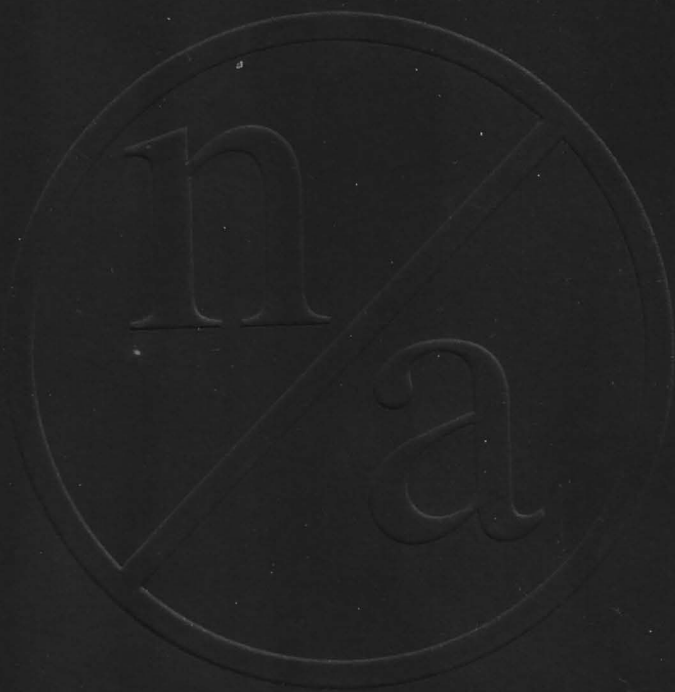


N/A: AN ARCHITECTURAL CEREMONY



United by a fascination with materiality and a mutual interest in story told through space, the collaborations between Ahmed Ozsever and Neeraja D, together known as N/A, hint at vestiges of the human form. The artists reject the reliance of the physical being within narrative, choosing instead to explore invisible presence and manmade qualities of building that remain long after the creators themselves are gone. Their collective body of work examines relationships between architecture, language, and time, reshaping each element's definition and expanding their boundaries beyond society's constructs.

An Architectural Ceremony, N/A's exhibition on view at Carthage College's H. F. Johnson Gallery of Art, employ these intersections as a jumping-off point. In preparation for the exhibit, the artists begin with a prompt that fuses the components of interest: a found architectural drawing from years past. This illustration leads to the development of the first new work on display. That work then leads to the next, and so forth, a linear unwinding rather than a grouping of objects unified under a single exhibition concept.

N/A forged their partnership in 2015 as students in Cornell University's MFA program, their studios divided by a thin wall failing to reach the ceiling. While this feeble structure separated the tangible objects of their practices, it was permeable enough to encourage the sharing of ideas. The distinction between the artists' creative histories is akin to this delicate barrier, which was simple to tear down (or, less destructively, walk around), yet simultaneously created two discrete fortresses of solitude.

The architectural sketch that serves as a starting point for *An Architectural Ceremony* was found, scanned, and stored away while N/A were studying at Cornell. It is a portion of a co-authored "time

capsule” that houses material fragments of ideas and elements of process — a perpetually in flux collection perfectly embodying the essence of N/A. Functioning as a single unit when deciding upon the preservation of each object to enter the capsule, the artists’ practice can be described as “hydra-headed.”

Now in 2018, N/A live on different continents, their schedules occur in different time zones, yet their storylines continue to coincide and their chronologies blur together rather than run in parallel lines. Their interests have remained in alignment, often sharing a lens from which to view the world. Through the years, they have maintained an ongoing correspondence from which their collaboration, and the work exhibited in *An Architectural Ceremony*, has evolved.

Using the idea of narrative-without-narrator as fodder, N/A engages photography, film, printmaking, and collage as tools enabling light, sound, and reflection to hold physical space. Their collective process begins with the shared decision about source material, together choosing the specific architectural plans to be used as initial inspiration for this exhibition. These drawings triggered artist-created instructions, taking the form of voice recordings passed back-and-forth via email. The directions motivated the creation of two new, separate works, made by N/A in their respective studios — handmade maps which were sketched, measured, and cut apart. However, the piece featured in *An Architectural Ceremony*, entitled “Title Track”, is not a display of the gridded illustrations that were created as a result of the instructions, nor is it a compilation of the audio messages. Instead, it takes the form of a two-channel video projected into the middle of the gallery, positioning viewers to actively listen to the artists in the act of listening.

Rather than interacting with the physical objects produced by the hands of the artists, the sound manifests as a substance that holds space. Audiences experience the anticipation N/A feel during their obedient processes of creation. The film acts as a vehicle through which N/A transfer their sentiments to the viewers. Feeling becomes language, and language, like the architectural renderings, is a plan. *Title Track* is both emotional and analytical.

Spatial drawing as prompt and prompt as frayed thread, the work begins to unravel, taking cue from its predecessor. Each item in the exhibition becomes part of a larger narrative. N/A explore a method of storytelling that situates object as protagonist. Netting and chalk, the materials from which the grids in *Title Track* are constructed, are thrust into the spotlight in *Chalk Lines* and *Pigeon Net*, a pairing of cyanotypes in curatorial conversation with the projected video. In the same way the audience listens to listening within the film, they are viewing an imprint of matter in lieu of the matter itself. The cyanotypes act both as a direct record and as an archive. They have the ability to freeze memory — both for the artists, enabling them to return to their moments of making, and for the viewers, the blue pigment or the texture of the paper revealing obscured histories.

Similar ideas suggesting image as landmark and memory as location were used in the development of *Phase (verb)*, a photographic series from 2015 that has been revisited; drawn upon for inspiration, resulting in the sculptural series *Phase (noun)*; and recontextualized within *An Architectural Ceremony*.

The prints act as a snapshot, created with light and time, and separate the viewer from the original object. Is this a form of deception, a way for N/A to show that things are not always what they seem, or a method of expanding reality and providing the intangible with a physicality that once seemed unattainable? As it is apparent that N/A are fascinated by the multiplicity of purpose,

perhaps the answer is both. In the same vein, *Unusable Archives #1* and *#2* assume the role of scrapbook, architectural record, and hidden history. (What is written on the backs of each piece of paper?) Though these framed assemblages were produced as the final component in the exhibition, they, too, reference N/A's early collaborations, each scrap saved long ago and now being drawn out of the time capsule for use in present day.

Within *An Architectural Ceremony*, the work of N/A translates space into a palpable entity, image into memory, and architecture into a readable language beyond the bounds of three-dimensional form. The gridded schematics used at the beginning of this journey are not merely mapping plans; they are also archives from which to mine. Each element of the exhibit is both a unique body and a reflection of works prior, using the invisible to foster imagination, and showing that though this narrative is void of cast members, a shadow always exists.

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