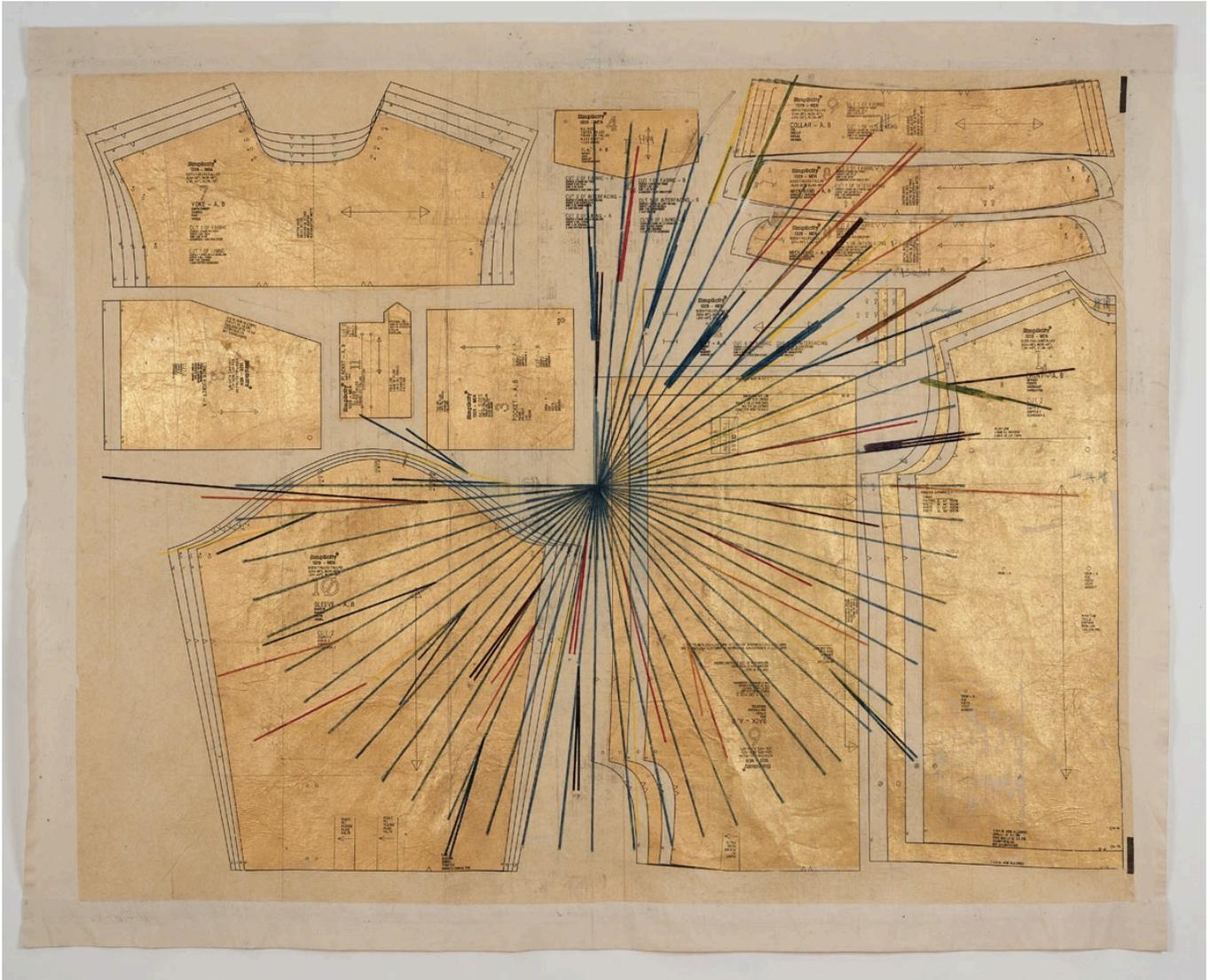


DOWN THE LINE

BY Sholeh Asgary, André Magaña, Keli Safia Maksud, Ronny Quevedo, Mira Dayal
May 9, 2022



Ronny Quevedo, *los desaparecidos (the arbiter of time)*, 2018, wax, pattern paper, and gold leaf on muslin, 50 by 62 inches. COURTESY ALEXANDER GRAY ASSOCIATES, NEW YORK/©2022 RONNY QUEVEDO

“Lineage” might bring to mind bloodlines, family trees, inherited customs, and archives indicating how an individual relates to a larger group. For many contemporary artists, lineage provides a framework for using specific materials and aesthetic references to speak to the nuances of identity, belonging, and relation. Interdisciplinary artists **Sholeh Asgary**, André Magaña, Keli Safia Maksud, and **Ronny Quevedo** work with a wide variety of inherited forms—from millennia-old textiles to postcolonial African national anthems to pre-Columbian ceramics—to probe the concept of the nation-state, rethink the parameters of authenticity, and

arrive at unexpected material metaphors.

Mira Dayal All of your practices fruitfully engage with the concept of lineage—you're resisting the idea that your work is necessarily engaging with a Western canon, and actively weaving together other specific lineages that speak to distinct sets of concerns.

Ronny Quevedo It's probably only in the past two years that the term *lineage* has concretely presented itself in what I investigate. A lot of my work deals with loss and memory, thinking about environments in which I existed and didn't exist, and also environments my parents existed in. I look at their background and their lineage as a way to invoke or consider spaces that I didn't exist in.

Disappearance might be a starting point in trying to identify loss. Oftentimes we can't see ourselves in certain canons or certain contexts. I name it disappearance to begin with and then slowly start devolving it into something that is much more about self-determination or agency. It's not about longing all the time, which is not to say that I don't want to pay tribute to what has been lost or omitted. But sometimes I see it more as identifying a moment in which an identity I was looking for didn't exist. I've always been curious about how artists recognize omission and lay claim to that space.

André Magaña I feel connected to starting from disappearance in terms of how I grew up and how I arrived in the place where I'm working now. It was a very aggressively assimilated household and a very aggressively whitewashed household. America dissolved my family and broke them down. As the situation became complicated, these assimilated structures also started to break down. That is when I started to learn more about the world I exist in, the reality of the power structures, and what my actual lineage is.

Sholeh Asgary *Lineage* is like *line*: what line am I standing in, and what does it mean to stand in a line? I was born in Iran and people in my family were political activists, but I grew up here [in the United States]. What history am I responding to? One of the things that moved me away from a very image-based practice—I used to work with photography—was wanting the image to somehow symbolize something authentic. That led me to an interdisciplinary practice instead, to see what happens if I throw a bunch of lines up and watch them fall, see where they converge. To be careful of what history, or reflections of those histories, I'm responding to.



André Magaña, *Caracetacocacola*
Pelocalabazapeyothurro, 2019, thermoplastic, epoxy resin, and chalk paint, 35 by 26 by 25 inches.
COURTESY MAGENTA PLAINS, NEW YORK

Keli Safia Maksud Some words that I go back to a lot are *wayfinding* and *wondering* and *wandering*. That is why I'm so interested in lines. Where is this line leading? It's not leading back to any origin necessarily. Nothing about trying to get back to this authentic whole. It's a place that is deeply contradictory. But there is something exciting about this question of literally wandering through time and space.

Asgary That is beautiful. What are other modes of wayfinding, or what are other modes of knowing or feeling, as opposed to the methods we have been taught or know? Because within those are so many gaps, and those gaps are exciting. Those gaps can tell us so much more about the line.

Quevedo I think all of us are confronting the idea of lineage as linear because of the models in which we want to operate, and maybe even the references that we have. Some of the disciplines that we have understood or cultivated fall short of the concepts that we want to bring out. That is why I now feel really comfortable thinking and talking about abstraction: that space of negotiation and malleability reflects the concepts that I want to investigate so much better.

Dayal Perhaps we can start with how you all deal with formal lineages, layering materials that can be traced back to a prior time or space.



Sholeh Asgary, *At or near the surface of the earth*, 2021, 5-channel sound installation with transducers, amplifiers, and fog. COURTESY SHOLEH ASGARY

Asgary *At or near the surface of the earth* [2021], which was installed at Headlands Center for the Arts [in Sausalito, California], is titled after the definition of fog: water molecules trapped at or near the surface of the earth. Five transducers are hidden in the room and the space is filled with fog. You walk in and it is very difficult to see someone on the other end of the room. The sonic element is both heard and felt, and viewers aren't sure where the sound is coming from.

I created the sound using a very high-powered microphone and amp. I made a recording of the sound of that space while sitting still for as long as I could, which was about nine minutes. I fed the sound through a transducer placed on the ground

and did a second recording at another time of day, so the second time included that previously recorded sound as well as the sound at that [later] time of day. I continued to do this, and by the fifth recording, I was playing the fourth recording, which combined the first, second, and third; you begin to hear the resonant properties of the room. It's very much like Alvin Lucier's *I Am Sitting in a Room* [1969], except this work has a different temporal element, being recorded throughout the day. I was thinking about this tension where fog is spiritual or transcendent and also affects your capability to see or be seen. Having made the recordings at five times of day, it's hard to not touch upon connections to the call to prayer as well.

Magaña Most of the work I've made in the past six years or so is rooted in my family's lineage in Colima, Mexico. They have been there for eleven generations. I was visiting my mom one time and noticed how many souvenir shops had reproductions of pre-Columbian ceramics from Colima. This is a very specific regional style of ceramics that is typically made of red clay, and hand-painted, so the paint is worn off. A lot of the ceramics in souvenir shops are pretty dirty and distressed; they try to emulate the look of the ceramics displayed in museums. I was thinking about *authenticity*, especially given that most of what people are going to see of Colima ceramics in museums are effectively looted from burial sites and don't belong in that environment. Is there a way to think about those souvenir ceramics—created by ceramicists from Colima, in Colima, and presented for sale—as more authentic than ceramics that are placed in a context where they don't necessarily belong, or where they shouldn't be, or where nobody would have expected them to be?

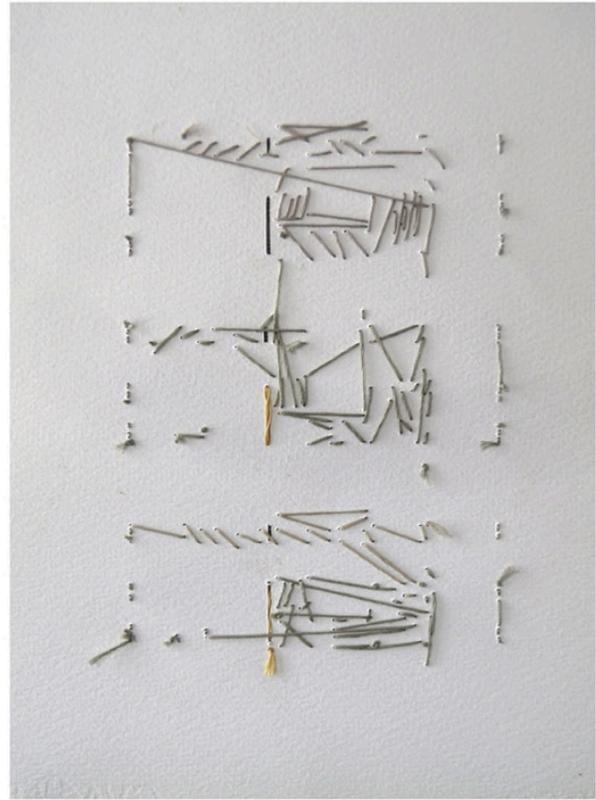
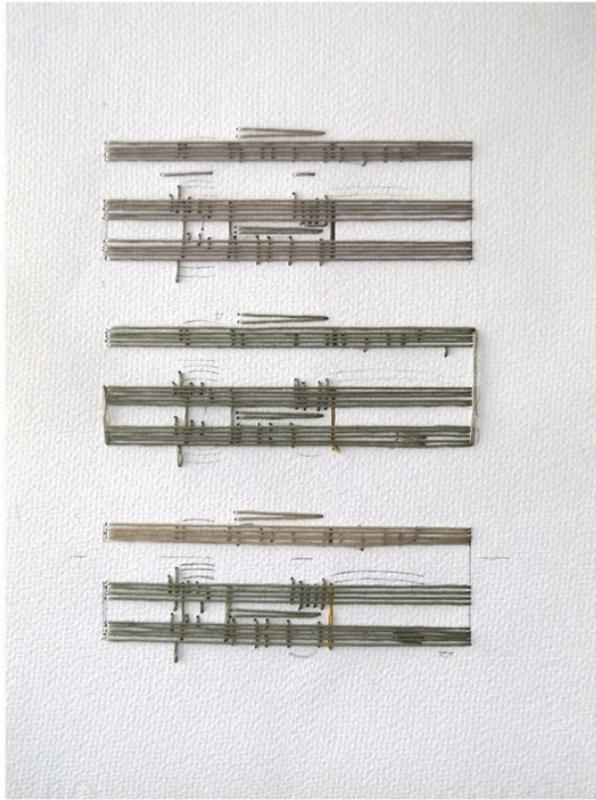
That was the conceptual jumping-off point for the exhibition “Reclinados” [at Prairie, a gallery in Chicago, in 2019]. I made five 3D-printed figurative sculptures, all about 42 inches long, with varying widths. 3D printing is its own form of coil-pot building, where plastic melts in very fine layers over and over again to generate an object. They are tied to the ceramic discipline, but I wanted to scale them up and make them relate more to the body, as a continuation of the art historical lineage of sculpture. I staged a tableau of figures lying around with food on their bellies and snacks nearby. The vision was of a bunch of people lounging in a field. As I was generating the work, I started thinking about savagery and ideas that viewers would ascribe to “Indigenous art,” ancient ceramics, and what kind of environments those artworks come from. I wanted this push and pull of creating an exhibition where there are bodies on the ground, and then having a viewer navigate the space and realize that it is a joyous scene, or a scene of leisure.

I think about my work in terms of some alternate reality or third plane of existence where everything is shifting in value and prominence, and comingling. Even in designing these works, sculpting with a computer digitally, all my work literally originates in a void—with no walls, just in space with each other. These dynamics problematize the idea of the linearity of history, which relates back to this meandering line in the sense of filling in the gaps and understanding contradiction.



André Magaña, *Peloelotero*, 2019, thermoplastic, epoxy resin, and oil paint, 15 by 31 by 47 inches. COURTESY PRAIRIE, CHICAGO

Dayal It's easy to think in a linear way about lineage. I was reflecting on an interview with filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha in which she pushes back on the expectation that she will engage only with her own lineage. Many artists do that, and it can be a process of self-discovery, but what “authentically” speaking to your own lineage means can be fraught and complicated, especially when speaking from the position of hybridity or a diaspora. Keli, your “Anthems” project seems to deal with these questions.



Front and back of a piece from Keli Safia Maksud's series "Anthems," 2020, embroidery on paper, 9 by 12 inches.

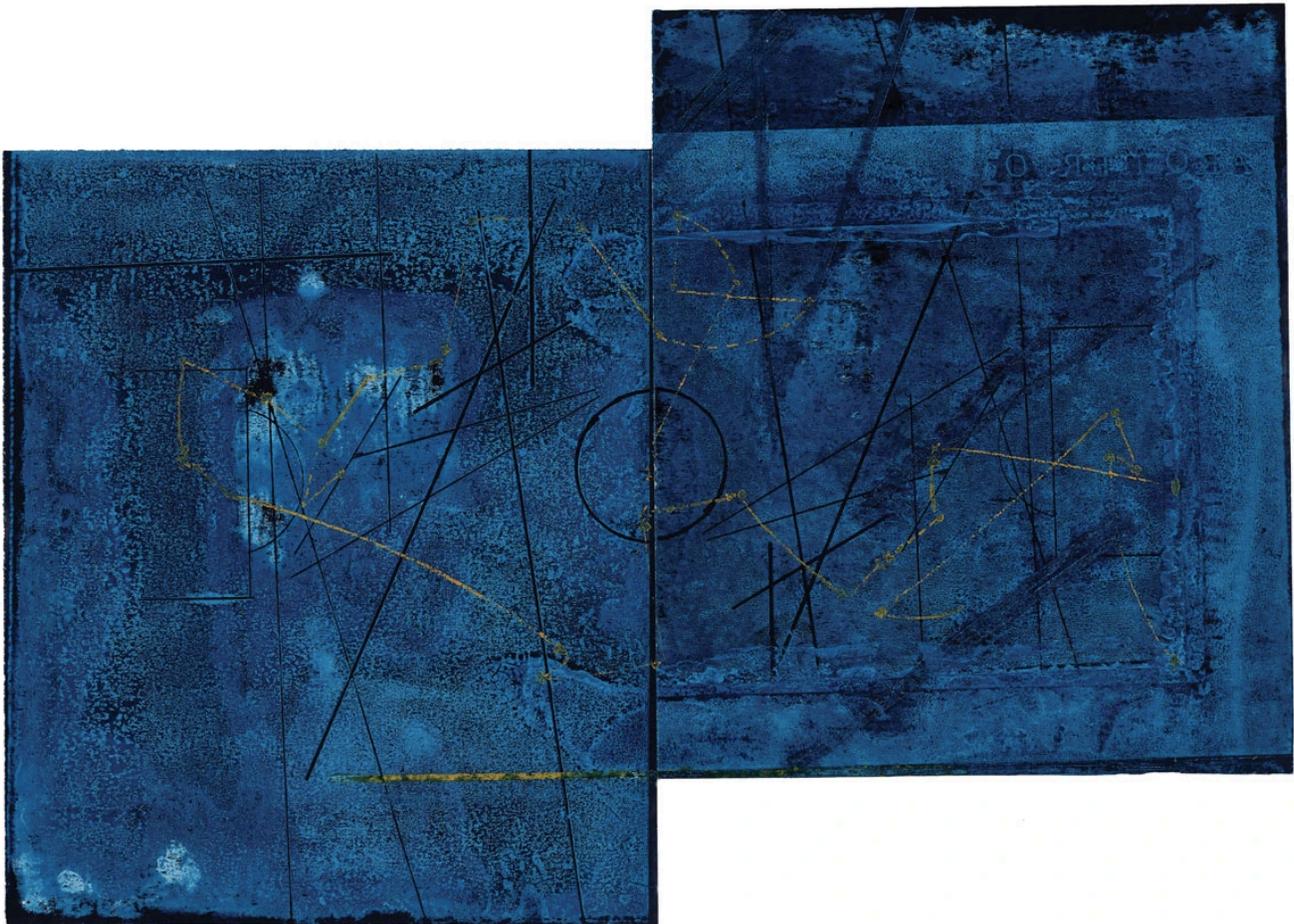
Maksud "Anthems" [2020] is part of a bigger project I've been working on for the past three years. What you see [on the front] is musical notation taken from various African national anthems, embroidered into paper. These anthems were written just as most African countries were gaining independence after European colonial rule. Many of these nations were thinking about self-determination and what it means to be a newly independent state, while also continuing to use this European language of the musical notation system and of the lyrics themselves, which are in English, Portuguese, French, Spanish. These anthems were written to represent borders that were put into place as a result of this scramble for Africa. I was interested in questions of contradiction, problematizing ideas of authenticity. So, with these pieces, I use the back sides [of the embroidery] as actual graphic notation; I work with musicians to try to create these new counter-anthems or remixed anthems. I am interested in the very strict nature of the "tight," Western music on the front, versus the haphazard, rhizomatic effect on the back.

This research started with trying to locate women in African histories. I learned about a lot of women who were very active in independence struggles across the continent, and how swiftly they were disappeared once we gained independence. At some point, I thought these projects were focused on women, but there are a lot of other types of disappearance, and failure as well. We begin with the failure of the colonial state, the failure of these new "nations," and this idea that failure has become who we are in some ways. Failure has such negative connotations, but I'm questioning its negativity. Whose idea of failure is it? If it's something inherited that we want to mimic, there's no doubt it is bound to fail. And that is completely OK.

Dayal The back side of the anthem is in some sense the failure of the anthem, but you are also using that as a score. So the failure is also generative.

Maksud I have a hard time with what I call the sound works that I make, because I'm very aware that whatever is happening in the back is very tethered to the front. There is no back without the front. Any new thing I create out of this is also a failure. I am trying to welcome this thread of failure.

Quevedo Loss can be generative. A lot of my work early on was just about grieving after my dad passed away. But thinking about how this work can be generative, I was curious to see the back of the drawings, Keli, and their rhizomatic nature, this attempt to find origin. It might even be a sense of place-making.



Ronny Quevedo, *every measure of zero (the keeper of time)*, 2018, wax on dress maker wax paper, 14 by 19 ¾ inches. COURTESY ALEXANDER GRAY ASSOCIATES, NEW YORK/©2022 RONNY QUEVEDO

Dayal Emphasizing lineage might also be a way to combat disappearance, to insist on threading something from the past into the present. Ronny, your series “*los desaparecidos*” [2017–] relates here.

Quevedo The title “*los desaparecidos*,” which translates to “The Disappeared,” is very much a connection to the disappeared in Argentina, and other people who have been disappeared who don't fall into that framework. I was thinking about pre-Columbian culture and what existed

prior to conquest, especially quipus, a knotted thread system that was used throughout the Andes to keep account of finances, create a census, or convey a narrative. In *the arbiter of time* [2018], wax is melted onto dress pattern paper, the kind you would buy at a fabric store to create a garment, and then that pattern paper is adhered onto muslin. Material for me is crucial; I only use patternmaking material from my mom's profession as a seamstress. The wax is put together in this radial design of forty-five lines, which indicate the forty-five minutes of a soccer game. Here I am paying homage to my dad, who was both a professional soccer player and an amateur referee when we came to the States. He was in the position of a judge, an arbiter of when things start and end, a delineator. He was given the responsibility to figure out what is fair and what is foul. I'm thinking about archetypes of the past [such as the quipus], where we don't know what information was being collected. So, I'm making connections between a recent past and that very wide-ranging past.

To go back to the point of authenticity, if it's just between me and my community, there is no question about authenticity because there is no sense of exploitation or wanting to perform. Stepping out of the community to show it to a different community is when authenticity comes into play. Sometimes with artists of color, people expect work, and whatever iconography is incorporated, to be decoded. So, abstraction makes sense as a space in which to operate, because abstraction can be symbolic without being iconographic. I think about the textiles from the pre-Columbian Andes: there is so much symbolism within the abstraction. But the context is so far removed that we are not able to make those connections as easily.

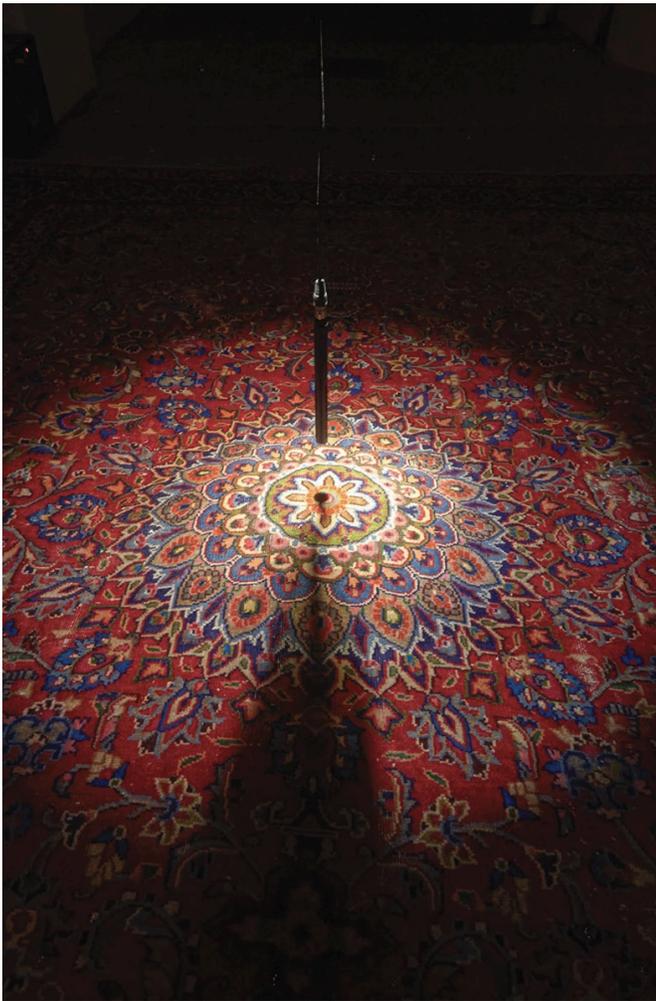
Dayal To what degree is it important that the lineage you're working in or with be legible

Magaña That is the question I'm sitting with right now in my practice. Initially, it was quite important to understand that I was working within the lineage of pre-Columbian ceramics, but I am more interested now in how precolonial society and contemporary society can interface. I'm starting to think about the absurdity of banalities of Aztec society prior to colonization playing out within contemporary post-digital, postindustrial society. Lineage is still quite important, but representation of anything in particular is less important.

Maksud I think a lot about repetition, and the ways in which the repetition of something also abstracts it. Oftentimes, a repetition is meant to be the exact same, but even an echo is not exactly the same thing. So, thinking about André's 3D printing, it seems very similar but it's not the same thing.

Quevedo This idea that tracing something actually makes it more opaque is interesting. What do you imagine to be the original or the template? Opacity has been a really interesting idea for me, especially reading [Édouard] Glissant and thinking about this notion of the Creole. Creolization is a much more accurate description of our contemporary condition, rather than any sense of essentialism. We are iterating or repeating or breaking down. I always found that much more invigorating than trying to find a proper source for something. Tracing is an act of transference: what gets lost and what gets created in the act of transferring something, even just generationally—with language, for example, or with customs?

Asgary I've been thinking about imprints. An imprint is a way of applying pressure. With tracing, we are tracing the *edges* of something, essentially. But how much are we losing in the trace and in those edges? There is also this potential or gap within every transfer.



Sholeh Asgary, *Qanat*, 2018, microphone, light, shadow, amplifier, transducer, mixer, pedal, and carpet, 9 ½ by 12 feet. PHOTO JORGE BACHMANN/COURTESY SHOLEH ASGARY

Quevedo Those gaps allow for transformation, and allow one to insert oneself. If I find a gap in anything, there is a space for me there. So, while you are still paying tribute through tracing, you are also finding yourself in the space available for you.

Asgary It becomes crucial. But is the trace mistaken as the thing itself? And what is the method of transference, from where, to who

Dayal The dictionary definition of *lineage* is descent from a common progenitor, or people who can trace descent from a common ancestor. What are the stakes of lineage for you, and can we arrive at a shifted definition

Magaña It seems that lineage is more a rhizome than it is a straight line. Or a wavy line. It is informed by various reference points.

Quevedo Initially, when I was thinking about lineage, I just didn't see my parents in any of the art histories that I came across. But I think lineage has become more of a renegotiation of what origin means. Glissant has helped me understand that origin is not a fixed place, in allowing the center and periphery to be constantly moving.

Maksud I really love this idea of lineage in the gaps. The idea of not being enclosed. It feels like lineage pulsates out. That is why sound is

so exciting for me; it pushes through things. The omnidirectional aspect of lineage is something I continuously come back to in my work.

Asgary Lineage is intergenerational, a time traveler. It is constantly expanding, and there are gaps constantly created within it.

Magaña I think a lot about collapsing time and parallel time. Any gap from any point in time that we didn't exist in, that we weren't sentient for, is vertical *and* horizontal. It is going in every direction. Think about the intestines—it is this size, but with so much surface area.

Maksud And I think we create these gaps. Especially with my parents' and my grandparents' generations, there are certain things about precolonial histories that they don't want to have as their identity anymore: *no, the timeline starts from here*. As much as I dig into my history or try to understand a group of people, I also understand that it might not be my mom's timeline. It becomes complicated.

Quevedo That reminds me of how trauma has enforced how memories and identities have developed, especially for my parents, or people who are first-generation, exiles, or refugees. Trauma has such a big impact on what is remembered and how it is remembered.



Photo from Keli Safia Maksud's series "Faces of Africa," 2018, 15 by 27 inches each. COURTESY KELI SAFIA MAKSUD

Dayal That circles back to what you were saying earlier, Ronny, about artists having the role of recognizing omissions. Omissions may help or hinder self-determination and identity formation.

Quevedo Yeah, this idea of parents leaving things out on purpose to safeguard the next generation goes back to this specific trauma. Sacrifice was always mentioned in my upbringing. Your voice is less hindered by mine or by what I have to deal with.

Asgary Breaking one lineage can mean starting another.