

# OBJECTS IN DIASPORA ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR

Collage & Artist's Book Exhibition

June 2026



# Objects in Diaspora Are Closer Than They Appear

"Heavy is the enchantment of the places you know you will never see again," (116) writes Sloane Crosley in her memoir, *Grief Is for People*. Heavier is the grief that comes with knowing when you eventually get to see those places again, you find it not the same.

Grief is one of many affects that tend to emerge, stick around, or manifest in other forms that do not necessarily match their emotions within the ongoing event we call migration. *Objects in Diaspora Are Closer Than They Appear* is inspired by the need I felt to give a material shape to these free floating affects that complicate the usual narratives of nostalgia, homesickness, and dreams of a better life elsewhere. Each piece is a reconstruction of a culturally/politically/emotionally significant object that presents itself in the form of a collage. As artists/students in this collection trace these objects back to different countries, histories, and memories of origin, they reflect on what the object in question meant to them prior to migration, and through the form of the collage they manipulate these images to bring forth their altered associations, perceptions, and emotions.

The second part of this collaborative project was further interested in the materiality of these artworks by turning them into different artists' books, exploring how the reflected affects and now-reconstructed images of objects take the form of a book where it is possible to physically engage with the layers and fragments of the collages, and the different agencies of readers.

While taking the abstract (the feeling) as its main focus, I was ultimately interested in tracing the affect on objects; both as its subject matter, and as matter itself. Working with the paper was an essential part of the process to ask in which ways the memory of an affectively charged object, assigned with certain feelings, disappointments, and excitements has changed and how it inhabits the mind of the person that has migrated to another country in this present moment.

I am extremely proud of each and every piece we produced together; but also feel deeply fortunate to have been able to share our stories as well as our feelings with each other as people who have dared to leave something behind in hopes of finding something better elsewhere. I am equally thankful to Ellen Barth and Alara Ergin for working on this project with me and supporting it from the very beginning to what it has become today. I have enjoyed every step of it.

And now, I hope you enjoy our stories, too.

Özge Kayan

## Contributors



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Mairi Ouroumidou  
Eylül Başkaya  
Sophia Haber  
Cewin Yasin  
Ellen Barth  
Asmin Karadağ  
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Roberta Di Nunzio  
Eva Agnello

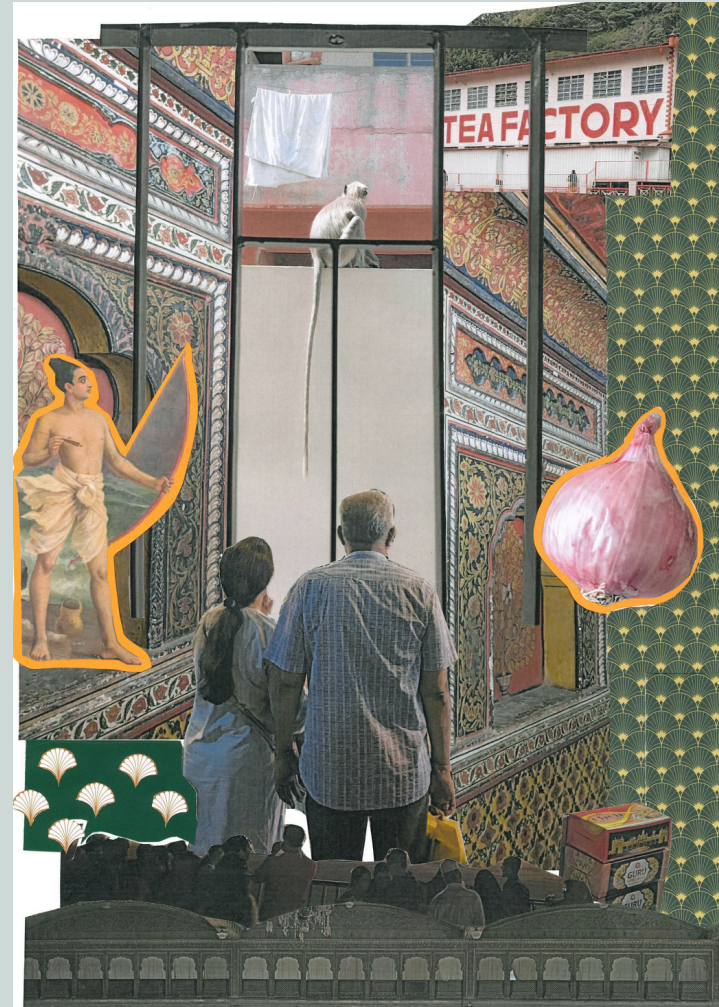
# Rushi Jetly

## Monkey's Choice

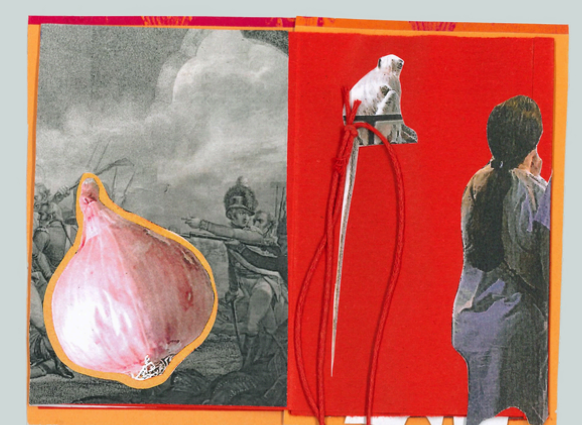
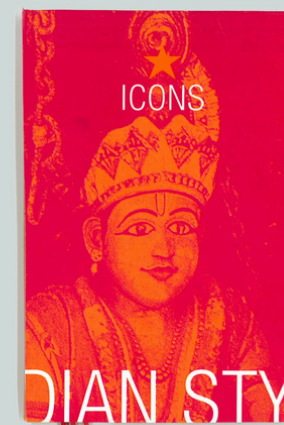
Once, a group of people go to Rama: a god-king, who always listens to people. They want all onions to either, lose a few layers until they are no longer onions, or to destroy them completely. Basically, no more onions! Rama stays silent. This group, taken aback by the silence, begin to use his angry image to start killing the onions.

A monkey, not a god, has been silent all this time while the onions are getting killed. One day, he reads a book about the onions. He decides to go to a place called university, where there are still some onions and other monkeys like him live. There are many tea factories and boxes of sweets in there. But they don't talk about the onions. Monkey tries to talk about it to understand what is happening. He is told by a tea factory that he is not allowed to talk about the onions in public.

One monkey seeing this, calls him over to a small room, where there were some onions and monkeys. They make lots of sense to our monkey. Monkey belongs to a man and a woman who love him deeply. They want a comfortable life for monkey, more comfortable than their own. Like tea factories at the university. But monkey wants to live in a world where onions are not being killed, because he knows that after the onions, it will be monkeys getting killed and at the end, it will be the man and the woman's turn. He knows that nobody's free till everyone is free. That day monkey makes a choice, to stand with the onions.



collage on paper, 41.5 x 30 cm



artist's book, 11.5 x 8 cm

# Mairi Ouroumidou

"Stuck in a paradoxical state of being, not quite here, not quite back. With my hands I can create a time machine to return back because going back physically will find me in empty spaces made of echoes.

No one warns you about the details, the sneaky agents of nostalgia hidden in familiar faces and phrases. Creating this little book gave me a sense of control over memory, I hold it and I cherish it in my own terms."



collage on paper, 29.5 x 21 cm



artist's book, 21 x 14.5 cm



# Eylül Başkaya

"This tiny book gathers objects that survived years inside my wallet: my grandmother's prayer believed to attract money, a metro ticket bought by a stranger in Milan after an unexpectedly long conversation about his breakup, my first German SIM card, and other traces of journeys in between. Gathering them all together, following no chronology other than that of my emotions, was a reminder of how easily I become attached to places, persons, things. Together, they form an accidental archive of belonging, revealing how a sense of home is built through the attachments we carry long after we leave."



collage on paper, 21 x 15 cm



artist's book, 8 x 5.5 cm

# Sophia Haber

"This is my grandmother, Marcella, the daughter of Russian Jewish immigrants who grew up in New York City. After becoming the first in her family to graduate from college and finishing a long career as a teacher and union leader in the Brooklyn public schools, she spent her retirement learning how to ski, traveling the world, and practicing fine arts. When I think of home, I see my grandma's face. This collage includes torn copies of her portrait, photographed letters from her journal, and tracings I created by rubbing crayon over the remnants of both."



collage on paper, 18 x 17 cm

# Cewin Yasin

"My grandfather lies on the left side of the image. Unlike my grandmother, he never came to Germany. After a lifetime of being denied language, identity, and cultural freedom, his belief was simple: if he was not allowed to decide how to live, he would at least decide where he would die.

With him, however, I experienced a form of belonging I have never felt again since his death: a feeling of "belonging without conditions."

When I was with him, I could exist without questioning, without justification, and without being reduced to identity, migration, or difference. We met each other at eye level.



collage on paper, 21 x 29.5 cm

In the picture, I am sitting next to him, leaning my head under his arm. Under his bare feet are his shoes. They symbolize everything we could leave behind in those moments together: the weight of the worlds we both carried separately - mine in Germany, his in Kurdistan.

The woman sitting on the couch is my grandmother. She is wearing traditional clothing, carries deq on her face, sipping on her tea while looking directly into the camera. At that moment, she had only recently arrived in Germany. She carried her entire world with her into a place that had no real space for it. She later died not only from old age, but also from the loneliness of not belonging.

Next to the sentence "Der Fremde, der sich erkundigen will" lies a chilli pepper which carries a double meaning. Curiosity can be part of being human, but it also can inflict pain, can be intrusive and exposing. In my culture, spicy food is connected to warmth, familiarity, and togetherness. Something deeply connected to home, yet at the same time something that burns and is sharp.

What connects all these experiences are the large bags of cucumbers placed in the center of the collage beside the words "Die Zwischenfälle." I found these bags abandoned at the side of the road. The cucumbers had no visible flaws, and I kept asking myself why someone would throw them away. For me, they became a metaphor for the way migrant lives are often treated: as disposable, invisible, or unwanted.

The entirety of the collage can be said to be playing with opposites. It uses soft imagery to speak about harsh realities. It reflects the tension between comfort and discomfort, visibility and invisibility. It reminds me, and I hope it reminds you, too, that even within pain, people search for moments of warmth, safety, and belonging - even if those moments are temporary or fragile."

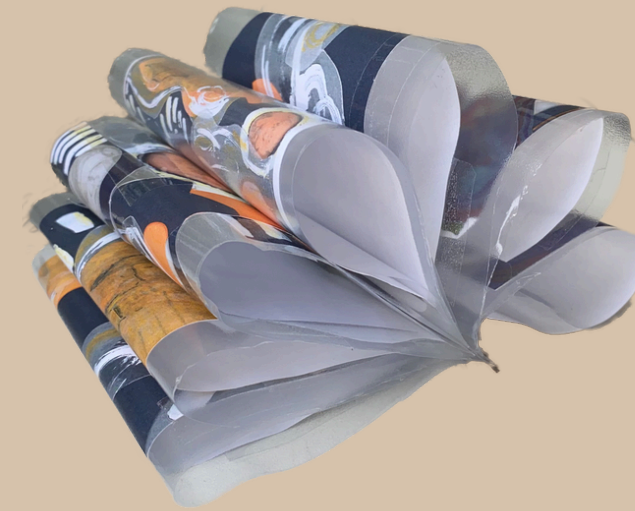
# Ellen Barth

"This collage is a depiction of a particular memory: 2006 in Xi'an, China and the sky is blanketed in dust from the Gobi Desert. For a few days, everything takes on an otherworldly yellow haze.

The two small artists' books included in the exhibition both repurpose everyday materials to remake the collage. The first is made from a clear document holder that has been cut and folded into soft, almost circular pages. As a result, the book never fully closes. Instead, the curved outer edges of the pages form a new image. The second book is constructed from a single sheet of transparent paper. Here, I wanted to make use of the material's transparency so that fragments of the original image peak through across multiple pages."



collage on paper, 24 x 17 cm



artist's book, 12 x 6.5 cm

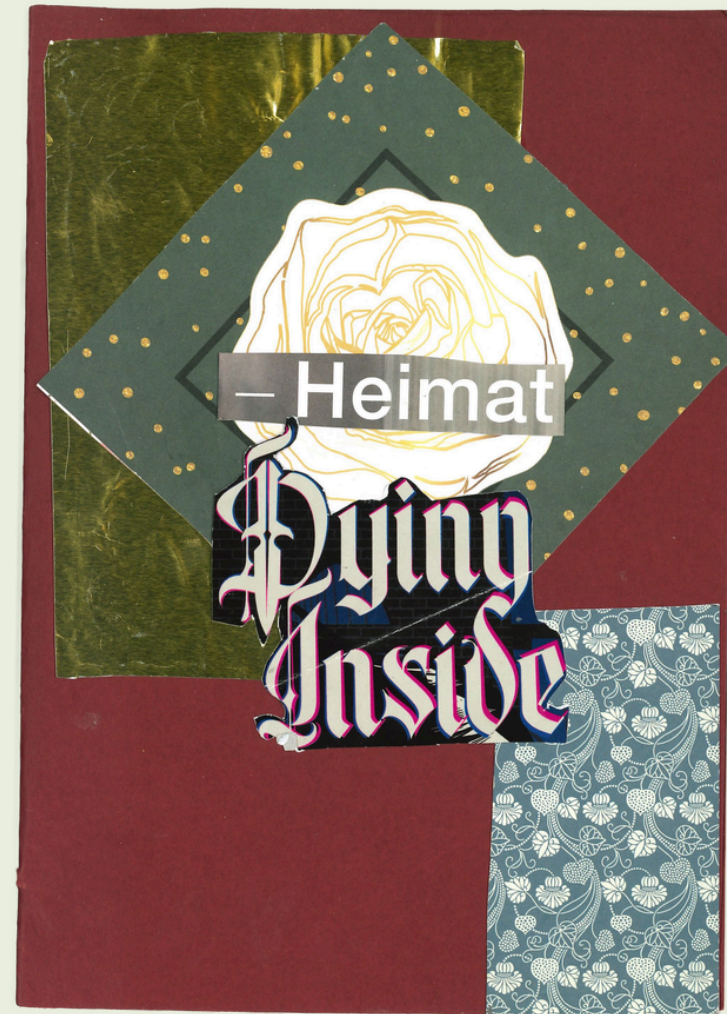


artist's book, 14.5 x 5.5 cm



# Asmin Karadağ

"My clearest memories from growing up are of my home, where this balcony was. My sister used to take photos from this balcony at various times. This view is just one of the things I'm mourning. These photos actually hold my most precious memories. Working with them has also allowed me to confront my emotions. It's not just the view I lost in the earthquake and will never see again; I also feel the profound impact of the aftermath of that earthquake. Especially when I recall how the state treated us. For instance, on the final page, how the president insulted the needy earthquake victims. Or his facial expression.



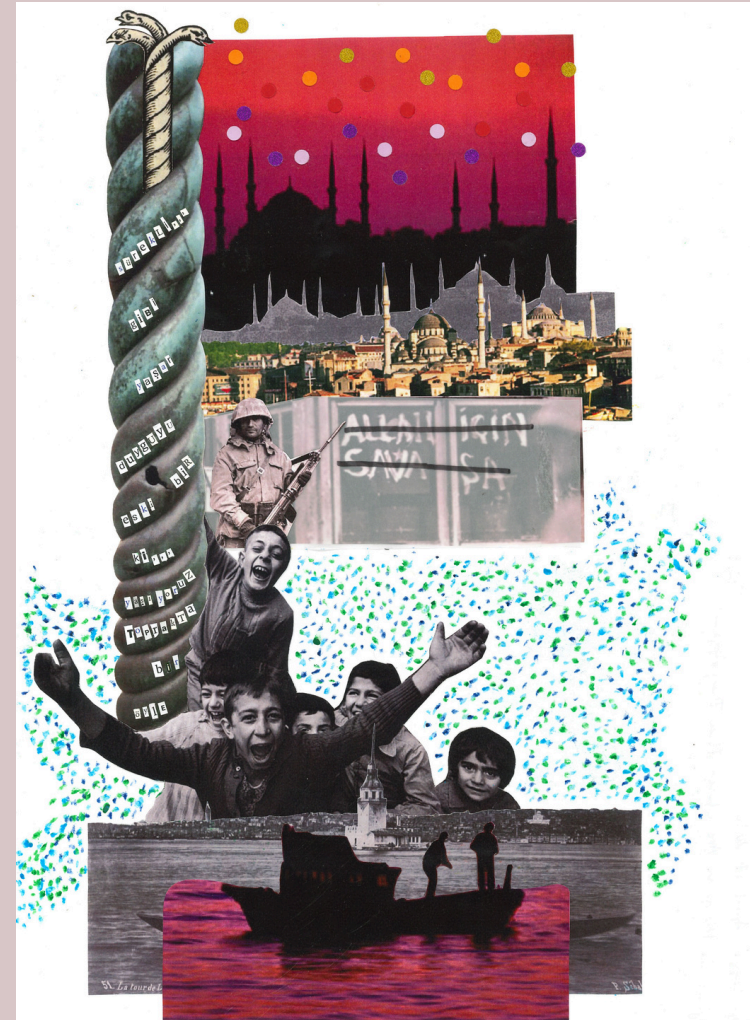
artist's book, 24 x 17 cm

I cannot forget those who issued a building amnesty in our country - a vast earthquake zone - when so many people do not die in earthquakes elsewhere in the world and live in safe buildings. That view is not merely a landscape from a house; it maybe illustrates how my perspective has changed with what it carries, a lost peace."



# Özge Kayan

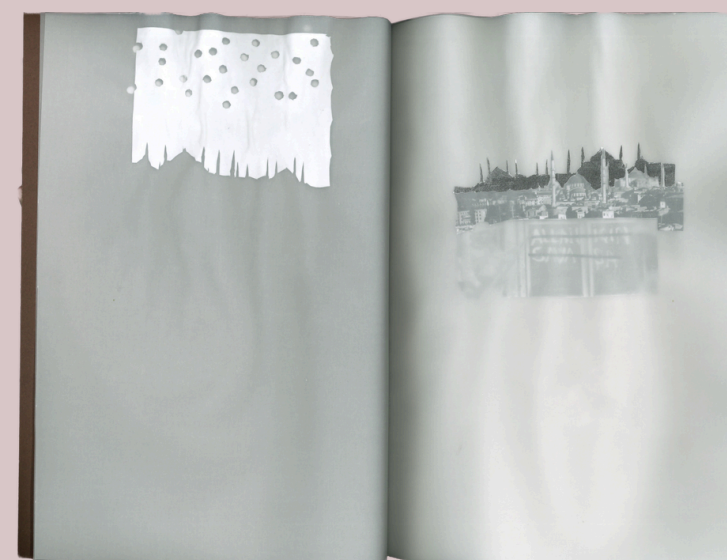
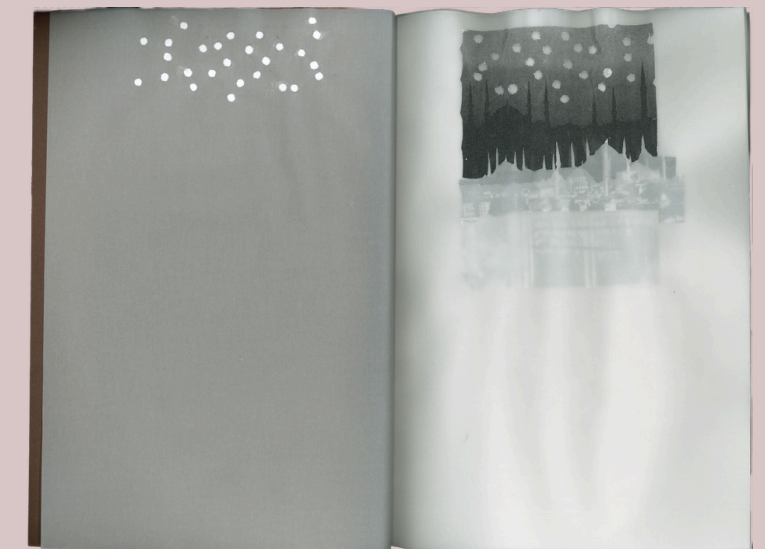
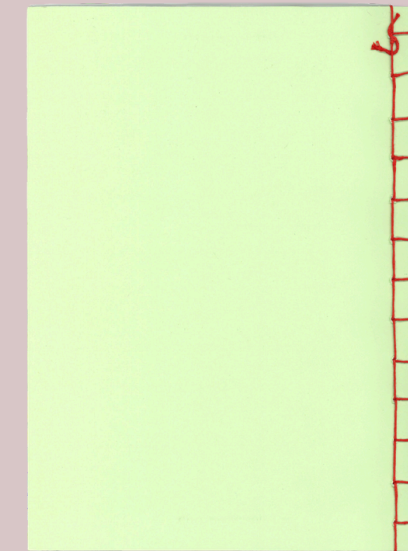
"The colum on the left side of the collage, called 'The Serpent Column,' is where it all started. The photographs of the soldier and the crossed-over writing in the middle of the collage are taken during the Maraş massacre of 1978, which is what Leylâ Erbil writes about in her novella *Three Headed Dragon*. She does so through the Serpent Column, weaving together the history of İstanbul and the history of modern day Turkey. The quote written over the column ("we live on a land where,,, it feels as if we are constantly reliving an old feeling,,,") is telling for the story moves in spirals, constantly revisiting some parts of the past, always adding new layers on top of the old ones.



collage on paper, 42 x 29.5 cm

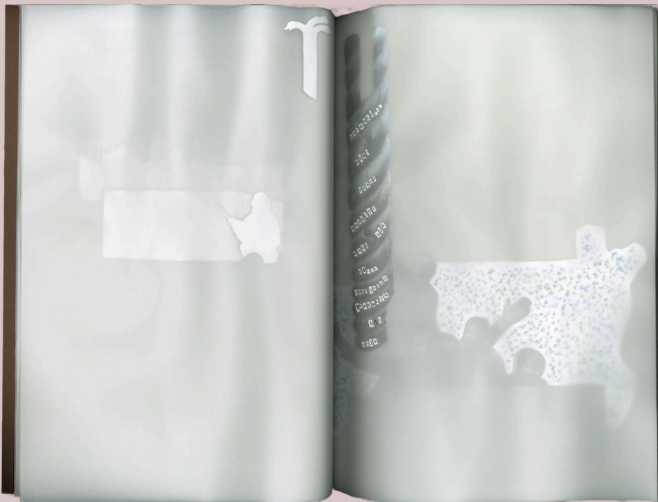
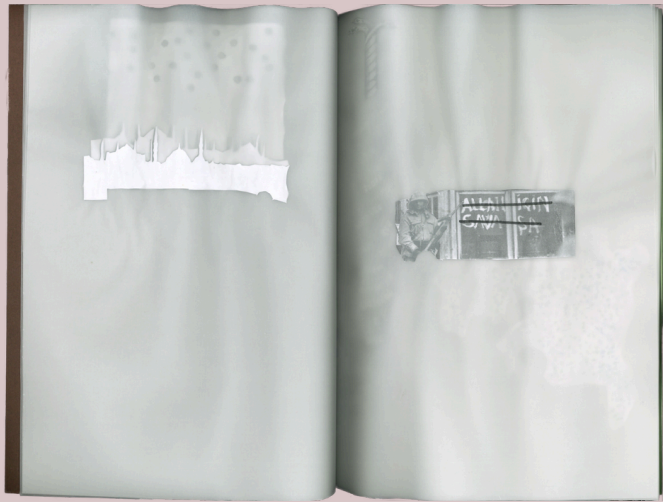
Whatever feelings of longing I have of home, they are always about İstanbul and the summer of 2007, which is when I first saw this column. I spent most of my childhood summers in my aunt's home in Çapa, as well as every spare time I had since turning 18, in this city. For me, the column and the historical area it stands erected today, represented only fond memories of family and a city that was filled with opportunities. After I moved to Germany, I found myself dreaming of returning there and living the life that I promised myself of having. But I have come to realize since then that the experience of leaving blankets over history with a heavy sense of nostalgia - and nostalgia always lies.

The soldier and the crossed-over writing in the middle of the collage is a way to remove that blanket. It is a way to remind myself that the country I have left behind has never been the same with what I had imagined. It is a way to come to terms with history and the future, and still choose to call a place home in spite of it."



artist's book, 29.5 x 21 cm

# Özge Kayan



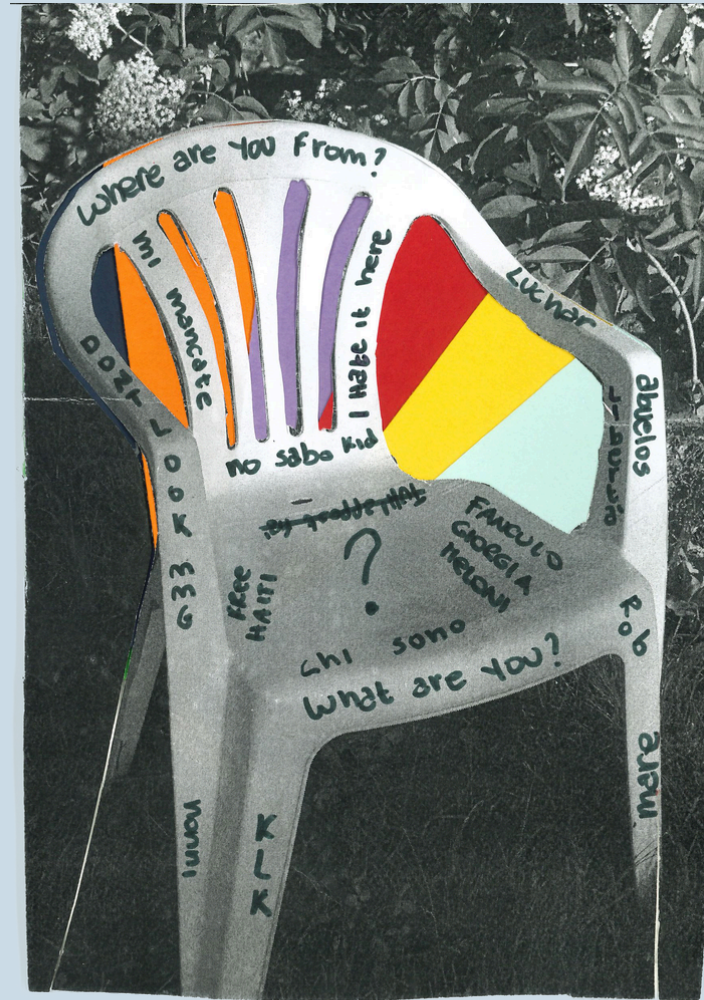
artist's book, 29.5 x 21 cm

# Roberta Di Nunzio

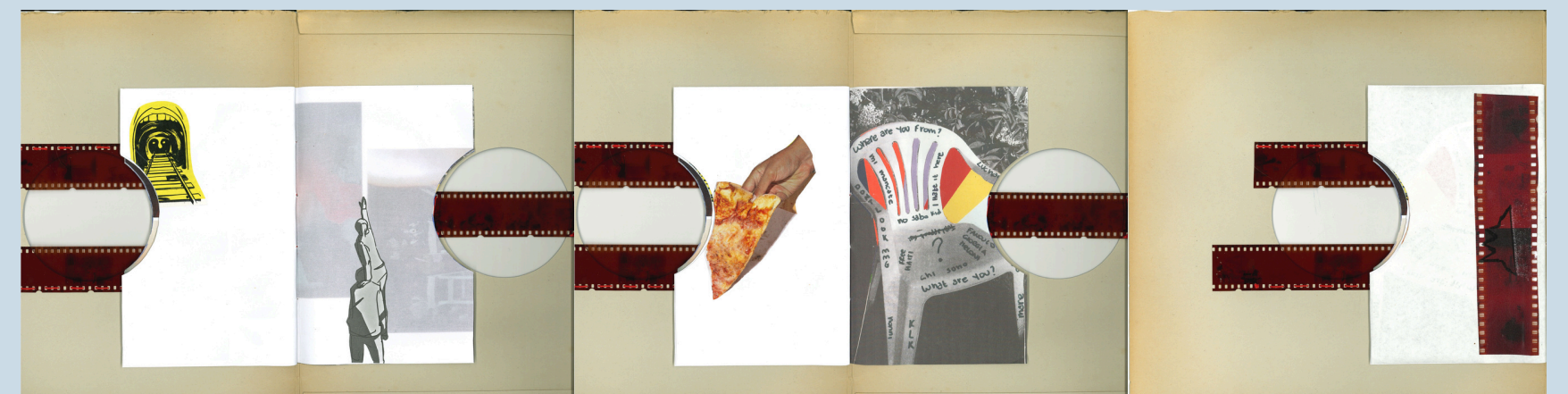
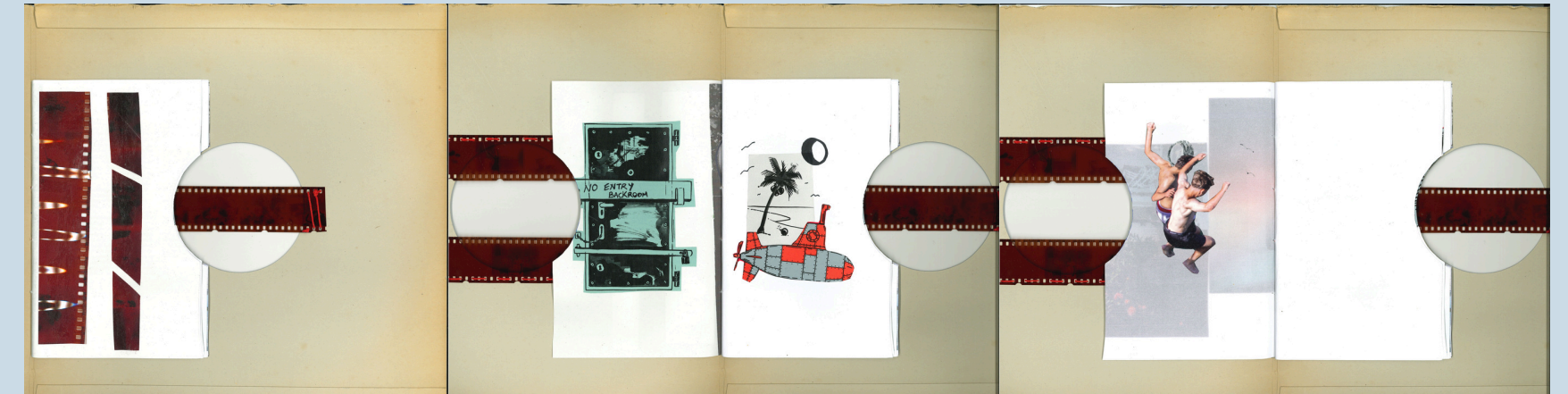
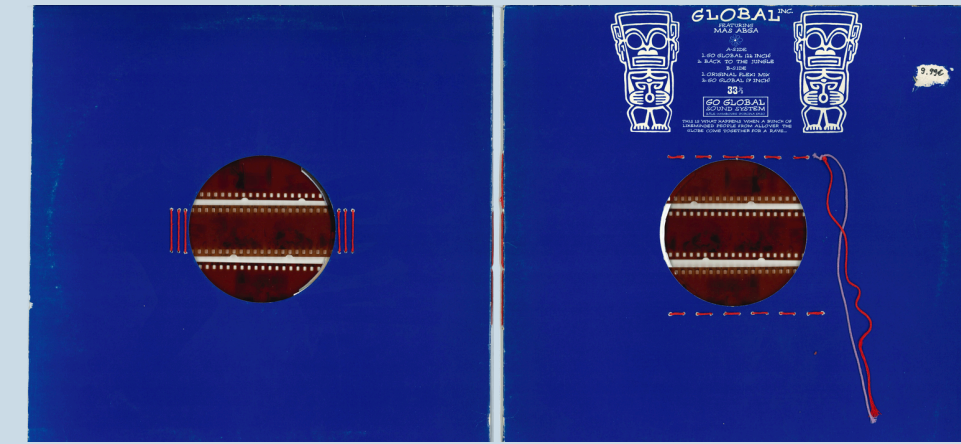
"Falsi Ricordi (False Memories) is the title I chose for this artist book, which explores my fragmented childhood memories between my two homes: Italy and the Dominican Republic. The project began with a collage of a white plastic chair, an object that reminds me of improvised family gatherings and moments I share across both cultures. On its surface, I wrote in a stream-of-consciousness style, mixing existential questions, personal reflections, spontaneous memories, and expressions of frustration.

As the collage evolved into a book, I reflected on how most of my childhood memories are not so objective as I thought. I kept mixed up events, locations, face and names, filtered through the colorful, naïve perspective of a child growing up between Vieste and San Pedro de Macorís. I have so much confusion and rarely know if what I remember entirely happened or are just random fragments that I picked together to make sense of what it felt at times a double life.

The vinyl record motif emerged spontaneously, but it reflects the central role music plays in my life. Music has always offered a space where my different cultural identities could coexist, merge, and transform into something enriching. The title on the cover humorously acknowledges this reality: I am, ultimately, a product of multiple cultures and the memories - real or not - that connect them."



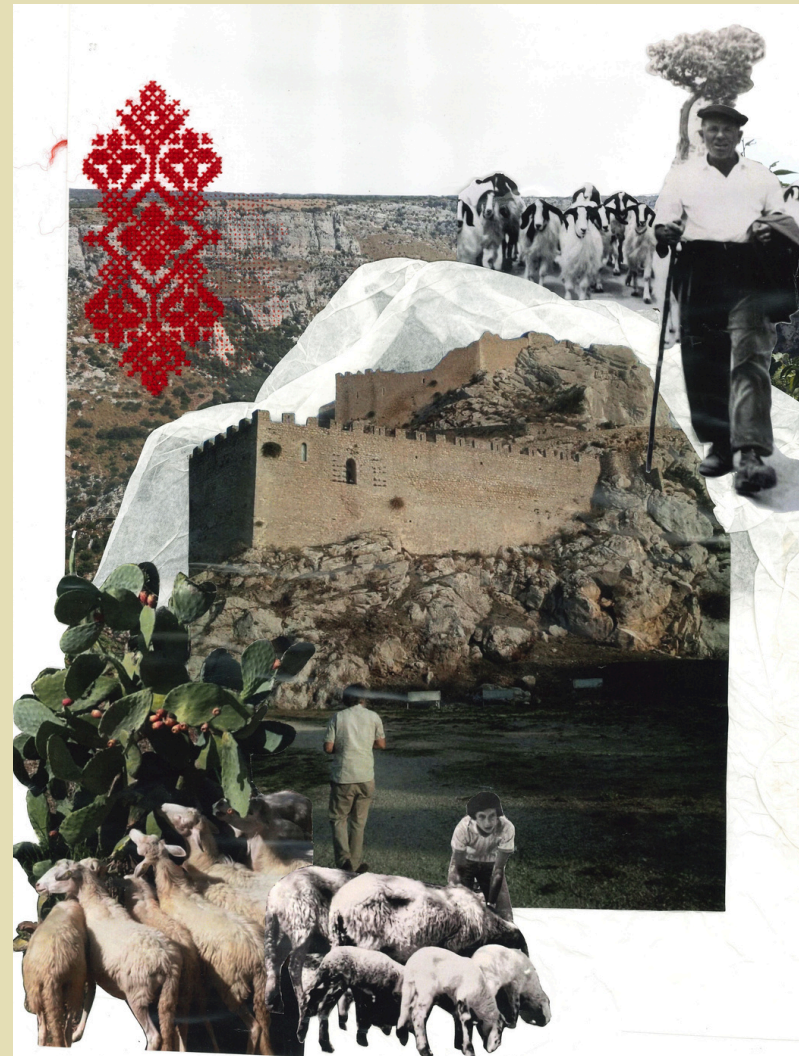
collage on paper, 20.5 x 14.5 cm



artist's book, 31 x 31 cm

# Eva Agnello

"When I first migrated, I thought it was all about breakups, but afterwards, I found out it had much more to do with reconciliation. Arriving in the unknown makes you question your identity, and the answer almost always lies at home. You realize you look, talk, eat, and behave a lot like home, and you would never realize it without going away. My grandfather and father represent these knots to me - being so rooted to Sicily, shepherding and shaping the land, knowing its secrets. I was the sheep that fled, and now I might want to return to its flock. The thing is: you don't know which reality you left, and which one is expecting you. The home you left is never the same one you return to.



collage on paper, 46.5 x 29.5 cm

This work is divided by generational layers: the first is my grandfather and my father's childhood. The second is about my dad and the perception of my own childhood. The third is what I'm currently sewing over all these layers. Each one of them is slightly opaque, and I guess they mean the blur within chapters of my own memory."



artist's book, 29.5 x 21 cm