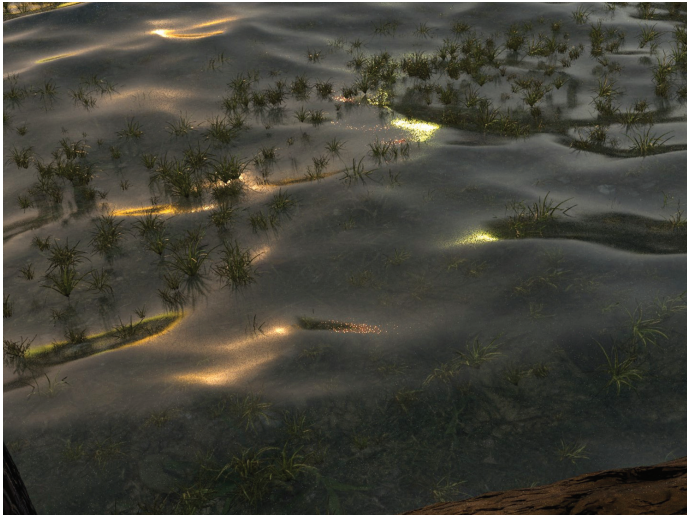


Asuf Ishaq



Articles of Home

ICA Theatre, Thursday 21 April, 7pm

Asuf Ishaq's new moving image work *Articles of Home* (2022) narrates migration experience as told through a relationship with objects and places, things left behind by the artist's mother when she migrated to Britain. Drawing inspiration from Édouard Glissant, the piece will incorporate land and soil, recognising its symbolic significance as both a beginning and an endpoint, a transtemporal portal, an archive of migration. The event will explore Ishaq's practice through conversation with the artist and includes earlier related work and music.

Q&A

So the first question, where did your ideas come from for this new work *Articles of Home* (2022)?

I've been interested in family histories, especially with my parents' migration experience. A previous film I made, *Mother* (2020), was based on a fifty-year-old photograph of my mother as a personal family archive. This new work is a continuation of that, but my perspective is now looking at objects and places that carry personal connections, memories and histories.

For my research I have been reading a fascinating book *The Skin of The Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* by Laura U. Marks, which explores Gilles Deleuze and Walter Benjamin's ideas of objects as fossils and having auras. So my ideas about the representation of objects have developed from this research too.

And can you talk a little bit about your practice more widely?

Generally, my practice is concerned with themes of embodiment, fragmentation, displacement, migration, post-colonialism and personal memories. I look to the diasporic body as an evolving archive of experience that it transmits to the next generation. Within this framework I make sculpture, film, sound or photography, using each medium to open up to various ways of expressing narratives, emotions and ideas.

How does moving image fit into your practice? Is it something that you've always used or something that's fairly recent?

I've been working with moving image mostly in the last few years. I have a graphic design background, so I've been working with moving image for a while, but it's only now that I bring it into my art practice. I find moving image vibrant and exciting to experiment with, as I am interested in the sonic experience in relation to text, film footage, narrative and images. I enjoy the challenge of telling stories and conveying emotions through time-based work, as I can represent past experiences, and through the process of making, make sense of fragmented memories.

How would you describe your new work?

For *Articles of Home*, I was planning to visit Pakistan and film my mother's family village. But I couldn't because of the whole Covid crisis, so now I'm representing some parts of my film in CGI. I'm recreating a very old mango tree as well as the family graveyard. I weave in some of the film footage recordings of my mum and her objects. The film also goes into an imaginary place where she's burying objects into the ground in the family village, which is underwater for half the year. The tree, house and graves are all submerged. My intention is to express location, memory and culture through the sense of home, the past and longing to return. I work with live footage, CGI, narration and electronic soundscape. The sonic work is inspired by my previous experience as a club DJ, and I enjoy bringing this aspect into my work.

You mentioned that *Articles of Home* is a continuation from your previous work *Mother*. Could you talk a little bit about that work specifically?

Yes, sure. *Mother* involved a dialogue with my mother that centered around a 35mm photograph of my mother when she had just married my father. It was very damaged and torn, suggestive of the journey it had. The photograph is like a memory fragment: it opens up through the exercise of repair and remembering, drawing out memories and experiences. In the film I weave in interviews and images of the house where she lived. We sat to edit the photograph together exchanging experiences, mine of art making, and this overlap was a new experience for us.

Do you see this new work, which you've said connects with your previous work, as being one step in a longer series of works that interlink?

My film for Image Behaviour is a new distinct work, not part of a series, but there are certainly overlaps. My practice encompasses themes I am interested in such as the diasporic body and the body as an archive transmitting inter-generational experiences. I also use nature and soil to express cultural identity and ideas of rootedness and rootlessness. In this new work I am still interested in objects and places, fragments of memory and viewing objects as fossils that hold auras. This perspective is based on objects which have a life of their own for the owner. The objects tell us their own stories, a cultural and political narratives.

Can you talk a little bit about your process, if you have a typical process in which you make your work, and then maybe more specifically about the process behind making this work?

I normally have film footage based on an aspect or an idea, but I'm also really interested in discovering the nature

of filming, accidents, movement of camera or a detail. Then I build around this using sound, text, still images and spoken word; discovery is an important aspect of my process. Sometimes I stage or create a fictionalised imaginary situation, where I provide instructions for re-enacting. Stories and narratives begin to appear, and I sometimes then expand on a story or an experience. I film my own footage and edit in Adobe Premiere, and create music with friends in Ableton Live. For this work, I collaborate with a 3D animation artist, learning as I go along. This opportunity has provided me with time to experiment with new elements such as CGI and in-depth sonic work.

Your work is obviously deeply personal and involves family members. Are you comfortable with your work being described as biographical?

Yes, I don't mind that description. I draw into the rich experience of my family and culture, with the intention of having universal appeal though. So it hopefully resonates with people or viewers from all walks of life, from different cultures and backgrounds. I am dealing with themes of human experiences, life and emotions. I always have this at the top of my mind as I am researching and making. Personal narratives and lives contain politics and national memory, and politics drown out some of the individual and the personal. I bring my experience of identity, politics, post-colonial histories and cultural meaning into my work.

Asuf Ishaq's practice is concerned with themes of embodiment, fragmentation, displacement, migration and memory, often presenting the physical diasporic body as an evolving archive that transmits experience with cultural and political meaning. Ishaq's work unravels across spaces and narratives to reveal new meanings and draw out personal histories. Working with narration, words, sound and images, he deploys fiction, non-fiction, archival material, storytelling and personal memories in works that manifest as moving image, sculpture, installation, sonic and photography.

Ishaq lives and works in London, he grew up in Birmingham to Pakistani migrant parents. He studied MFA Fine Art at Goldsmiths (2020) and Graphic Design at Royal College of Art (1996). Ishaq has shown work recently at South London Gallery (New Contemporaries), Firstsite Colchester, Goldsmiths CCA, Safehouse 1 (2021), Saatchi Gallery (2020). Upcoming in summer 2022, The London Open exhibition at Whitechapel Gallery.