

Positions through Triangulating

Silent Barks & Scented Paper: Rethinking Time's Passage

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“Paper is senseware; it serves, more than a material for writing and printing, as a perpetual medium of intelligence inspiring the human senses” (Hara et al., 2021, p. 155). Embracing Kenya Hara’s concept, I see paper as a remarkable tool for its sensory influence on our memories. Its ability to create lasting, tangible treasures is unmatched. These pieces invite us to read anytime and provide a comforting trust when held. We engage with paper through writing, tearing, and folding, keeping our memories alive. These physical qualities of the material led me to the question: “How can the sensory qualities of paper be used to evoke memories?”

My work investigates how the texture and scent of paper can trigger memories, inspired by my experience of losing my sense of smell due to COVID-19. I became fascinated by how paper, often seen as permanent, can preserve sensory traces and bring back forgotten memories.

This investigation led me to the exploration of scent: I developed scented paper infused with natural aromas from herbs, plants and fruits. The aim was to establish a tangible link to the past and evoke memories through the senses.

Additionally, I printed photographs from travels to various places around the world on this handmade materials, hoping to reconnect the memory of the place through the use of specific scents. For example, during my trip to Indonesia, I noticed many dishes were prepared with lemongrass, this motivated me to print photos from that visit on paper infused with lemongrass. I crushed lemon peels to create a paper that carries citrus scent inspired by a trip to Mallorca.

Consequently, the photos from my time in Mallorca are printed on this lemon-scented paper. My purpose was to test how memories could adhere to the olfactory sense.





As I was looking for relatable projects I found, HaMai's work, called *A Piece of Bark* (HaMai, 2024); the artist takes an interesting approach to recollection, using a printed photo of bark to explore the impermanence of memory. Over six years, he documented how the photo, pinned to the same spot on a tree, changed as the actual bark deteriorated. He embraced the idea that memory is always temporary and that time will ultimately reshape what we try to capture it.



While our projects both engage with memory and materiality, HaMai embraces change and decay as part of memory's nature and discovered that the essence of photographic memory will eventually fade away. This project motivated my initial set of experimentations, when I tried to record memories with paper. I attempted to evoke and hold memory by engaging more directly with sensory elements. Our differing approaches raise questions about time's role in memory, and HaMai's work has encouraged me to recognize time as an essential component of memory itself.

In my project, paper represents a stable, tangible medium, contrasting with today's digital ephemera. The sensory qualities of paper—its weight, surface texture, and, particularly, its scent—provide a physical connection that feels more

permanent than a digital image. In creating my scented papers, I drew inspiration from paper's unique qualities as a sensory object that evokes nostalgia. In contrast, HaMai uses fragile photographic paper to represent tree bark. By photographing the bark and overlaying the image onto the tree, he embarks on a six-year journey "replacing" the real bark with an image, observing the decay of both. His work emphasizes the susceptibility of photographic paper to environmental changes and the gradual erosion of what it represents.

Time is an unavoidable factor that influences both material and memory in our projects. In my work, the scent embedded in the paper will inevitably fade, reflecting the transient nature of memory. While I try to prolong this experience, HaMai embraces change, documenting the decay of photographs as they rot and fade. His perspective encourages viewers to confront the vulnerability of memory, recognizing that just as photographs deteriorate, so do our perceptions of the past. This acceptance challenges my desire to preserve memories, prompting me to question the possibility of true permanence.

The core tension between our approaches lies in how we respond to change. My work actively resists the idea of forgetting by embedding memory in sensory materials, essentially creating a way to pause time through smell, touch, and sight. In contrast, HaMai's work embraces change, inviting viewers to witness the evolution of both materials and memories. While HaMai's project acknowledges decay and finds beauty in the inevitability of transformation, my project fosters a memory that lingers. His approach is largely observational, documenting how things change without direct intervention; he captures the gradual alteration of the bark photograph without interacting with it beyond recording the image. In contrast, my project encourages a more intimate interaction with paper's scent, texture, and sight, inviting people to actively participate in memory-making through sensory experience. This active engagement allows memory to feel "alive," albeit temporarily, making the sensory journey immersive and immediate.

Reflecting on HaMai's project has imparted significant insights for my own work. His acceptance of change has encouraged me to consider how my materials may evolve over time and how this evolution could enhance the experience of memory. In my future exploration, rather than focusing solely on the preservation of memories, I intend to explore how sensory materials naturally transform, thereby allowing the passage of time to become an integral element of my artwork. HaMai's work underscores the importance of time within this framework. By documenting the transformations of scents and textures in my project, I aim to capture a layered and evolving representation of memory that acknowledges impermanence rather than resisting it.

The exploration of HaMai's work has enriched my understanding of memory and materiality. I have long valued sensory experiences as catalysts for memory recall; however, I am becoming increasingly aware of the potential and limitations inherent in preservation. Similarly to HaMai, I have come to recognize that our objective may not be to retain memories indefinitely, but rather to celebrate their natural evolution. I look forward to incorporating a sense of impermanence into my creations, as I believe that the dynamic transformations of materials are essential to the narrative of memory. My journey now involves not only the preservation of memories but also an appreciation for their fragility, and I find great beauty in this transformation. This path is profoundly inspiring, and I am keen to explore it further.

References

Hara, K., Hohle, M.K. and Yukiko, N. (2021) *Designing design*. Zurich, Switzerland: Lars Müller Publishers.

Mai, H. (2024) *A Piece of Bark, I replaced the bark with a photograph and spent six years documenting it, Little Red Book*. Available at: <http://xhslink.com/a/UA4FEgrgYgxY> (Accessed: 2024).