
remy faint
a
site
of
unfolding



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a site of unfolding

UNSW Galleries



Burner 2026



Shadow III (detail) 2026

the speculative leap

mikala tai

Artists often engage with history in a manner that irks historians. Rather than pursuing new scholarship or adhering to the conventions of academic practice, they approach the past through speculation, subjectivity, and the deeply personal. They bring their own methodologies to the past, relinquishing the need for definitive conclusions in favour of the complexity of ambiguity. When artists encounter historical moments, myths, or archives, personal experience frequently shapes the engagement. Emotions, inherited fictions, embellishments, and aberrations may intersect with the historical record, creating space for audiences to join the artist in a speculative leap between past and present. It is often within these gaps and uncertainties, rather than established facts, that artists animate historical moments for contemporary audiences.

In 'A Site of Unfolding', artist Remy Faint uses his practice as a means of exploring his family history. While the familial archive remains a rich and frequently explored point of departure for artists, for Faint it is not the archive itself that forms the focus of the work. Rather, he is interested in the obstructions that prevent him from fully connecting with the experiences of his Guangzhou-born grandparents and their lives as settlers in 1870s Launceston, Tasmania. Through research, he has assembled the factual contours of their lives, including arrival dates, occupations, addresses, and other archival traces. This is the kind of information that drives amateur genealogists and sustains millions of Ancestry.com accounts. Yet such records reveal little about who these people were beyond the

facts of their existence. It is this gap in the historical record, and the impossibility of fully recovering lived experience, that Faint interrogates through his work. In doing so, he seeks not only to better understand his ancestors, but also to locate himself within a continuum that extends across generations, tracing the connections between their lives and his own.

Stepping into Faint's exhibition is to enter a space of experimentation where research and speculation collide. While 'A Site of Unfolding' is anchored by extensive research, viewers first encounter the work through assemblage, abstraction, and material investigation. Folds of fabric drape over sculptural metal armatures, forms appear as ghostly apparitions, and shadows move through and around the artworks, creating subtle tricks of light and perception. Through both the physical construction and placement of works, the audience is rarely able to look at one artwork without looking through another. These layered assemblages and fragmented painterly constructions echo the obstructions and absences that define the archive itself. In 'A Site of Unfolding', the viewer's search for solidity, certainty, and narrative is continually deferred and ultimately futile.

It is through material investigation and the process of abstraction that Faint gives form to the uncertainties of the archive. In resisting straightforward representation, the works acknowledge that ancestral histories are rarely recovered intact. Since art school, silk has been central to Faint's exploration of his ancestral connections. Each silk work exists as part of an ongoing continuum, emerging from those that precede it and unfolding into those that follow. This iterative approach resonates with the practice of his great-grandmother Mei Ying (Mary) Chung Gon, who made silk shoes more than a century earlier. Although separated by time, geography, and the gaps of the historical record, Faint uses silk as both a material and a connective thread. In doing so, he seeks not only to forge a connection across generations, but also to continue that familial and cultural lineage through his own contemporary work.

While Mei Ying (Mary) Chung Gon created lianlu or lotus shoes, silk shoes for bound feet, Faint's adoption of silk is thoroughly contemporary. He has developed a distinctive form of painting in which silk is stretched taut across wooden frames that incorporate architectural interventions and, more recently, abstracted forms. The silk functions almost as a translucent membrane, revealing the underlying structures while simultaneously softening and obscuring them. Upon this surface, Faint paints figures and forms that emerge without clear context, often rendered in warm reds, oranges, and a sharp, defining white.

Layered over the silk are additional materials. Earlier works incorporate rudimentary patchwork strips assembled from test paintings that intersect the painted surface. More recent iterations introduce a further painted canvas attached to the upper edge of the frame, falling in uneven lengths across the work. With each development, the silk becomes increasingly obscured, yet it remains fundamental to the work's construction. As both material and metaphor, it persists beneath the accumulated layers, echoing the partial visibility of the histories that underpin the exhibition.

Extending this use of abstraction as a metaphor for archival obstruction, Faint creates large-scale immersive assemblages. In 'A Site of Unfolding', the installation in the first gallery space sees lengths of painted silk collapse in on themselves and drape across a series of large metal armatures. While paintings remain fixed to the walls and new works are suspended from the ceiling and on plinths, the silk forms at the centre of the space appear almost deflated. As gravity gathers the material into dense folds, the painted surfaces become partially concealed, frustrating any attempt at a complete view. The installation transforms the physical properties of the material into a metaphor for the fragmented and obscured nature of historical knowledge.



Banner I and *Banner II* 2026

Echoing the silk installations is a new series of ceramics. Like the silks, these forms appear suspended in transition. At first glance they seem to be collapsing, their almost impossible heft improbably surviving the firing while remaining poised in a state of perpetual decline. Yet on closer inspection they appear to be taking shape instead, defying gravity as if caught in the act of becoming. Hovering between collapse and construction, the sculptures refuse to settle into a single state, embodying both fragility and resilience at once.

This exploration of the relationship between evolution and collapse has been a recurring concern within Faint's practice. In 2022, he exhibited two silk works in 'Hatched', the annual exhibition of exemplary tertiary graduates at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts. Produced during the final year of his Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) at UNSW Art & Design, these works featured a freestanding rectangular black metal structure across which a silk painting was stretched, alongside a single pole form draped in silk. The tension between stretched and suspended material established a formal language that has continued to evolve in subsequent works.

The tension of inversion remains critical to Faint's practice, extending beyond individual works to shape the exhibition itself. Across two interconnected spaces, Faint realises his most ambitious investigation of inversion as a conceptual and spatial device. His vibrant colour palette and often misty forms on silk have lent a sense of lightness to his work, a quality that is sustained in the first gallery space. However, the second spatial offering of the exhibition shifts the tone considerably. In a darkened space, Faint obscures the viewer's immediate ability to delineate works. But, as the eyes adjust, a new, more confronting assemblage reveals itself.

As a series of charred wooden forms emerges from the darkness, the gallery is transformed into a site of ruin. Hovering just above the ground, the scorched structures evoke the architectural remains of a ferocious fire. They resemble the remnants of domestic room dividers, hinged folding screens commonly found in Chinese homes. Known as pingfeng, or 'wind shields', these wooden screens traditionally feature finely carved fretwork depicting tessellated patterns, birds, flowers, and mythological scenes, or intricate lacquer paintings illustrating historical events and legends. During the Tang dynasty, artists began mounting silk onto the screens, transforming them into movable works of art within the home.

In Faint's work, these decorative details have been burnished away. Traces of patterns, shapes, and forms remain, but they are reduced to partial suggestions. If silk once covered the screens, it has long since disappeared. Formally, the works can be read as companion pieces to the frames of his paintings, borrowing similarly intricate fretwork and bracing while presenting it in fragmented and inverted form.

While the first space houses works that encapsulate the sense of expectant curiosity that accompanies research into ancestral lineage, the second captures the aftermath of that search. Here, discovery gives way to fracture and loss. The charred screens speak to the fragility of cultural memory and the incomplete nature of inheritance, while the extent of their destruction conveys the finality of that loss. The slight but persistent scent of burning clings to the works, extending them beyond the visual and reinforcing the irrevocability of what has been consumed.

To encounter 'A Site of Unfolding' is to navigate an assemblage of fragments, intuitions, and partial truths, where imagination becomes not a departure from research but an essential means of engaging with what the archive cannot disclose. Rather than privileging written documents and official records, Faint foregrounds one of the few surviving material traces of his great-grandmother's life, her lianlu, embedding it within a dense assemblage that gives physical form to his attempt to reach across time.



Green urn 2026



Shadow I (detail) 2026

List of Works

Gallery 1

Green urn 2026
stoneware, glaze
36 x 50 x 40 cm

Burner 2026
stoneware, glaze, oxide
48 x 43 x 25 cm

Crown 2026
stoneware, glaze
46 x 43 x 25 cm

Spectre I 2026
steel, silk, ceramic
197 x 154 x 70 cm

Spectre II 2026
steel, silk, ceramic
200 x 140 x 75 cm

Sky 2026
silk, wood, pigment
350 x 160 x 8 cm

Banner I 2026
acrylic and ink on canvas, silk, paper
114 x 160 cm

Banner II 2026
acrylic and ink on canvas, silk, paper
114 x 160 cm

Untitled 2026
acrylic on canvas, silk, hessian, wood
27 x 23 cm

[Mei Ying's] Lotus shoes
late 19th—early 20th century
silk, thread, wood
2 parts: 14 x 5 x 9 cm each

Gifted to Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery by Ann Chung Gon, 1994

Gallery 2

What Remains of a Form 2026
wood, fire
dimensions variable

Foyer

Heirloom I n.d.
silk, cotton, thread
138 x 120 cm

Heirloom II n.d.
silk, cotton, thread
105.5 x 140.5 cm

Heirloom III n.d.
silk, cotton, thread
120 x 128.5 cm

Collection of the artist's family

All works courtesy of the artist and CASSANDRA BIRD, Sydney and Paris, unless otherwise noted

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Contributors
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Editing: José Da Silva and Catherine Woolley
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We recognise the Bidjigal and Gadigal peoples as the Traditional Custodians of this site and acknowledge them as the first artists to inhabit this Land.

We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and extend this respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from all nations of Australia.

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