

# PLACES OF FREEDOM AND CONTAINMENT

REHAB EL SADEK

SARA JIMENEZ

SHERVONE NECKLES

KARA ROONEY



THE GALLERIES AT MOORE  
MOORE COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN  
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# PLACES OF FREEDOM AND CONTAINMENT

Our reaction to and our dependency on our surroundings has preoccupied social theorists, city planners and artists for years. This focus on our surroundings is fueled by both an interest in the possibilities of architecture to shape our experiences, and by the changing global population patterns due to extensive migration. The results of questioning the topographical influences on our lives are manifold and vary depending on one's temperament and willingness to engage with often painful truths. The answers to the many questions are never simple or direct. The title of this exhibition, *Places of Freedom and Containment*, grew from my realization of these complexities.

When does a space we inhabit support our striving for self realization? When does it prevent us from achieving success? Why do we have visceral—positive or negative—reactions to certain places? Architecture and urban spaces can be used to control the lives of its inhabitants; to restrain and contain their movement, and embed history and past hierarchies. But it can also inspire and support nascent ideas.

The four artists in this exhibition engage with the issues of space and place in a manifold of ways—all directly or indirectly addressing the foundational idea posited by the late Yi-Fu Tuan in his pivotal study *Space and Place/The Perspective of Experience*: “Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to one and long for the other.”<sup>1</sup> First published in 1977 and reissued in 2001, it is as relevant as ever. So are the ideas in *Architecture and Feminism*, published by Princeton Architectural Press in 1996. There, Deborah Fausch highlights architecture's engagement with the body and the need to explore the implications this has for developing structures more responsive to our physical and emotional needs.<sup>2</sup>

Fully asserting the pivotal role of women in creating and preserving nurturing environments, Shervone Neckles created a female figure who holds the home on her shoulders. Following the contours of her own body, Neckles made this figure central to the complex exploration of her Caribbean origins. Interestingly in the 1940s, Louise Bourgeois commented on her role as caregiver by conceiving of the house and female body as a single entity in a series of paintings and drawings entitled “Femme-Maison.”<sup>3</sup>

Born in the United States to Grenadian parents shortly after their arrival, Neckles grew up in two worlds and immersed herself fully in both. An artist, educator and community organizer, Neckles draws on her Afro-Caribbean heritage and deftly explores various media and materials, be it a number of printing techniques, beading, embroidery, dry herbs or PVC.

About her work in the exhibition, the artist states:

“The homes referenced in the textile prints and sculptures are of my maternal great-grandparents and grandparents. These homes were my family's introduction to land ownership. Many objects were lost after my grandparent's house survived a fire and two hurricanes, but there is so much more that has been preserved and is honored through my *Provenance* and *Domiciliation* series. More than just an emblem of survival, these houses extend beyond literal structures for the family. They give us an internal strength, a sense of belonging, and a place where we are from. For me and my family, the home is a sacred space.

In *Provenance*, a print and textile series, features my own figure with my maternal great-grandparent's home. The self-portraits depict myself uprooted from my home country of Grenada; the home has instead become internalized as an integral part of my body and consciousness.

Between my Afro-Caribbean and American identity, the home both preserves the memories and legacies, while also balancing the weight of being a first-generation child, carrying the family's hopes and promises for the future. Each piece has its own narrative that borrows from my fascination with Caribbean mythology, physics, colonialism, and Catholicism.

The sculptures in *Domiciliation* are repositories, safeguarding the



Shervone Neckles, *Provenance 8*, 2018 (*Provenance* series). Polyester print with embroidered thread surface, glass beads, dried saffron, 15 x 11 in. (print), 18 x 14 in. (framed) Photo by Yao Zu Lu, courtesy of Shervone Neckles's Studio.

remaining physical artifacts of my family records. These housed family records range from family photos dating back to the 1880s to my grandmother’s journal entries. The work also draws inspiration from Grenadian-American poet and activist Audre Lorde’s “biomythography” concept, which blends biography, history, and myth to present the black female existence and lived experiences.

These two bodies of work *Provenance* and *Domiciliation* respond to my longing for Grenada and all that it symbolizes, though it is not the country in which I was born. I inherited my parents’ yearning for home and their memories of Grenada.”

Filipinx-Canadian artist Sara Jimenez is interested in translating her cross-cultural memories into large-scale installations and performances. Exploring the principles of collage, she utilizes a wide array of materials, creating narratives around concepts of colonial history, home and memory.

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- SHERVONE NECKLES

*Roots Burrow Through Stones and Hard Facts* is an immersive installation with a sound component by musician/composer Lau Nau. It grows from an earlier project realized at Smack Mellon in Brooklyn in 2021/22, and presents a poetic rendition of the artist’s research into Binondo, Manila’s Chinatown neighborhood in the artist’s ancestral country of the Philippines. Binondo is the first recorded existence of a Chinatown, established in 1594 by Spanish colonial settlers aiming to structure the city through ethnic separations and control. Walls separated Binondo from the Spanish settlement of Intramuros, which translates to “within the walls” Binondo stands as a relic of ethnic control and labor efficiency during the Western transition to capitalism.

The artist has overlaid imagery from Chinese, Spanish, and Filipino textiles, along with zoomed-in, digitized fragments of photographs of the architecture in Binondo and Intramuros, onto sculptures, hanging fabric, wallpaper, and flooring within the gallery. By combining visual elements from this particular historical period, Jimenez endeavors to rearrange the colonial legacy. She grapples with the following questions: What emerges as resilient and fugitive despite attempts to erase and repress? What cannot be controlled, tamed, erased?

Through her use of translucent fabrics, Jimenez plays with the parameters of porousness and containment between what is designated as *inside* and *outside*. The installation itself reflects on



Sara Jimenez, *Roots Burrow Through Stones and Hard Facts*, 2021. Mixed media, site-specific installation, dimensions variable. Installation view at Smack Mellon, New York. Courtesy of the artist.

ways that memories, ancestral knowledge, and secrets become embedded in architectural spaces while also being contained within the body.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, Rehab El Sadek contemplates the dichotomy of space and place, exemplified by her suspension of the basic structural elements of the house. Within her sculpture *House of Gauze* (2021), there are most basic household items—a table and a used chair—which evoke a sense of loneliness that is often a part of the immigrant experience. However, these items can also represent places of refuge and security. In the home, it is possible to escape the surveillance that is frequently the function of towers built not to protect, but as a means to dictate political or religious fervor, or a tool to identify those trying to escape restrictions. Towers are abundant in the Islamic world, many full of formal beauty. Represented here by *Burj Alkanisa* (2021) and *Burj Abyad* (2021), both are almost precariously tall and the perishable materials used in their construction signify their inherent fragility: the power invested in them is not built to last forever.

As the cities in many parts of the world age, architects, city planners and social theorists are tasked with finding solutions to a number of

issues—population growth, the climate crises, an increased need for energy and potable water, the conservation of resources, etc. The reconfiguration of the existing urban infrastructure to the changing needs of our modern society can result in unexpected tensions. Sadek's *Buildings in Conflict* (2021), a long wall relief precariously balanced on spindly legs is a good parable for this moment in which architects and city planners are tasked with creating new environments.

Poet, visual artist, curator and critic Kara Rooney is interested in the intersection of the body, language and physical space as a means of gaining deeper insight into how we communicate with one another—how we formulate identity (or hide it), and how language's inherent blind spots affect our sense of collective consciousness.

Her recent series *Desire Line* (2020) takes its name from a concept in landscape architecture of unplanned paths created by pedestrians to reach a desired point most efficiently. It can be used in a more metaphorical sense as well, referring to an endangered urban architecture, and the often-doomed desire to preserve historical artifacts. In Mexico City, where Rooney, a native of Rhode Island, presently resides, countless monuments to past cultural heritage have been destroyed or stripped of their meaning by improper and insensitive displays at various cultural institutions.

Rooney adopted the ideas of the Latin American street art movement *Accion Poetica* as a guiding spirit for her *Desire Line* series—a critique of the process of gentrification, displacement and capitalist desires in the city and its environs informs her work. The series reexamines the misplaced intentions and ideas of “care” that museums so often espouse, and re-envision the role of the architectural space in the preservation of the collective memory. This idea is inspired by Indra Kagis McEwen's essay “Socrates' Ancestor,” which talks about how historical Western architecture gained its legitimacy through the preservation of memory.<sup>5</sup>

These ideas penetrate and inform all of Rooney's work, be it digital collages, sculptural works or, more recently, large weavings. These pieces—based on the rubbings of sections of buildings in the eight colonias of Centro, in Mexico City—act as an abstract map of a place that is disappearing. They are meant not only to preserve memory of these historical spaces, but also pay an homage to places that house our sense of cultural and personal identity.

It is this understanding of architectural space as a bearer of cultural and personal identity that is so often demonstrated in the work of women artists and architects. We have experienced radical societal changes in the past few decades: the nuclear family is no longer the major consumer of habitable spaces, there are more and more people working from home, “9 to 5” are no longer the only working hours,

parenting is shared, and elder care is a looming issue. While not creating in a strictly architectural sense, the artists in this exhibition address space and place with a fresh understanding, commenting on past hierarchies and foregrounding the current understanding of and the sensitivity to gender roles. In doing so, they influence the potential for changes to our understanding of architectural planning and urban design.

## CHARLOTTA KOTIK

Brooklyn, September 2022

<sup>1</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze, Carol Henderson, editors, *Architecture and Feminism* (New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 39.

<sup>3</sup> Meeka Walsh, *Architectures of Domesticity* (Winnipeg, BorderCrossings Magazine, 2008), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Text adapted from Smack Mellon's presentation of *Sara Jimenez: Roots Burrow Through Stones and Hard Facts* (November 20, 2021 – January 2, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Indra Kagis McEwen, *Socrates' Ancestor: An Essay on Architectural Beginnings* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1997), 130.



Kara Rooney, *Col. La Roma*, from the *Desire Line* series, 2022. Handwoven wool tapestry, 90 x 56 in. Courtesy of the artist.



Installation view of Shervone Neckles, *Domiciliation: Bless this House Repository #3*, 2019. One-of-a-kind mixed media silkscreen print onto 16-gauge clear polymerizing vinyl chloride (PVC) sheets, polypropylene webbing, fabric trimming, brass chains, 22 x 31 1/2 x 17 in.

I would like to acknowledge the outstanding help of Gabrielle Lavin Suzenski and her staff, who truly made this exhibition possible, Miles Krumpak for scholarly suggestions, and Dexter Dine, who assisted this project from the very beginning.

Charlotta Kotik is a writer, independent curator, and lecturer living in Brooklyn. A native of Prague, she has worked in major American museums and is a Curator Emerita of Contemporary Art at the Brooklyn Museum.

*Places of Freedom and Containment* is the third iteration of Moore's Visiting Curators Initiative, which highlights the artistic talents of curators from outside the Philadelphia region and brings their vision to The Galleries at Moore, a hub for contemporary art and creative exploration in the heart of Philadelphia. For this exhibition, **Charlotta Kotik's** work focuses on a multicultural approach that explores how architectural and domestic spaces are conceived, modified and inhabited, based on a woman's role as provider in various societal structures. Each artist in the show uses a unique perspective to illuminate the intricacies of urban design and its impact on society's functionality, as well as cross-cultural gender roles and how they can be employed to create enriching environments. Artists in the exhibition include **Sara Jimenez**, a Filipinx-Canadian multidisciplinary artist who explores transcultural memories and creates work that addresses existing global narratives around concepts of origins and home, loss and absence; and **Rehab El Sadek**, an Egyptian-born artist of Sudanese ancestry who works at the intersection of conceptual art, architecture and language—her work explores themes of identity, displacement, immigration, and belonging. Similarly, **Shervone Neckles**, an interdisciplinary artist of Afro-Caribbean origin, integrates themes of identity and immigration into her work—she also explores many of the Caribbean arts and crafts traditions in her practice. Her ancestral home in Granada, rendered in various techniques, is a recurring theme of Shervone's work. For **Kara Rooney**, an American multidisciplinary artist living in Mexico City, architectural forms and a spatial perception are the main inspiration. Rooney uses painting and weaving to document the disappearance of sections of historical neighborhoods to preserve collective memory and to pay "an homage to architectural spaces that house our sense of cultural and personal identity."

## THE GALLERIES AT MOORE STAFF

GABRIELLE LAVIN SUZENSKI, ROCHELLE F. LEVY DIRECTOR  
DEANNA EMMONS, EDUCATION & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT COORDINATOR

KATIE LOW, CHIEF PREPARATOR  
SUNNY LUCAS, PREPARATOR  
KEITH MURPHY, PREPARATOR  
BRIAN ZIPRIN, PREPARATOR

Cover image: installation view of Rehab El Sadek's *House of Gauze*, 2021. Wood, gypsum, foam, gauze, table frame, chair, sod 93 x 51 x 120 in. and *Buildings in conflict*, 2021. Industrial foam, gypsum, wood, 66 x 332 x 12 in.

## EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

All works courtesy of the artists unless otherwise noted

### REHAB EL SADEK

*Home Plans*, 2022

Mixed media on metal

Four pieces, 14 x 24 x 2 in. each

One piece, 27 x 6 x 1 in.

*Buildings in conflict*, 2021

Industrial foam, gypsum, wood

66 x 332 x 12 in.

*Burj Alkanisa*, 2021

Mixed media

130 x 24 x 20 in.

*Burj Abyad*, 2021

Industrial foam, gypsum, metal

105 x 8 x 8 in.

*Sur Hadid*, 2021

Metal zigzag fence

3 pieces, 23 x 28 x 9 in. each

*Netting*, 2021

Wooden dowels

Dimensions variable

*House of Gauze*, 2021

Wood, gypsum, foam, gauze, table frame, chair, sod

93 x 51 x 120 in.

### SARA JIMENEZ

*Roots Burrow Through Stones and Hard Facts*, 2022

Fabric, foam, vinyl, wood, sound, carpets, wallpaper

Dimensions variable

### SHERVONE NECKLES

All works courtesy of Shervone Neckles's Studio

*Untitled (Quantum Effects)*, 2022 (*Provenance* series)

Embroidered thread surface with glass beading on velvet cloth, paper, clear

polymerizing vinyl chloride, gold heat-reflective foil film, fabric trimming

53 x 36 in. (drawing)

58 1/2 x 41 in. (framed)

*Provenance: Domiciliation Settle*, 2021

Silkscreen print on velvet cloth

40 x 32 in. (print)

44 x 35 x 2 in. (framed)

*Provenance: Domiciliation UnSettle*, 2021

Silkscreen print on velvet cloth

40 x 32 in. (print)

44 x 35 x 2 in. (framed)

*Domiciliation: Bless this House Repository #2*, 2019

One-of-a-kind mixed media silkscreen print onto 16-gauge clear

polymerizing vinyl chloride (PVC) sheets, polypropylene webbing, fabric

trimming, brass chains

13 1/2 x 18 1/2 x 8 1/2 in.

*Domiciliation: Bless this House Repository #3*, 2019

One-of-a-kind mixed media silkscreen print onto 16-gauge clear

polymerizing vinyl chloride (PVC) sheets, polypropylene webbing, fabric

trimming, brass chains

22 x 31 1/2 x 17 in.

*Provenance 8*, 2018 (*Provenance* series)

Polyester print with embroidered thread surface, glass beads, dried saffron

15 x 11 in. (print)

18 x 14 in. (framed)

*Provenance 14*, 2018 (*Provenance* series)

Polyester print with embroidered thread surface

15 x 11 in. (print)

18 x 14 in. (framed)

*Provenance 22*, 2018 (*Provenance* series)

Polyester print with embroidered thread surface

15 x 11 in. (print)

18 x 14 in. (framed)

### KARA ROONEY

*The sky is only blue in accordance with the place from which we perceive it*,

*No. 1*, 2022

Oil, acrylic and gravel on canvas

20 x 16 in.

*The sky is only blue in accordance with the place from which we perceive it*,

*No. 5*, 2022

Oil, acrylic and gravel on canvas with concrete base

Dimensions variable

*The sky is only blue in accordance with the place from which we perceive it*,

*No. 6*, 2022

Oil, acrylic and gravel on canvas with concrete base

Dimensions variable

*Col. La Roma*, from the *Desire Line* series, 2022

Handwoven wool tapestry

90 x 56 in.

*El Barrio Desaparecio*, 2021

6 unique Polaroid prints

8 1/4 x 20 in. (framed) each

*Desire Line, Aerial View, No. 1*, 2020

Acrylic, graphite, thread on paper

28 x 19 1/2 in.

*Desire Line, Aerial View, No. 2*, 2020

Acrylic, graphite, thread on paper

28 x 19 1/2 in.

*Daidalon No. 1*, 2018

Digital collage on Hahnemuhle paper

48 x 32 in.

*Daidalon No. 7*, 2018

Digital collage on Hahnemuhle paper

48 x 32 in.