

온전히, *as is. At tapos:*

Interweaving Fragmented Narratives through Diaspora-as-Methodology

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Abstract

This research-creation project examines the complexity of diasporic identity through the lens of the author's trajectory—born in Korea, raised in the Philippines, and currently residing in Canada. Challenging the Canadian ideology of multiculturalism, which often flattens cultural differences into reductive categories, the work explores narratives that are "illegible" to conventional frameworks.

The project employs "diaspora-as-methodology," using fragmentation and personal narrative to structure a critical inquiry into nonbelonging and cultural multiplicity. The thesis culminates in a solo exhibition, 온전히, *as is*, featuring two primary installations: 온기 (*Warmth*), which utilizes Korean *onggi* vessels and soundscapes to metaphorically "ferment" memories, and *Mga Santan In Bloom*, which weaves 3D-printed flower beads using traditional Korean *maedeup* (매듭) to transform a Filipino *santan* flower bracelet-making communal ritual into scalloped, undulating map of communal care. By interweaving linguistic opacity and fragmented histories, the work positions the diasporic body as a site of constant motion, generating nuanced articulations of identity that resist simplification while embracing the inherent fluidity and multiplicity of the diasporic experience.

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I also thank Professor Joy Wong, who guided me throughout my two years at York University. I entered the MFA program with more doubt than confidence, grappling with questions that were personally rooted and difficult to unravel artistically. While I knew these elements were crucial, I struggled with how feelings—particularly a sense of hopelessness—could be mobilized in critical ways. Where others might have dismissed this emotional labor, Joy remained personally encouraging and critically engaged. By sharing artworks and texts that provided the vocabulary for these difficulties, Joy helped me use

complex questions regarding diaspora to engage with research out of curiosity rather than a demand for answers. Thank you, Joy, for showing me how to be critically engaged with lived experience.

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To God

Last, but most worthy, I would like to take a moment to thank God for allowing me this journey. I write this in Korean, simply because it is my spiritual language—the one in which I feel most comfortable speaking with Him.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Table of Contents	vii
List of Figures	viii
Preface	ix
Chapter 1 — Grounded in Diaspora-As-Methodology	1
Chapter 2 — Title: 온전히, <i>as is</i>	5
Chapter 3 — Project 1: 온기 (<i>Warmth</i>)	9
Sound	11
Echo	13
Fermentation	16
Formation	19
Creation Process	19
Tactile Resonance	21
Chapter 4 — Project 2: <i>Mga Santan In Bloom</i>	23
Tradition	25
Transformation	26
Translation	30
Together, A Celebration	33
Chapter 5 — <i>Tapos</i> (Finished/Then After)	36
Bibliography	46
Appendix: Exhibition Documentation Images	48

List of Figures

Figure 1. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, <i>Dictée</i> (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 1. Screenshot of the opening paragraph (photograph by the author).	3
Figure 2. Maebyeong (plum bottle) decorated with turtles and clouds, 2025. Installation view in <i>Echoes of the Everyday</i> , Gales Gallery. (photograph by author).	10
Figure 3. 온기 (Warmth), 2025. Installation view in <i>Echoes of the Everyday</i> , Gales Gallery. (photograph by the author).	14
Figure 4. Still from 온기 (Warmth) production video showing ta-rea technique, 2025. (photograph by author).	20
Figure 5. Still from <i>Mga Santan In Bloom</i> production video showing 3D printing of santan flower beads, 2025. (photograph by author).	27
Figure 6. Experimentation with maedeup technique using mountain-climbing paracord, 2024. (photograph by author).	29
Figure 7. Still from <i>Mga Santan In Bloom</i> production video weaving santan flower beads using maedeup technique, 2025. (photograph by author).	30
Figure 8. <i>Mga Santan In Bloom</i> , 2025. Installation view, Fall term end-of-year critiques at York University. (photograph by peer).	31
Figure 9. Documentation of Fall term end-of-year critiques at York University, 2025. (photograph by peer).	32
Figure 10. Still of santan bracelet making process made by author's cousin, 2026. (photograph by author).	33

Preface

I begin by sharing my positionality and lived experience to situate the work that follows. This thesis weaves fragments of personal narrative with research-creation and critical inquiry, and this preface offers a point of entry into how and why I arrived here.

I was born in Korea and raised by ethnically and culturally Korean parents, but I spent my entire childhood in the Philippines. My family moved there when I was three years old, and we lived there for a decade before immigrating to Canada. Alongside my parents, I was raised by my *ates*—house helpers, a common presence in wealthy Filipino households. I was given nicknames such as *puting puting tabaching-ching* (an endearing phrase that translates to “pale, pale, chubby,” with a playful rhyme), and at times I was simply called *anak*, meaning “[my] child.”

It was not until my arrival in Canada that I became acutely aware of my “Korean-ness,” and more so, my perceived lack of it. As a teenage girl navigating an unfamiliar place, I was searching for social acceptance and a sense of belonging. My childhood in the Philippines rendered my identity difficult to read within settler-colonial frameworks. Comments were made about my “non-Korean” English accent, I was critiqued for my unfamiliarity with the rising Korean pop culture, many pointed out how I was too loud or had an unexpectedly expressive demeanor—all of which are traits that were understood as misaligned with dominant expectations of what a Korean girl should be. In response, I spent many years performing an identity I did not fully recognize as my own, while suppressing traces of a place I consider home: the Philippines. This tension—between a perceived lack of Koreanness and the erasure of my Filipino upbringing—produced a sense of shame that still surfaces from time to time.

For many years, I did not recognize these experiences as forms of gendered and racialized discrimination. It was only through my first encounter with Carmela Laganse, a

Filipinx diasporic artist and my BFA instructor, that I began to understand how these forms of discrimination shaped my sense of identity. The familiarity she brought into the institutional space offered a sense of comfort and permission. Through her encouragement, I was able to speak openly about my childhood in the Philippines and the anxieties I carried with me. Her guidance prompted me to question who holds authority over identity, and why certain configurations of identity are upheld as normative.

Living in a country that prides itself on diversity and multiculturalism, I often struggle to see representations of myself—despite existing within the very communities that enable Canada to be celebrated for its openness. While cultural difference is publicly celebrated, there remains a strong impulse to categorize, define, and generalize. I argue that this drive for cultural characterization is not a reflection of genuine acceptance of diversity, but rather exposes how minority groups continue to be positioned as the Other—subjects to be examined and scrutinized to prove they pose no threat. As Stuart Hall describes, multiculturalism has reductively broadened its definition, to a point where it is now simply “a train of false trails and misleading universalities.”¹ There is a prevailing assumption that because state laws prohibit racist discrimination, such experiences are minimal or resolved. Yet this belief obscures the reality that these systems are largely shaped by members of the dominant socio-racial group who are not themselves subject to such reductive discrimination; as a result, ethnoracial categorization often flattens the complexity of lived experience. When communities are generalized, they become more easily consumed, leaving little space for contradiction, multiplicity, or nuance.

We need more nuanced ways of looking at race and culture beyond phenotype, simply because these definitions no longer—and arguably never have—captured an accurate understanding of the diverse diasporic communities to which we all reside together. To start

¹ Stuart Hall, “Thinking Diaspora,” in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, ed. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 211–34

deconstructing essentialistic stereotyping of diasporic bodies, I can say with confidence that our definitions can never be static. It is the collective journey of all— of our ancestors, our family, surrounding community members, and our own self—that forms who we are, and these identities will remain in flux as we continue to navigate this journey. It is through visual art that I explore this fluidity, creating spaces where cultures, histories, and identities can meet, overlap, and resonate without needing to conform to neat categories. In doing so, the work gestures toward a broader recognition of experiences that are often rendered invisible or simplified.

As I navigate my own journey, I turn to artistic expression as a mode of questioning. Rather than seeking resolution, I endeavour creative practices that hold uncertainty and invite further inquiry. Through this practice, I hope to create space for complex conversations—spaces where experiences resist simplification, and where stories foster attentive listening, connection, and solidarity.

Chapter 1

Grounded in Diaspora-As-Methodology

The Canadian ideology of multiculturalism—a nation invested in classifying cultural differences²—stands in direct opposition to the fragmented and displaced nature of my identity. Born in Korea, raised in the Philippines, and now living in Canada, I occupy a space that intersects multiple cultural categories that destabilize colonial frameworks of race, ethnicity, and cultural heritage. Against the hegemonic reverence for clarity and cultural distinctness, I drift in-between and beyond said categories—reflecting my migratory journey shaped not by certainty but by the unknown possibilities of an imagined future. This research-creation project emerges from that instability. Thus I embark on this journey with the guiding inquiry: *How can cultural multiplicity expressed through artistic forms generate more nuanced articulations of diasporic identity?*

Diaspora is not a singular or uniform condition. It emerges through varied histories—forced displacement, colonial violence, labor migration, indenture, elective mobility—each shaped by distinct political and economic forces. As Lily Cho, a scholar of Asian Canadian studies and postcolonial literature, writes, “[d]iaspora must be understood as *a condition of subjectivity* and not as an object of analysis.”³ It is not merely the crossing of borders, but an orientation toward unresolved histories and unsettled belonging. Diaspora extends across time, shaping experiences of displacement even amid moments of apparent stability.

My trajectory across Korea, the Philippines, and Canada reflects a particular formation of diaspora, shaped by economic, educational, and geopolitical conditions. My

² Eva Haque, Research Chair at York University, identifies the Canadian ideology of multiculturalism as a state-sanctioned project that manages diversity to preserve a settler-colonial hierarchy. By "ordering" cultural differences into manageable categories, the state limits the recognition of complex identities that do not fit within its rigid national narrative. See Eva Haque, *Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework: Language, Race, and Belonging in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 4–12.

³ Lily Cho, "The Turn to Diaspora," *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 17 (2007): 11.

family moved from Korea to the Philippines to support a family business, and later to Canada for educational opportunities. These relocations unfolded throughout my childhood, and during these formative years, social integration and economic stability became burdens I learned to carry. These experiences may resonate with some, but not with all. I do not attempt to define diaspora universally. Rather, diaspora provides a conceptual ground through which I recognize and articulate a migratory life that resists singular definition.

Situated within diasporic experience, my positionality forms the conceptual ground of this research. It is shaped by lived encounters with precarity and nonbelonging. Drawing on Anna Tsing's notion of precarity in *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, I understand the diasporic body as constituted through such conditions. This precarity is not an anomaly but an everyday structuring force—one that enables diasporic stories to emerge beyond linear colonial time.⁴ Similarly, as Dr. Marissa Largo argues in *Unsettling Imaginaries*, nonbelonging is not solely the result of displacement but a critical capacity that reveals colonial structures often normalized as coherence or cultural clarity.⁵ Precarity and nonbelonging thus function as orientations: one structuring the fluidity of diasporic life, the other transforming felt dislocation into a site of critical insight—conditions that enable the research and creative practices I develop.

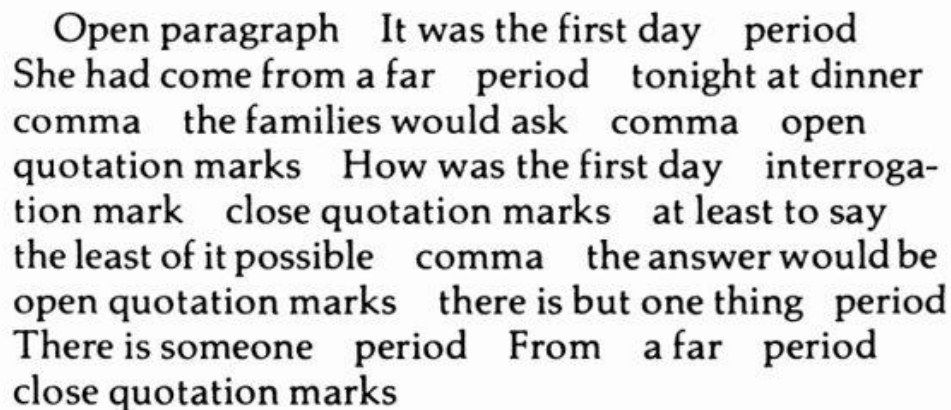
From these groundings, I propose “diaspora-as-methodology”: a mode of research explored through the everyday, recognizing diaspora not simply as a subject of study but as a mode of being, creating, researching, and surviving. Unlike *diasporic methodology*—an interdisciplinary approach that centers the study of diasporic lived experience—*diaspora-as-methodology* allows fragmentation, nonlinearity, and relationality to structure the research itself.

⁴ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, 1st ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400873548>.

⁵ Marissa Largo, “Unsettling Imaginaries: The Decolonial Diaspora Aesthetics of Four Contemporary Filipinx Visual Artists in Canada” (PhD diss., OISE/University of Toronto, 2018), 45, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Knowledge here does not move toward resolution. Questions are not resolved but lived, thus continuously revisited. Diaspora-as-methodology shapes not only what I study, but also how I generate creative forms directed by a lived experience that remains inherently fragmented yet coherently fluid. This orientation toward lived inquiry informs the writing, structure, and storytelling that follow.

As I write this thesis-support paper, I turn to *Dictée* (1982) by multidisciplinary artist and writer Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, where linguistic fragmentation deliberately disrupts conventional academic structure.⁶ Wide spacing, written-out punctuation, incomplete sentences, and grammatical irregularities position the reader in estrangement rather than fluency (see fig. 1). I recognize this fractured language not as distortion, but as a formal engagement with diasporic experience. In attending to Cha's strategies, I see how diaspora-as-methodology operates not only at the level of creation but through language itself.



Open paragraph It was the first day period
She had come from a far period tonight at dinner
comma the families would ask comma open
quotation marks How was the first day interroga-
tion mark close quotation marks at least to say
the least of it possible comma the answer would be
open quotation marks there is but one thing period
There is someone period From a far period
close quotation marks

Figure 1. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictée* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 1. Screenshot of the opening paragraph (photograph by the author).

Inspired by this disruption of conventional form, I employ diasporic storytelling to speak about my works. Personal narratives are not merely illustrative; they generate

⁶ Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictée* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 1.

knowledge. Rather than separating theory and practice into discrete domains, this paper enacts their entanglement, allowing storytelling itself to carry conceptual weight.

The narratives center on the exhibition 온전히, *As Is*, along with two ongoing projects: 온기 (*Warmth*) and *Mga Santan In Bloom*. Each is traversed through personal narratives, academic research, self-reflections, community interactions—all interwoven through storytelling, embodying destabilized and non-linear narrative structures that render illegibility inseparable from diasporic intent. Diaspora-as-methodology does not aim to define identity, but to sustain the conditions under which identity remains in motion.

It is my hope that these diasporic narratives invite readers into a practice of unknowing—an intentional refusal of colonial certainties and a sustained engagement with the complexities within the diasporic everyday. This paper narrates the becoming of the thesis work itself, embodying an ongoing engagement in which questions are not resolved but inhabited, enacted through diasporic storytelling and creative practice. In the spirit of Alexandra M. Rivera, a scholar of marginalized subjectivities, this project operates on the belief that “[w]e do not create because we have the answers. We create because we are possessed by our questions.”⁷

⁷ Alexandra M. Rivera, *The Intersectional Other: Reimagining Power in the Margins* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022), 195.

Chapter 2

Title: 온전히, *as is*

온전히, *as is* is the title of my thesis exhibition. It combines the Korean word 온전히 with the English phrase “as is”. This pairing is not an instance of aesthetic experimentation or stylistic distortion; it is a deliberate conceptual framework. The title stages the instability of translation as both form and method, foregrounding how linguistic access is structured by positionality. In doing so, it reflects and critically engages diasporic lived experience.

Flux Between Translations

I argue that the word 온전히 is, in many ways, a lost word—one that becomes completely invisible to those who lack the cultural and linguistic context required to understand it.

To illustrate this condition, I offer a brief activity in the following paragraph. I encourage to follow the steps and actively engage with the exercise as an invitation to a glimpse of diasporic fragmentation:

Using Google Translate (the default translation tool for many English speakers) enter the Korean word 온전히 (*onjeonhi*). The platform translates it as “completely.” Next, press the swap icon—the two-way arrow between the source and target languages—to translate “completely” back into Korean. Here you will notice that the original word, 온전히, has been replaced by 완전히 (*wanjeonhi*). From this point on, regardless of how many times you toggle between the two languages—oscillating back and forth between 완전히 and “completely”—온전히 does not reappear. The word is lost in translation.

This experience became a metaphor for diasporic reality: a desire to understand, the obscuring of origins, confusion produced by imposed redefinitions, and the continual circulation within states of unknowing.

A closer examination of the Hanja roots of 온전히 and 완전히 reveals how their etymological foundations generate distinct conceptual orientations. 온전 (穩全) derives from 온 (穩), meaning “steady” or “at ease,” situating 온전히 within a framework of grounded continuity. Its sense of wholeness does not emerge from flawlessness, but from steadiness—an intactness sustained through balance rather than perfection. By contrast, 완전 (完全) derives from 완 (完), meaning “perfect” or “without flaw.” 완전히 therefore gestures toward completion in the sense of errorlessness, implying a sealed or fixed state. Although the distinction may appear subtle, it produces significant conceptual consequences. One term suggests ongoing continuity; the other suggests perfected finality.⁸

I began thinking about this difference while working on my exhibition title. I wanted to embody 온전히—to be whole within continuity, not perfect but steady, not sealed but ongoing. However, when translated as “completely,” the term shifted toward the semantic register of 완전히. Yet the conceptual intention embedded in 온전히 would be entirely lost.

Like a word displaced in translation, I find myself circling questions rather than arriving at certainty when attempting to define who I am within geopolitical and cultural expectations.

The act of translation began to mirror that circling—the diasporic subjectivity itself. Each click of the swap button. Each substitution. Each “almost” meaning. The movement became more revealing than the result. Diasporic reality, then, is not a clean bridge between languages, but an unstable oscillation. A search without guaranteed arrival.

For this reason, I could not replace 온전히.

The resistance to translation, I came to realize, is not a problem to be solved. It names a diasporic condition: rooted yet unsettled, whole yet continuously unfolding across linguistic, temporal, and cultural shifts.

⁸ KBS World, “온전하다, 완전하다,” *KBS World Korean*, May 9, 2013, https://world.kbs.co.kr/service/contents_view.htm?lang=k&board_seq=229856.

That recognition led to the pairing with *as is*.

As is introduces a different configuration of indeterminacy. Commonly defined as “in the existing state or condition,” it appears at first to indicate stasis. Yet its semantic range shifts according to context. In commercial usage, it implies fixity and the absence of alteration. In everyday discourse, it may gesture toward the provisional nature of the present moment. The phrase therefore holds a productive tension: it signals a fixed condition while simultaneously exposing the instability of presentness.

It holds contradiction. A fixed state that gestures toward flux. A present condition that resists permanence.

Where 온전히 articulates grounded continuity, *as is* foregrounds conditionality. Together, they construct a threshold between steadiness and flux, continuity and indeterminacy.

This pairing does not resolve translation; it stages it.

Language, in this formulation, does not operate as a transparent bridge between cultural systems. Rather, it functions as an unstable portal—one that both enables and withholds access. As demonstrated in the fragmented linguistic strategies of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, opacity may operate as a generative condition rather than an obstruction.⁹ Meaning is not uniformly distributed; it is encountered unevenly, contingent upon histories of linguistics and subjective diasporic positioning.

In this way, 온전히, *as is* resists reductive legibility. The title does not resolve translation, instead destabilizes it. Such liminality becomes methodologically significant, preserving the multiplicity and tension that diasporic narratives risk losing when rendered overly coherent or complete. In doing so, 온전히, *as is* embraces multiplicity as a form of

⁹ Cha, *Dictée*.

resistance to essentialistic legibility—because the moment these narratives are simplified, we risk erasing the complexity of diasporic histories altogether.

Chapter 3

Project 1: 온기 (*Warmth*)

온기 (*Warmth*) emerged from multiple encounters, not a single origin. Its first spark traces back to my BFA thesis preparation. I was one of the few POC students in my cohort engaging with themes of diaspora through traditional Asian aesthetics. On one end, my work was often met with silence—many claiming they were afraid to engage with artwork reflecting “a culture they are not too familiar with.” On the other end, the fluidity of my practice, shaped by my cultural upbringing, was frequently read through assumptions and stereotypes, interpreted as uncertainty or confusion about identity. I see both responses as facets of diasporic erasure, highlighting the tensions and expectations placed on cultural expression.

In response to these conditions, I began to explore how objects could both carry and disrupt expectations of cultural identity through my BFA thesis work, *Maebyeong (plum bottle) decorated with turtles and clouds* (2024). Using the form of a *maebyeong* (매병)—a vessel widely recognized in East Asian history—I borrowed the visual language of museum display and displaced it intentionally (see figure 2). The vessel was decorated with turtles and clouds referencing Jollibee and Chickenjoy,¹⁰ which are pairings that disrupt expectations of tradition, authenticity, and cultural coherence. Rather than offering clarification, the work operated through friction, allowing meaning to emerge through misalignment. In this way, the

¹⁰ Jollibee is the largest fast-food chain in the Philippines, widely recognized as a cultural touchstone and often described as the “McDonald’s of the Philippines.” Its signature dish, Chickenjoy, is celebrated for its crispy texture and flavor profile tailored to the Filipino palate—distinctly served alongside gravy and rice. For those who grew up there, Jollibee is less about the menu and more about the “core memories” of childhood. I view Jollibee as a profound site of belonging, particularly for those whose early years were shaped by the social rituals of the Philippine school system. The real magic happened in the classroom: there is a specific social currency to hosting your birthday party at school, sponsored by your family for the entire class. From kindergarten through elementary school, providing a Jollibee spread for your peers was the ultimate power move; you immediately became the “cool kid” for the day. Beyond the social status, this tradition reflects a foundational value where celebration is never an isolated, individual act. It captures a specific Pinoy impulse to transform a personal milestone into a communal history, shared intimately with every classmate and teacher in the room.

object functioned less as a stable representation and more as a site where diaspora emerges through the collage of various socio-culturally specific imagery.

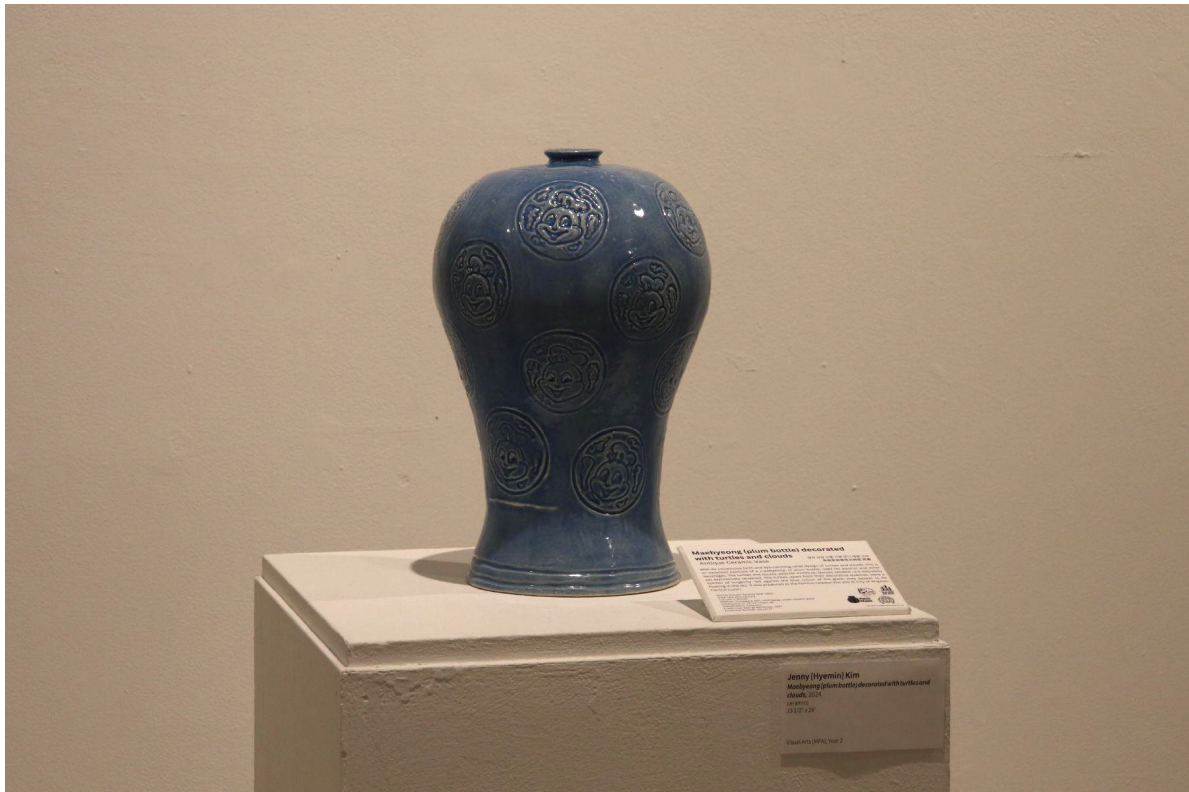


Figure 2. *Maebyeong (plum bottle) decorated with turtles and clouds*, 2025. Installation view in *Echoes of the Everyday*, Gales Gallery. (photograph by author).

Viewers approached the *maebyeong* from different perspectives that reflected their individual positionality. Korean audiences recognized the form but not its references; Filipino students spotted (and celebrated) Jollibee immediately, unconcerned with historical lineage; others treated it as a fragile artifact needing protection. These interpretations coexisted in tension rather than consensus.

This dissonance revealed that meaning does not reside solely in the object, but also emerges relationally. Through these varied interactions, the work functioned less as a stable representation and more as a site where diasporic knowledge was produced. It was from this realization that *온기* (*Warmth*) began to take shape, embracing ambiguity and relationality as generative conditions for creative exploration of diaspora.

Driven by a desire to further explore this ambiguity, I was inspired to create 온기 (*Warmth*). The project takes form as an arrangement of Korean *onggi* (옹기) vessels—traditionally sites of communal food sharing and collective labor—each housing archives of personal audio clips and fragmented soundbites. Together, they form a terraced landscape accompanied by a melodic mosaic of echoes. Like myself—ethnically Korean but culturally shaped by a Filipino upbringing—each vessel, while visually grounded in Korean tradition, becomes a container for layered cultural identities that share traces of Filipino, Korean, and Canadian customs, languages, and soundscapes. 온기 (*Warmth*) unfolds through four interwoven components that function as both method and metaphor: *Sound*, *Echo*, *Fermentation*, and *Formation*.

Sound

Not long before beginning my MFA program, I discovered a large archive of childhood photographs and videos carefully organized by my father, sorted into Google Drive folders by year, month, and occasion. While browsing this digital album, I encountered a video of my five-year-old self at my first summer recital in the Philippines. I was just beginning to learn English, and on stage, I was tasked with reading sentences aloud.

What struck me most was my accent: my English carried a thick Tagalog inflection. This stood out because it resonated with another memory—only a few weeks after moving to Canada, my Grade 8 teacher told me I could not speak English the way I did, calling it “culturally inappropriate.”¹¹ Set against the memory of my five-year-old self on stage in the Philippines, this moment of correction lingered. From that lingering emerged a rush of other

¹¹ I find it somewhat ironic that a generation before me, discrimination manifested through scent, another sensory function, in ways that were far more overt. I have heard numerous accounts from older 1.5-generation Korean immigrants who struggled in elementary school because their packed lunches—filled with Korean dishes unfamiliar in the West at the time—became sources of ridicule. The distinct aromas of kimchi and *doenjang jjigae* would fill the classroom, prompting comments from classmates and even instructors about how “stinky” the food was, further isolating children who were already navigating displacement. I see parallels between those experiences and my own encounters with sound—particularly my accent—which operates along a similar grain of discrimination. The implication persists that we are not only marked as alien, but that our ability to be perceived as “non-alien” is measured against Eurocentric norms.

sonic recollections: my Korean registering as formal and mature because it lives mostly between my parents, my grandparents, and me; the *Jeolla* dialect shaped by my grandparents' upbringing on a small island near *Mokpo*; waking up to the sound of boiling soup and getting excited to learn whether it is *kimchi jjigae* or *sinigang*; my once-fluent Tagalog gradually disappearing in the years following immigration to Canada; my quiet avoidance of my cousin because I could hear her Tagalog accent, even when she spoke Korean; and now, my continued struggle to speak Tagalog—not only from disuse, but from the guilt of having intentionally distanced myself from it in an effort to belong in a place I needed to call home. Through this accumulation, sound revealed itself not as a singular event, but as an ongoing condition of diasporic life—at once formative, reconstructive, intimate, and now, estranged.

It was through this reckoning with accent—the flood of memories entangled in complex and often contradictory emotional states—that I began to engage with sound beyond sensory experience. Encountering Casey Mecija, a scholar of Filipinx Studies, in her text *The Sound of Queer Diaspora: Sonic Enactments of Filipinx Desire, Loss and Belonging* (2020) provided a language for this realization. Mecija claims sound to serve as a vital methodological framework to understand the complexities of Filipinx cultural production. She argues that sound carries forms of knowledge that exceed scientific reasoning or empirical measurement, enabling articulations of identity that resist containment by dominant frameworks shaped by racism, colonialism, and gender norms.¹² Sound is not merely an expression, but as an affective medium through which diasporic subjects negotiate desire, loss, nostalgia and belonging. In this way, sound becomes not simply something heard, but something enacted—a site where diasporic knowledge is acknowledged without scrutiny.

This theoretical insight becomes tangible when I consider my own voice as an affective medium of my diasporic journey. My Tagalog-accented English carries the sonic

¹² Casey Mecija, “The Sound of Queer Diaspora: Sonic Enactments of Filipinx Desire, Loss and Belonging” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2020), 45, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

memory of my childhood in the Philippines, a place where I continue to belong. My American-accented English, by contrast, bears the marks of colonial erasure and Western assimilation I sought for social acceptance. The *Jeolla* dialect in my Korean serves as a living monument to my grandparents and parents—reminders that, even when “Korean qualities” are not immediately visible in my demeanor, my ancestors continue to guide me.

When I return to the video of my five-year-old self confidently rolling vowels at the tip of my tongue without hesitation, I am reminded of who I was and who I continue to be. I remain 온전, as is.

Echo

At the beginning of my second year in the MFA program, I presented an early iteration of 온기 (*Warmth*) in the graduate opening exhibition *Echoes of the Everyday* at Gales Gallery, York University, in September 2025. In this installation, sound functioned as the primary medium of inquiry, drawing on personal audio archives to examine diasporic intimacy and memory. The work featured a small *onggi* vessel from which audio resonated, constructing an imagined spatial environment through sound (see figure 2). Composed of two primary elements—a conversation among three women and the sounds of cooking—the audio’s temporal flow evoked a tactile, spatial presence suggestive of intergenerational exchange.



Figure 3. 온기 (*Warmth*), 2025. Installation view in *Echoes of the Everyday*, Gales Gallery.
(photograph by the author).

Experiencing 온기 (*Warmth*) in its physical form and observing how viewers engaged with it, I came to understand how echo—a fragmented sound—functions as a diasporic phenomenon. While volunteering as a gallery sitter, I observed visitors entering and exiting the space, noticing a perceptible shift in demeanor as they moved from the busy hallways—filled with students rushing between classes—into the gallery. What initiated this change was marked not only visually, but audibly. Visitors approached the source of the sound in varied ways: some lingered to listen to the audio in its entirety, while others encountered it briefly as part of their broader movement through the gallery. As viewers returned with questions, I was struck by the variability of perception: the audio, though fixed in its original recordings, was experienced differently by each listener. Some heard birds chirping, others the rhythm of ocean waves, the hum of the city, or—most memorably—the resonance of *home*.

Two elements of echo resonate deeply within this work: the fragmentation of sound through movement and the personally-mediated sonic encounter. Within *온기* (*Warmth*), echo is shaped by the movement of sound—its reflection and return—a journey that never arrives unchanged. The multiplicity of this experience is shaped by the *onggi* vessels themselves: as sound reverberates within their bulbous ceramic walls, it fractures and disperses into the gallery in transformed forms. This fracturing mirrors diasporic experience, where identity and memory are never fixed but continuously reshaped through movement, displacement, and encounter. Though tethered to its origin, the echoed sound is continuously transformed through spatial and temporal engagement, emerging as a diasporic condition—anchored in origin yet always in dialogue with difference and contingency.

Building on this understanding, the experience of echo is further mediated by the audience. Visitors refract the sound through their own memories, producing interpretations that unfold in unexpected ways: fragments of the original source entwine with personal histories and cultural positionalities. These individualized sonic experiences demonstrate that resonance creates a blurred space rather than a blank one, where the presence of sound is recognized but never fully legible, allowing listeners to fold their own memories, traditions, and perspectives into what they hear. Ambiguity here is not distortion, but a generative condition—a reflection of the multiplicity, relationality, and fluidity that characterizes diasporic life.

Together, these elements elevate subjectivity, inviting listeners to navigate and interpret the distorted hums around them. This space embodies the diasporic everyday, allowing one to unpack and reassemble layered, horizontally temporal information that entwines past, future, and present. Within this space, I also find hope: its ambiguity and demand for engagement create a bridge through which others can apprehend the lived experience of diaspora, even amidst deference or distance. It is here that I return to Lily Cho's

provocation: that diaspora be understood not as a static object of analysis, but as a 'condition of subjectivity.'¹³ By centering this subjective experience, we create a space capable of enriching our understandings of diaspora and fostering connections within our shared complexities.

Fermentation

I return to a question first posed by my supervisory committee during my initial year in the MFA program: why *onggi* (rather than another vessel)? At the time of making, the choice felt instinctive and intentional, yet difficult to articulate. In response, I began researching the vessel, hoping its history and function might illuminate what I had sensed intuitively amidst the creation process.

Onggi, often referred to as the “breathing vessel,” is a traditional Korean ceramic container historically used for fermentation, a central practice in Korean cuisine. Its porous walls allow air to circulate, supporting slow transformation while preserving food over extended periods.¹⁴ This capacity for long-term sustenance also signals a sedentary way of life, enabling communities to remain rooted in place.

Thinking through this function prompted me to reconsider fermentation beyond its culinary associations. Rather than illuminating the *onggi* as a purely cultural reference, the fermentation itself began to register as a way of understanding transformation. As Gabriel Levine, a theorist of everyday ritual and experimental tradition, describes, fermentation operates as a microcultural process—one shaped by time, care, and environmental interaction, where transformation emerges without fixed outcomes.¹⁵ In *온기* (*Warmth*),

¹³ Cho, “The Turn to Diaspora,” 14.

¹⁴ Sungkon Kang. "The Study on Plastic Characterization and Decoration Element in Korean Traditional Vessel 'Onggi'" *The Journal of the Korean Society of Ceramic Art* 1, no.1 (2005) : 55-70.doi: 10.22991/ksca.2005.1.1.55

¹⁵ Gabriel Levine, “FERMENTING: Microcultural Experiments and the Politics of Folk Practice,” in *Art and Tradition in a Time of Uprisings* (United States: MIT Press, 2020), 153–98, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/12392.003.0006>.

sound undergoes a similar fermentative shift: as recorded audio moves through the *onggi* and disperses into the gallery, it becomes echo—altered by material, spatial, and perceptual conditions. This transformation does not erase meaning; instead, it opens toward possibility.

Through this lens, *onggi* embodies the coexistence of transformation and continuity, echoing the conceptual grounding of 온전히. Like the vessel, diaspora is not defined by rupture or loss alone. They unfold over time, retaining connection to origins while allowing change to emerge through contact and encounter. Fermentation, in this sense, provides a way to think of diaspora as a durational process in which meaning is both preserved and altered—a continuity that endures through transformation.

While these research-based metaphors provide a meaningful grounding for understanding the *onggi*, the theoretical lens alone felt insufficient. To truly locate the “warmth” I was seeking, I had to move beyond the archival and toward the visceral. This led me back to a memory I initially dismissed as an insignificant exchange. During a dinner arranged between my family and my father’s friends, newly immigrated to Canada, conversation turned—predictably—to my brother and me. My brother’s academic path was met with approval; when attention shifted to me, a Studio Art major, the room settled into a familiar quiet.

What lingered was a comment from my father’s friend’s wife—my proximity to her measured exactly the length of that awkwardly long descriptor. Upon learning that I worked with ceramics, she remarked that I could make her an *onggi*, and she could share kimchi with me in return. At the time, I found the remark disorienting. My ceramic practice, grounded in conceptual inquiry, felt far removed from functional vessels or culinary use. The association seemed misplaced, even reductive.

It took me some time—perhaps I needed to “ferment” myself—to notice the significance of her comment. Like kimchi slowly transforming in a jar, my understanding

shifted over time, revealing the quiet insight embedded in that seemingly trivial exchange. Though I cannot claim to fully understand her intent, I now perceive the exchange differently in retrospect. Positioned differently by our respective lived experiences, her comment nonetheless bridged a gap between us—offering a possibility for connection, even future encounter.

Perhaps from her perspective, shaped by everyday experience rather than artistic discourse, ceramics was understood through function, nourishment, and sharing. *Onggi*, for her, was not an abstract form but a vessel through which community could be built around food. This perspective aligns with the historical context of the *jangdokdae*—the courtyard space where *onggi* jars were traditionally kept. The *jangdokdae* was not merely a site for food storage, but a space of collective labor, collaboration, and social interaction: families and neighbors would gather to make fermented pastes, kimchi, and other staples. In this sense, *onggi* embodies relationality, its significance extending beyond individual use to communal care and shared practices. Perhaps my father's friend's wife was attuned to this legacy, unconsciously invoking the relational and social dimensions embedded in *onggi* through generations.

Through this layered reframing—emerging from both research and personal narrative—I arrived at a new understanding of *onggi*. The vessel becomes a site of connection and communal possibility. Following Levine, fermentation—understood as a gradual and ongoing process of transformation—becomes a metaphor for diasporic knowledge itself: one that develops over time through accumulated experience, contradiction, and negotiation between past, present, and imagined futures.¹⁶ Whether the reference of *onggi* was motivated by reciprocity, curiosity, or the simple desire for shared experience, all were directed toward the same path: communal connection.

¹⁶ Levine, "FERMENTING," 165.

Formation

Closing this chapter, I present two distinct accounts of formation: the making of the onggi vessels and the emergence of the title, *온기* (*Warmth*). Each stands independently—one rooted in material practice, the other in linguistic and conceptual reflection—without a direct connection between them other than the chapter title itself. The first details my creative process, revealing how notions of authenticity defined in essentialistic frameworks are inscribed within myself, even in seemingly mundane gestures with clay. The second traces the title’s emergence, a realization that only became clear in retrospect. While these accounts do not intersect directly, each contributes to grounding the project as a whole. Together, they illuminate how *diaspora-as-methodology* shapes both material and conceptual dimensions of the work, offering multiple points of entry into understanding the project’s significance.

Creation Process

To recognize and respect the history of onggi, I decided to make these vessels using techniques aligned with traditional Korean practices. Information on the history and making of *onggi* was readily accessible through short-form documentaries from major Korean broadcasting platforms such as SBS STORY, EBS Documentary, and YTN Science. Across these sources, a recurring technique was *ta-rea* (타래), a method that combines coiling and paddling. Working on a rotating surface, coils of clay are stacked around the circumference of a base, then compressed and shaped using a flat wooden paddle. Ta-rea is essential for strengthening the vessel walls while allowing for control over form and scale.¹⁷

Guided by this research, I began forming the onggi through ta-rea (see fig. 4). What initially appeared to be a straightforward technique quickly revealed its complexity. The videos did not account for the degree of synchronization required between speed, pressure,

¹⁷ SBSStory, “전통방식 그대로 고수! 수작업으로 만드는 ‘대형 항아리 달인’ [Sticking to traditional methods! Handcrafted vessels made by the ‘Large Jar Master’],” YouTube video, 3:30, July 4, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTXEU_RfKEQ.

and movement. Without this coordination, the coils dry too quickly or settle unevenly. As I attempted to learn and apply the technique simultaneously, the walls of the vessel began to crumble.



Figure 4. Still from 온기 (*Warmth*) production video showing *ta-rea* technique, 2025.
(photograph by author).

Struggling to grasp the rhythm of *ta-rea*, my movements slowed—not by choice, but due to lack of technical coordination. During this delay, the clay began to stiffen, and the coils could no longer compress properly. Through my material knowledge of clay, it became clear that the method was failing. Working at a large scale, I did not want to abandon what I had already built. To stabilize the form, I turned to the slip-and-score technique: a foundational handbuilding method often taught as an introductory skill in ceramics.

This shift, however, was accompanied by an unexpected sense of shame. I felt compelled to conceal the change in technique. This moment was captured on video as I slowly turned my back to the camera and stopped the recording altogether. At the time, I did not yet understand why altering my process felt like a failure—only that it did.

It was only after stepping away from the studio and later watching the footage that I began to recognize how internalized colonial expectations around authenticity and tradition were operating within me. As scholar and artist Aram Han Sifuentes notes, BIPOC artists often occupy a limbo of diaspora and displacement, where we are made to feel “not authentic enough to incorporate our own cultures, traditions, and histories into how we represent ourselves.”¹⁸ When our self-representation does not align with white frameworks of legibility, we are told—implicitly or explicitly—that we are not that, and that whiteness retains the authority to define who we are. Within this context, my hesitation in the studio was not merely a technical concern, but a learned response: a fear that deviating from a prescribed 'authentic' method would invalidate both the work and my relation to it.

To inhabit a diasporic body while critically aware of colonial logic, yet still find myself deferring to its demands for purity and correctness, is a difficult contradiction to hold. I name this moment not as a failure, but as evidence of the labour diasporic subjects carry—navigating expectations to be legible within white institutional frameworks while simultaneously working through our own states of partial knowing and unknowing. This tension does not negate diasporic reality; rather, it actively sustains and shapes it.

Here, formation unfolds not as a singular moment of making, but as an accumulative process shaped by struggle, adjustment, and reflection. The vessel's form emerged alongside an awareness of how ideas of authenticity, failure, and legitimacy are internalized and enacted. This account of making thus marks formation as both material and affective—something that takes shape through lived negotiation rather than resolution.

Tactile Resonance

To close this chapter, I reflect on how I arrived at the title 온기 (*Warmth*). On a surface level, the title emerged from a playful linguistic proximity: 온기 (*on-gi*) closely

¹⁸ Aram Han Sifuentes, “How Internalized White Supremacy Manifests for My BIPOC Students in Art School,” *Art Journal* 80, no. 2 (2021): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043249.2021.1872294>.

mirrors the pronunciation of the vessel 옹기 (*ong-gi*). While this resonance initially amused me, the choice carries a deeper intention. I title the work 온기 (*warmth*) to foreground its tactile resonance—one shaped by stories, reflection, and relational presence—granting the work a sense of life beyond its visual existence within a gallery space.

“Warmth” is a tactile sensation, one that can only be experienced through embodied, physical engagement and therefore resists purely visual or interpretive distance. While the word warmth often evokes affection and intimacy—which remains true to the ongoing formation of this process—I use it here to expand the sensory register of the work. The project exists visually as sculptural form and audibly through sound that moves across the gallery space; through its title, I further ground it as tactile, emphasizing relationality carried through the stories shared within it. The title, I hope, invites viewers into the relational conditions upon which the work is built.

In Korean, “온기 (*ongi*)” operates differently than its English translation. While warmth in English is often experienced in the immediacy of touch, 온기 refers to the residual warmth left behind after someone has departed—the heat lingering on a mug after a hot drink has been finished. This warmth signals presence through absence; it is proof that life was recently here. I understand this project in a similar way—not as a static object, but as evidence of lived experience that continues to resonate even after the moment of encounter has passed.

I have never been drawn to the idea of art as something meant solely to please the eyes, to entertain, or even to educate in a didactic sense. I do not understand my work as an object of stasis. Rather, I see it as a marker of life—one shaped by complexity, contradiction, and continual reflection. I close this chapter not with resolution, but with residue: warmth that lingers, relations that persist, and meaning that remains in motion.

Chapter 4

Project 2: *Mga Santan In Bloom*

Mga Santan In Bloom—a project that made me newly aware of affect not as excess, but as knowledge—emerged as 온기 (*Warmth*) was taking form. During late nights in an empty ceramic studio, I struggled under the pressure of writing my thesis, navigating linguistic anxiety, and grieving the loss of a close friend who transferred universities for their own safety. I found myself unable to move forward with work I cared deeply about. What I had dismissed as an “art block” revealed itself as overwhelm—a flood of emotion rooted in care, and precisely for that reason, a signal that I needed to pause.

Ambiguity in 온기 (*Warmth*) allows diasporic identity to remain fluid rather than fixed. My difficulty was not with the work itself, but with translating that fluidity into academic forms that seemingly privilege clarity and resolution. In trying to meet those expectations, I became distanced—physically from community and mentally from the exchanges that sustain my practice. I began to lose sight of why I continue this work at all.

This disorientation prompted a shift. Rather than treating emotion as interference, I began to understand it as an indicator of relational imbalance. Isolation was not creative failure, but a sign that something foundational—connection, accountability, shared presence—had been strained.

This awareness deepened when I encountered Indigenous research methodologies articulated by Shawn Wilson in *Research Is Ceremony*. Wilson frames research not as detached inquiry, but as a relational process grounded in accountability to community. Knowledge, in his framework, is not produced through distance, but through sustained relationships.¹⁹

¹⁹ Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Halifax: Fernwood Pub., 2008).

For a practice already grounded in lived experience, Wilson's articulation offered not just validation, but structure. It clarified that my overwhelm was not a lack of discipline, but a response to relational rupture.

To navigate this affective and relational significance, I stepped back from the pressure to produce and returned to memory. Rather than moving forward through analysis alone, I paused and traced backward, allowing memory to function as method.

I traced back.

Drew a line.

The line connects to another, tied as one.

I continue to trace; the line continues.

A red line. A destined connection.

It traces. I follow.

A line. A knot. A line. A knot.

A flower connects it all.

This tracing was not just metaphorical, but equally procedural—a way of locating connection through repetition, touch, and return.

Amidst my state of disconnectedness, I revisited a childhood ritual that shaped my understanding of community—the making of santan flower bracelets.

Mga Santan In Bloom draws from Filipino communal practices centered on gift-giving, knowledge sharing, and relational care. By weaving 3D-printed santan flower beads using a Korean knotting technique called maedeup (매듭), the work transcends simple viewing, fostering a site of relational care where individual memories and collective presence intersect. A continuous thread of flowers, secured by intermittent knots, creates a scalloped, undulating pattern across the gallery wall. This spanning distance marks both the passage of

time—linking back to childhood—and the strength of community, where individual flowers are knotted together to form a cohesive whole.

Tradition

The Philippines, a foundational site of belonging, was initially encountered as an unfamiliar landscape. I moved to Angeles City when I was three years old—old enough to be cautious of unfamiliarity, yet young enough to accept new realities. My *ate*, our house helper and my older sister, welcomed me by making a small flower bracelet—a simple gesture that opened a child’s heart. Not only was I gifted this bracelet, but I was also taught how to make it. She took a small red santan flower, pulled the style from the base of the stem, and connected one flower to another, stringing them into a bracelet that fit perfectly around my wrist.

This ritual of welcoming stayed with me throughout my time in the Philippines as it taught me the importance of community and belonging. I made countless bracelets, especially when family visited from Korea, family with whom I no longer shared a home. These bracelets helped me stay connected: to a home not born into but raised, to family I had culturally distanced from, and to the core values instilled in me by my community. Interestingly enough, when I shared this project idea with my thesis supervisor, Dr. Marissa Largo, I was surprised and moved to learn that she and her children had also participated in this ritual, affirming its vitality across generations.

Reflecting on bracelet-making, I recalled *maedeup*, a traditional Korean knotting technique. Both functional and aesthetic, *maedeup* embodies intergenerational knowledge and the collective spirit of art-making. My grandmother often described these knots as objects whose beauty lies in form shaped by interconnectedness, a principle I found echoed in the

practice's long history. Maedeup relies primarily on verbal and tactile transmission rather than written records, underscoring its relational and community-based nature.²⁰

With this in mind, I chose to weave santan flowers through maedeup, creating objects that embody connectivity, care, and shared knowledge across cultures.

Transformation

Mga Santan In Bloom explores how diasporic knowledge emerges through relational care. Making—both in the form of ritual objects and through shared memory—allows affect to circulate as knowledge rather than excess. In this way, care and attention to everyday acts become both a methodology and a framework for navigating diasporic life.

Continuing this ritual in Canada required transformation rather than preservation, as santan flowers are tropical plants not native to this land. I grounded this transformed ritual in two guiding principles in order to preserve its significance. First, the flowers—or their substitutes—needed to remain accessible, allowing people to participate when moved to do so. This principle honors the abundance of santan flowers in the Philippines, where the ritual is sustained through accessibility rather than scarcity. Second, the ritual was meant to be shared rather than kept private, allowing the knowledge it carries to circulate freely. As a carrier of this practice, I recognize that its meaning can only be sustained through engagement with others. At its core, the project continues a practice of care through gift-giving.

To support accessibility, I recreated santan flowers using Blender and 3D printing, a process made possible with support from the Makerspace team at York University's Markham Campus. This approach allowed me to produce the flowers in abundance without excessive physical labor and at an affordable scale. The beads were printed in thermoplastic

²⁰ Eun-young Kim, *Maedeup Mandeulgi* 매듭 만들기: 무형 문화재 매듭장이 알려주는 27가지 매듭 이야기 [*Making Maedeup*] (Seoul: Mijinsa, 2016).

polyurethane (TPU), a flexible, rubber-like material chosen for its durability and tactile qualities. Each 3D-printed flower was subtly reshaped using a heat gun to curve the petal tips, allowing each to carry slight variation and difference—marks of individuality within repetition. This technical process is also a reflection of a specific diasporic strategy: the santan is a tropical species, and its digital reproduction allows it to persist in a climate where it cannot naturally thrive. In this way, 3D printing and the heat-shaping of synthetic materials work in tandem with the labor of memory. It is a material translation—one that stabilizes a fragile, organic form into a durable presence, negotiating the geographic and temporal distances of displacement.



Figure 5. Still from *Mga Santan In Bloom* production video showing 3D printing of santan flower beads, 2025. (photograph by author).

While experimenting with 3D printing, I began researching different types of maedeup and encountered challenges sourcing suitable cords in Canada. Historically, maedeup used *dahoe* (다호) cords, which were braided to hold tension and maintain

form—essential qualities for knots that only reveal their final shape once carefully tightened. This structural requirement became central to my material decisions.²¹

In search of a cord with similar tension, I initially experimented with thick paracords typically used for mountain climbing. While impractical for bracelet-making, this stage of trial and error became meaningful in itself. Struggling to find appropriate materials, observing maedeup knots rendered in vibrantly colored contemporary cords, and learning through failure all became part of the process. This experimentation reflects a diasporic methodology in which tradition is not replicated intact, but reimagined through contemporary materials and conditions (see figure 6). For the final iteration, I used mini paracords—smaller in scale yet structurally capable of holding simple maedeup knots—allowing the bracelets to remain wearable while retaining necessary tension.

²¹ Eun-young Kim, *Maedeup Mandeulgi* 매듭 만들기: 무형 문화재 매듭장이 알려주는 27가지 매듭 이야기 [*Making Maedeup*] (Seoul: Mijinsa, 2016).



Figure 6. Experimentation with *maedeup* technique using mountain-climbing paracord, 2024.
(photograph by author).

With the santan flower beads and mini paracords prepared, I documented myself assembling the bracelets, weaving together memory, tradition, and diasporic practice. This act of making mirrors how my *ate* taught me santan bracelet-making and how *maedeup* knots are passed down across generations, emphasizing the relational and intergenerational nature of knowledge transmission. By combining Filipino ritual with Korean knotting and adapting both through 3D-printed materials, the work honors continuity while allowing space for transformation.

The resulting video functions as a transformative element of the project in its own right. It captures two traditions merging into a contemporary expression of diaspora, allowing the knowledge embedded in the act of making to circulate beyond the physical objects or a single maker. The video operates as both documentation and ritual—a mode of care, teaching, and connection that extends the work into new spaces and relationships (see fig. 7).



Figure 7. Still from *Mga Santan In Bloom* production video weaving santan flower beads using *maedeup* technique, 2025. (photograph by author).

In this way, *Mga Santan In Bloom* underscores how diasporic knowledge emerges through care, memory, and relational practice. By weaving together personal ritual, intergenerational teaching, and material experimentation, the project demonstrates that transformation is not only formal or material, but also affective, communal, and ongoing. Like *온기* (*Warmth*), it shows that diasporic understanding is produced through layered experience—through making, sharing, and engaging with others—rather than through fixed representations or singular narratives. Knowledge, like community, remains lived and circulating: created through action, passed along through interaction, and reinterpreted across time and space.

Translation

It comes as no surprise that this work—like the *maebyeong* and the *onggi*—revealed additional layers of meaning when presented publicly. The first audience engagement occurred during the final critiques of my MFA thesis year at the end of the fall term. In this

context, I began with a “cold read,” inviting audience members to respond without prior explanation. This approach allowed me to observe how the work communicated on its own terms (see fig 8).

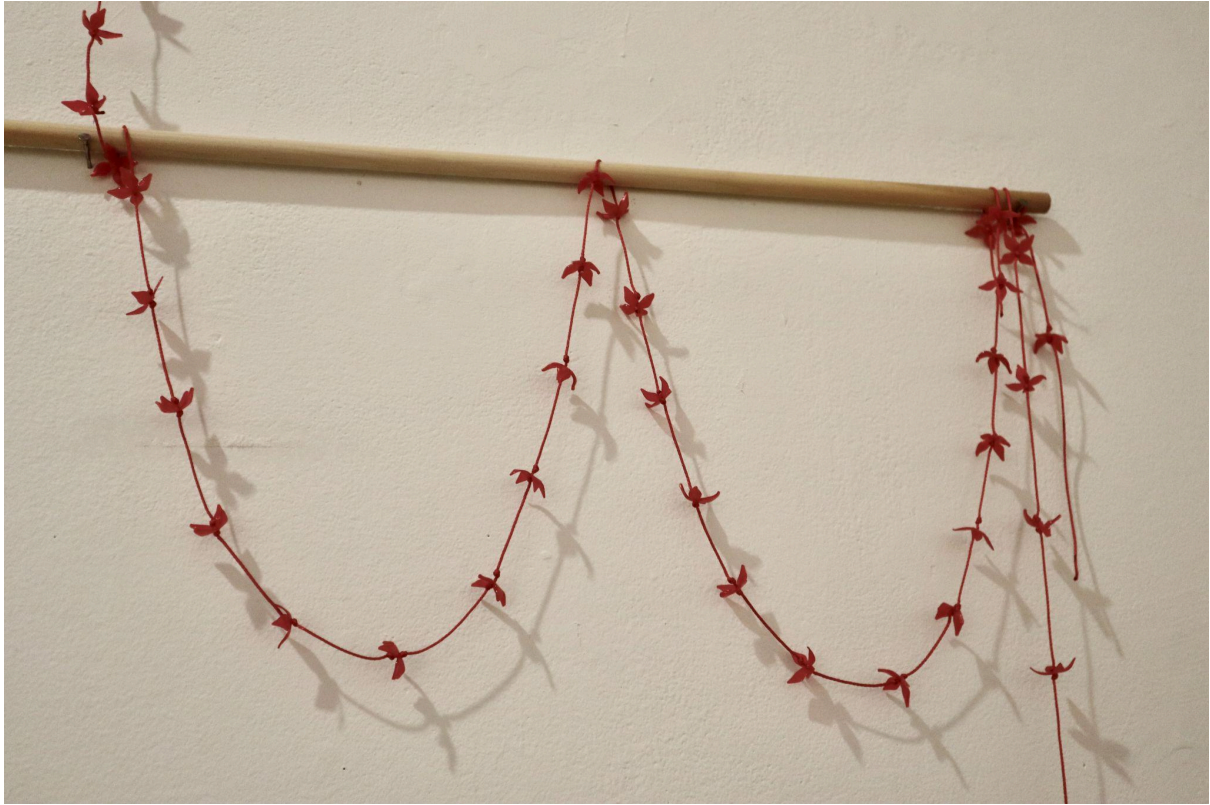


Figure 8. *Mga Santan In Bloom*, 2025. Installation view, Fall term end-of-year critiques at York University. (photograph by peer).

During this initial reading, the delicate petals of *Mga Santan In Bloom* were described as conveying intimacy, while the tactile qualities of the materials invited closeness. The long red thread connecting each santan flower was read as a marker of time and continuity, grounding the work historically and emotionally.

Encouraged by this response, I then shared the personal and cultural context of the work: my childhood memories, the santan flower ritual, and its community-centered significance. I anticipated that this narrative would clarify the work. Instead, it produced confusion. I was told that without verbal explanation, the cultural meaning was lost (see fig. 9).



Figure 9. Documentation of Fall term end-of-year critiques at York University, 2025.
(photograph by peer).

This feedback unsettled me. If the blind reading had been generative, why did context produce a sense of lack rather than fullness? While I was aware that the work, situated in Toronto, would encounter viewers unfamiliar with the santan bracelet ritual, my concern shifted away from accessibility and toward articulation. How could I speak about this ritual without reducing it? How much should I translate? What is lost—or misrepresented—when explanation is demanded in a displaced context?

I brought these concerns to my thesis committee, where one suggestion was to incorporate video documentation of the santan bracelet-making process in the Philippines. Materially, this was possible: my cousin, who lives there, remains closely connected to these flowers. What emerged instead was a deeper tension—my persistent guilt when speaking about, and especially in relation to, the Philippines.

When I reached out, her response was immediate and generous. She was excited that the project spoke of home. She traveled to find santan flowers and sent video recordings:

blossoms in their natural environment, surrounded by birds, insects, and ambient life.²² She then filmed herself weaving the bracelets, carefully threading each flower in a rhythm that echoed my own knot-making gestures (see fig 10).

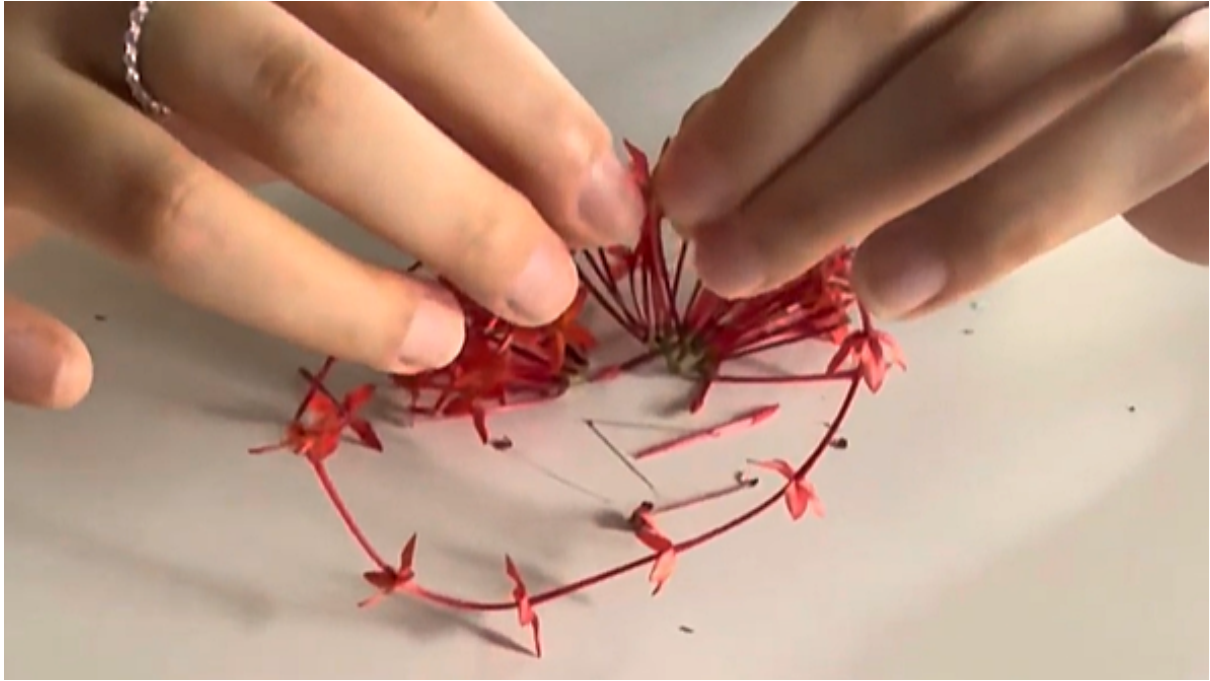


Figure 10. Still of santan bracelet making process made by author's cousin, 2026.
(photograph by author).

Through this exchange, I was reminded that the ritual continues to bind us across distance. What began as guilt shifted into shared celebration. In her response—and in the broader network of relations she represents—I was reminded that I remain connected. This realization led me to consider presenting her video alongside my own, but spatially separated, requiring viewers to move physically between them. This oscillation would echo the diasporic condition itself: a continual back-and-forth shaped by the desire for grounding.

As I am reminded to whom the work is dedicated, this exchange remains significant. Knowledge emerged through the act of sharing itself. Perhaps translation, here too, can remain in flux. I write from a place of care, honoring the labor of my cousin and her friend,

²² The santan flowers were found in La Finca subdivision in Lipa City, Batangas.

whose participation reminds me that diasporic work does not stand apart from everyday life—it is sustained by it.

Together, A Celebration

I often return to the question of how my artwork supports my community. This question does not present itself as a problem to solve, but as an ongoing reflection—shaped by moments of encounter with other diasporic artists whose practices remind me that making can be a form of care. Experiencing diasporic work that names complexity and connectivity has repeatedly given me hope, especially when my own position feels fragmented or uncertain. My work grows from this lineage: one sustained through shared stories, recognition, and the quiet labor of staying connected.

One such encounter was with Filipino Canadian interdisciplinary artist Marigold Santos, who visited York University in January 2026. I had the honor of inviting her for a studio visit. I was nervous because I have long admired her work. Her practice, which visualizes Filipino diasporic experience through cultural markers guided by sensorial memory, has resonated with me for years. She walked through my studio, observed the works I had installed, and then we sat together to talk.

Our conversation centered on *온기* (*Warmth*) and *Mga Santan In Bloom*, in preparation for my thesis exhibition. Marigold noted that the multiplicity present in my work functions as an act of resilience: a protest and a survival strategy for diasporic bodies. She traced how micro-level experiences—my twice-migratory life and diasporic identity—intersect with macro-level structures, particularly Eurocentric frameworks that shape how identities are made legible, recognized, and valued.

Looking back, what stays with me most is not the structured feedback, but the space she created for me to speak. I rambled—about the artworks, my personal history, how those experiences inform my practice, and how the same events register differently as I navigate

shifting diasporic positions. I spoke of vanity, anxiety, and the weight of being an immigrant, a diasporic, East Asian woman navigating academia and the art world. My rambling, though born of nervousness, also signaled comfort. I spoke more openly than I ever had before. I felt acknowledged—not because she fully knew my inner world, but because she recognized it in solidarity. This moment shows how relational space allows diasporic experiences to be witnessed and affirmed; affective labor and multiplicity become legible when supported by connection.”

The resonance of this interaction, and the vulnerability of speaking my history aloud, inspired me to map *Mga Santan In Bloom* into the shape of a soundwave from the first summer recital in the Philippines—audio captured within one of the *onggi* from *온기* (Warmth). The form emerges from a single word: “colour,” spoken with a Tagalog inflection that bridges both languages. I pronounced it 'kolur.' Listening back to my own voice in that recorded moment, I sense a delicate fusion of the English colour and the Tagalog kulay—two words pointing to the same essence through different textures. In this specific inflection, I discovered a liminal terrain: an in-between space where cultures merge to give shape to new realities (see appendix).

This sense of naming and reclaiming cultural markers carried over into Marigold’s artist talk at The Goldfarb Gallery. Each plant, each animal, and their historical and symbolic contexts, including references to colonial footprints and folklore such as the *aswang*. What stayed with me most, however, was her question: “Has anyone heard about the orchid mantis?” This introduction led into *Shroud Hand (Orchid Mantis)* (2025), a painting of a mantis resting on a hand textured with woven patterns. The relationship between insect and host plant—neither parasitic nor fully symbiotic—becomes a metaphor for survival sustained through care.

What lingered most was her personal reflection. Her fascination with insects and the natural environment did not emerge from formal research or inherited tradition, but from her son's obsessive curiosity. In sharing his attentiveness to the world, she revealed the sustained yet often unseen labor of motherhood. The way Santos traces her diasporic journey—from specific memories of the Philippines into expansive, fantastical forms—made visible how everyday fascinations, affective labour, and care animate her imagery. Insects and nature appear not as scientific motifs, but as intimate fragments of lived life, rendered present and vocal within each painting.

Witnessing one diasporic artist articulate her experience so fully was profoundly empowering. In her presence, the multiplicity of my own life—so often flattened or dismissed—felt recognized and affirmed. I returned to my projects with renewed clarity. Diasporic work grounded in everyday markers fosters resilience amid isolation, instability, and uncertainty. It activates the unstable ground we inhabit and transforms it into a site of aliveness.

As Marigold prepared to leave, I offered her a small 3D-printed santan flower as a gesture of gratitude and a symbol of the connection formed through our exchange. She asked, “How was the visit?”—a question that could have been procedural, a simple check-in. Without hesitation, I replied: “It was healing.”

And it truly was. Not simply because of feedback, but because in that shared space—across stories and the messiness of diaspora—a sense of belonging was affirmed. It reminded me why I create: not just to make objects, but to keep connections alive and weave community across distance. *Mga Santan In Bloom* doesn't hide its roots. The title is a nod to my Filipino heritage, and the beads mirror the flowers I remember, but it's also an invitation to a future I'm still imagining. As the title claims, 'santan flowers bloom together'—and in that blooming, the silence of the past finally finds its voice.

Chapter 5

Tapos (Finished/Then After)

I use the Tagalog word *Tapos*—which can mean both “finished” and “then after”—to replace the conventional “Conclusion.” This choice signals a departure from linear closure, reflecting the logic of the work itself. I do not end this paper by summarizing all the preceding chapters into one cohesive statement. To do so would contradict the ethos of this project. A conventional conclusion implies resolution, a neat closure, and yet the processes explored here—diasporic practice, relational care, affective knowledge—resist finality.

Each story, each chapter, holds significance as part of an interwoven whole, but these threads do not converge to produce a singular endpoint. Instead, they generate understandings, reverberations, and openings. Even as I write, I see the connections forming, shifting, and emerging between the various strands of my inquiry. To impose a summarized conclusion would erase the ongoing negotiation of meaning that has shaped both the making and reflection in this paper.

These reflections do not resolve, but rather echo across the work, offering fragmented reference points through which the significance of diasporic practice may be felt and interpreted. Each fragment—whether a ritual, an encounter, a material experiment, or a memory—contributes to a network of relational knowledge that continues to evolve beyond the page.

Tapos, then, signals both completion and continuation. It acknowledges that while chapters can be closed, learning, making, and reflecting persist. Diasporic knowledge, in particular, does not arrive as a singular truth; it emerges through practice, memory, and relational engagement. It is layered, iterative, and always open to reinterpretation. Rather than fixed definitions or tidy narratives, this work foregrounds multiplicity, complexity, and ongoing connection.

Together, the threads traced through this paper—from ritual practices to relational encounters, from material transformation to affective reflection—are not meant to resolve, but to resonate. They gesture toward futures, continuities, and dialogues that extend beyond this text, embodying what it means to live diasporically.

Tapos is more than a closure; it is a reflection of diaspora-as-methodology. It embodies an approach to knowledge and making that is iterative, relational, and responsive rather than linear or final. Just as diasporic lives navigate multiple geographies, temporalities, and relational networks, this thesis traces meaning through movement, memory, and connection. By refusing a singular conclusion, *Tapos* enacts what diaspora-as-methodology insists upon: understanding emerges through practice, through engagement with others, and through the lived, often fragmentary, experiences that cannot be fully captured in static statements. In this way, the end of this paper is not a conclusion but a methodological gesture—it models how knowledge circulates, transforms, and continues, mirroring the very processes that shape diasporic life and art.

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Appendix: Exhibition Documentation Images

