During my month-long residency in Koh Samui, Thailand, I was deeply inspired by the unique perspectives and ways of seeing rooted in local traditions. These insights naturally led me to draw connections between these traditional views and modern visual technologies. The works that follow are a direct reflection of these thoughts and explorations.

A Bead #1
A Bead #2
4k Single-channel video loop
0'31"
2024

I have often wondered if the endless loops of short videos and GIFs we see everywhere on social media are, in essence, like a string of beads. Each bead is similar to the next, arranged in a structure that could theoretically extend forever.

In Buddhist thought, the bead chain is a powerful metaphor for the continuity of consciousness: 'There is no thread passing through the

beads of the necklace of rebirths.'[1] Each moment of awareness arises like an individual bead, yet there is no permanent self that binds or connects these fleeting experiences.

With this idea in mind, I have sought to create a bead chain without a physical thread – one held together by the logic of perception. Much like the principles of panoramic imagery, the scope of our vision forms a sphere, resembling a single bead. It is through the fragile and fleeting nature of our bodies and eyes that we thread each moment into a continuous chain of life.

This 31-second video is designed to loop endlessly, much like the cycles of existence, making it perfectly suited for the infinite replay of social media.

> *The video, titled **A Bead**, runs for 31 seconds. The reflected imagery on each bead's surface will be customised based on the specific exhibition environment.*
>
> *Online preview version:*
> *https://www.instagram.com/p/DDKWAevSSE0/*

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[1] FrançoisJean, and Matthieu Ricard. *The Monk and the Philosopher: A Father and Son Discuss the Meaning of Life*. Translated by John Canti, Editorial: New York, Schocken Books, 1998, p. 30

CARE
Hand bound book
20×24cm, 42 pages
2024

I walked along the coastline, visiting the small 'homes' outside each Thai family's house individually. In Thailand, spirit houses are a common sight. These miniature homes, elevated from the ground, shelter the small statues of guardian spirits alongside their servants and pets. Through the tiny doors and windows, these delicate deities can be glimpsed sitting in the shadows while the exterior is

bathed in the excessive brightness of the tropical sunlight. To truly see them, one must approach the little houses and let their eyes adjust to the contrast in light.

When peering at these statues through the windows, one finds them facing outward, seemingly gazing at us. The world outside their miniature houses might appear to them as an overexposed tropical film. The Thai belief in spirits inhabiting the land and nature takes form through these powerful, transcendent forces *watching* human daily life.

This gaze from above reminds me of the surveillance cameras scattered throughout modern cities. Similarly, they observe us from a superior vantage point, ostensibly caring for us. This technological observation practice reflects a contemporary belief, also rooted in watchful vigilance. Spirit houses, in a way, are a personified version of such surveillance. However, constructing spirit houses is typically a spontaneous act performed by residents, while installing surveillance cameras is often externally imposed. These two practices reflect distinct belief systems and their respective agents of faith.

During my residency, I visited over 20 spirit houses near my site. I bowed to them with joined hands, seeking forgiveness for my intrusion as a guest and the offence I was about to commit. Then, I placed a 360-degree camera inside each of their little homes. Panoramic imaging technology, rooted in a Western worldview, inherently emphasises the centrality of the observer. In creating and viewing a spherical panorama, the photographer and the viewer become the centre of the world, the focal point around which all things revolve. The offence I refer to lies in this worldview embedded with technology – introducing a human-centred observing tool into a space regarded as above humanity, a space designed to observe humans. The deities watch over people, while the camera represents an invasive act of *watching back*.

It is worth noting that 360-degree cameras are now widely used in creating virtual tours for online real estate platforms. Homeowners utilise such tools to allow prospective renters or buyers to view their living spaces comprehensively online. This is part of the reason I chose to use this technology in my project. Despite the Thai people's highly tangible expressions of faith – constructing intricate homes for spirits, offering them servants and flowers – no one has ever truly viewed these sacred living spaces in the same way they would examine a human home. Artists in residence often engage with locals and participate in their daily lives; this time, I chose to visit the homes of these miniature spirits. Using a camera, I sought

to further concretise this already tangible belief system and bring to light the lives of these deities in their shadowed interiors.

This method is inevitably accompanied by a sense of transgression. I think of the early photographers of Buddha statues, who may have encountered similar dilemmas. Is photographing and fixing the image of a figure regarded as greater than humanity itself an intrinsic offence? Even today, many temples and churches prohibit photography. Such taboos reflect the power dynamics inherent in the act of *watching*. What is permitted to be seen? What can be recorded, magnified and repeatedly viewed through mechanical means? Why do we create devices and idols, granting them the ability to observe and care for us?

This project was completed amidst the tension between reverence and transgression. Regardless, I have always respected and believed in every form of humble faith that acknowledges humanity is not the master of all things. Here, I once again offer my apologies and gratitude to the spirits I may have offended, and I thank them for their silent cooperation throughout this project. I am convinced that, during my time living and working in Koh Samui, I was cared for and favoured countless times by these small deities. For that, I am deeply grateful.

Ground View #1 (the handprint project)
Ground View #2 (the footprint project)
Laser-printed on cardboard, 4k Single-channel video loop
Size variable
2024

Under the residency arrangements, I visited the International School of Samui. I was immediately drawn to a massive rock embedded in the school building, spanning several classrooms. The children ran and played around it as if it were just another part of their everyday environment. A teacher, Desiree Lopez, explained that the rock wasn't intentionally placed there – it simply couldn't be removed. Since the school's inception, various attempts had been made to remove or level the stone, all to no avail – it was too vast, too solid. This story struck me as deeply symbolic: a British international school expanding into a tropical island, encountering the unyielding permanence of the land itself.

Curious, I contacted Director Zhong of the Hunan Geological Museum, sharing photos of the rock. She identified it as granite shaped by spheroidal weathering. Further research revealed that granite forms the island's primary geological composition. At first glance, it appears the rock intrudes on the school's grounds, but in reality, the school itself rests atop an enormous granite mass extending deep beneath the Pacific. The portion exposed within the classrooms is merely the tip of the iceberg.

Since arriving in Thailand, I had heard many stories about the tradition of land worship. Spirit houses, for instance, reflect the belief that the land has a presence, often personified and imbued with the power to observe and protect. This idea of seeing through the land's perspective resonated with my long-term practice. As an artist working closely with digital modelling tools, I have come to understand that their most novel aspect isn't the ability to create stunning visuals but the way they allow us to perceive objects from within. The logic of these tools is rooted in surfaces – digital structures are essentially hollow cavities encased in digitised shells. Through this lens, the inside of every granite boulder becomes a hidden cavern. Just as belief systems allow humans to reinterpret the land, digital tools reimagine material through their inherent logic. To Thai believers, the rock silently observes the children running past; to digital modelling, the children are simply figures excluded from the rock's inner world.

But when the children touch or climb on the rock, the dynamic shifts. Through their physical interaction with the rock's surface, the boundary between the external and internal worlds is momentarily dissolved. In digital modelling, simulation not only hollows out objects but also homogenises them – blurring distinctions between body and stone. A child's hand pressing against the rock's surface becomes, in a digital world, just a hand-shaped bump on a continuous surface.

For this project, I collaborated with the schoolchildren, asking them to use 3D scanning software to capture each other's hands touching the rock. These scans, along with fragments of the rock's surface, were stitched together to form a larger, composite rock, linking all the children's handprints. When viewed from the inside, the object reveals a new perspective – one that imagines seeing humans from the rock's core, mirroring Thai beliefs about the land's sentience. The result is a digital cave inscribed with countless handprints, a contemporary echo of ancient human expressions: 'This is me; I was here'. This handprint-covered wall acts as a communal thread, binding individuals together through shared touch.


The composite rock was printed as a large-scale mural, evoking the grandeur of a cavern. Accompanying it is a looped video that allows viewers to explore the rock's interior. The gaps formed by scanned and cropped models let light spill into the cave, illuminating the traces of connection left behind. Here, the children's touch doesn't leave warmth but creates enduring links to one another, much like the shared imprints of ancient humans.

This idea also inspired another project in collaboration with children from The British International School of Samui. This piece similarly revolves around the marks we leave on the earth. For island residents, the most natural traces are footprints left in the sand – ephemeral and easily washed away. I invited the children to scan one another's footprints on the beach. The scanned models of sand and feet were then combined, creating a continuous sequence of footprints that no longer belonged to a single person but to a group of friends who shared their school days. Although the digital beach exists solely in the virtual realm, it preserves these ephemeral traces in a way no tide could ever erase.
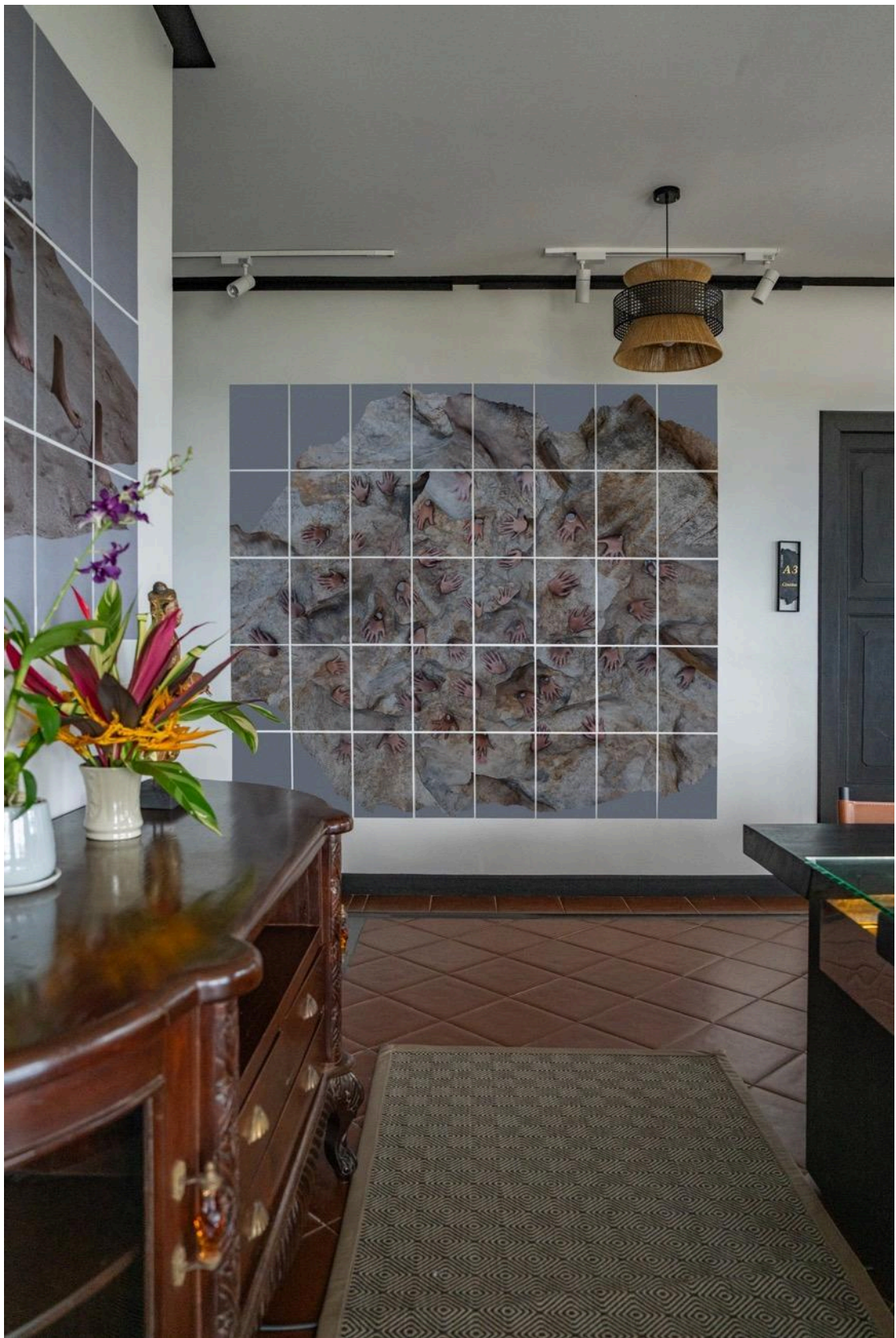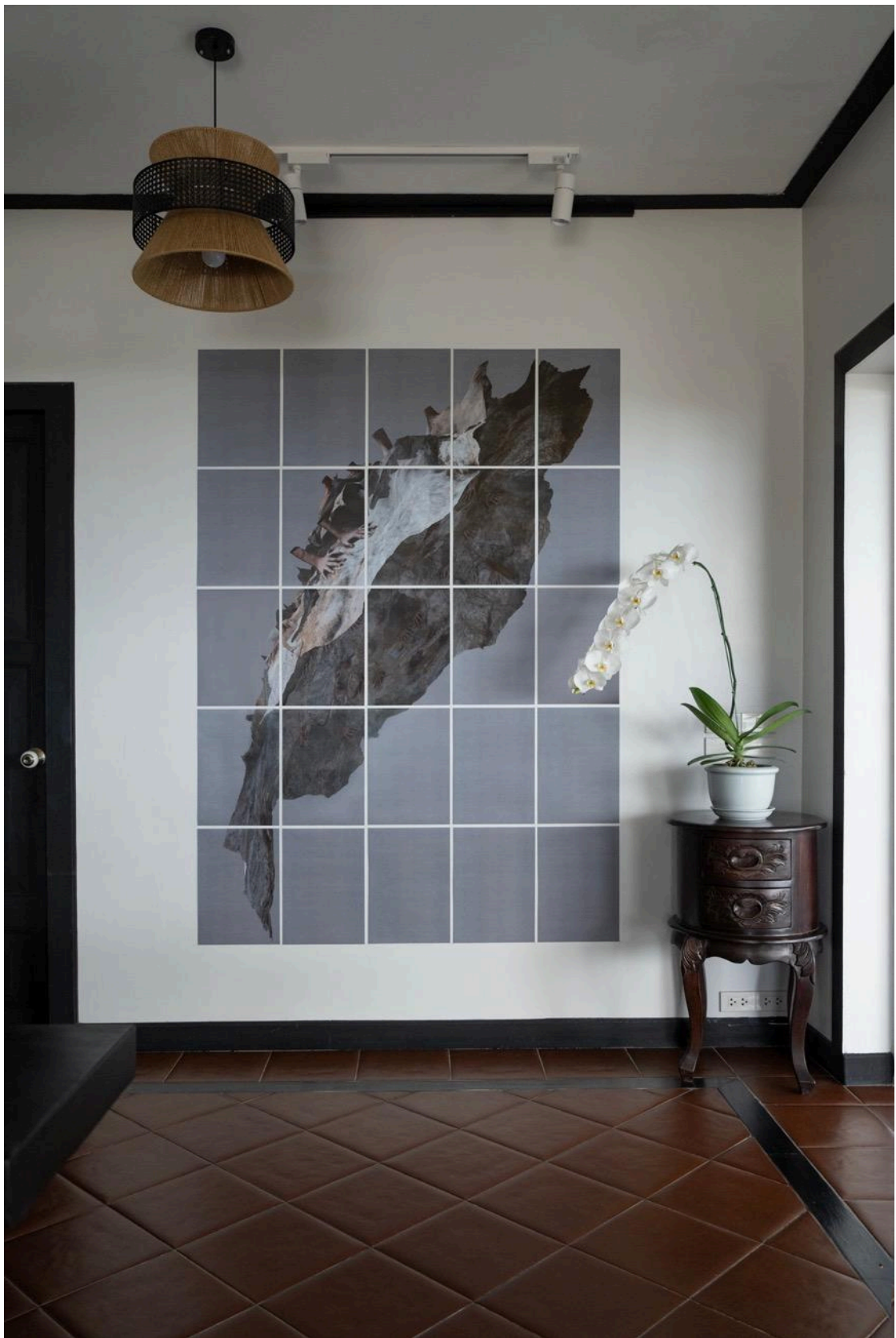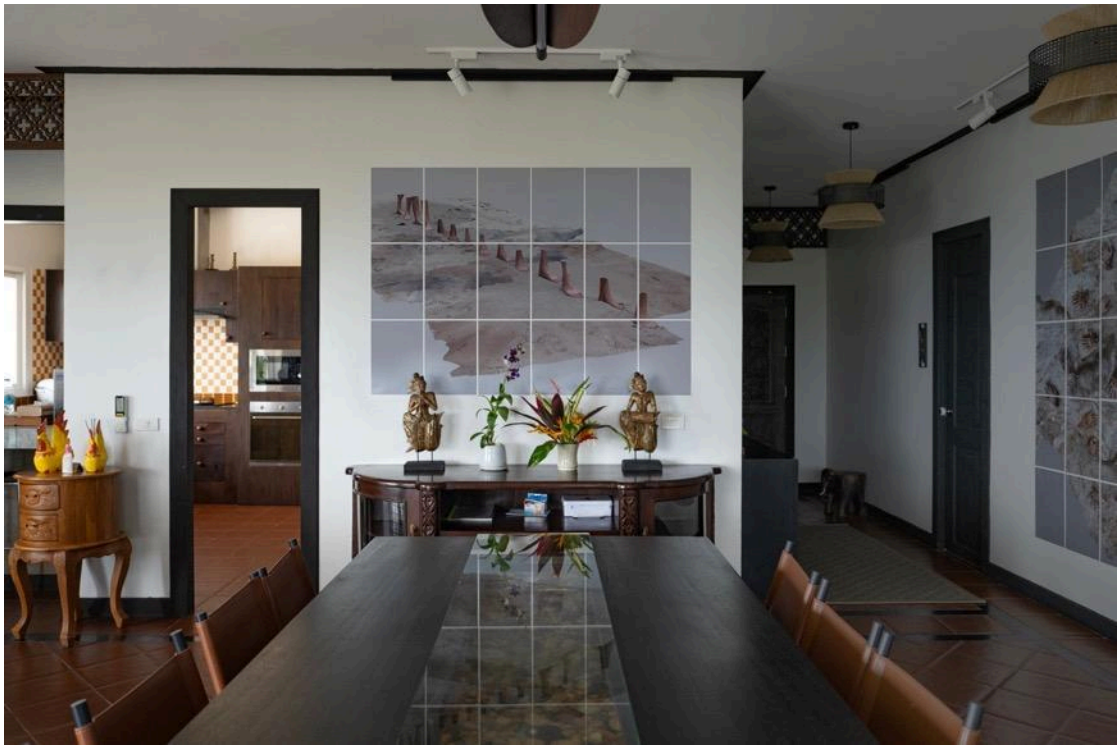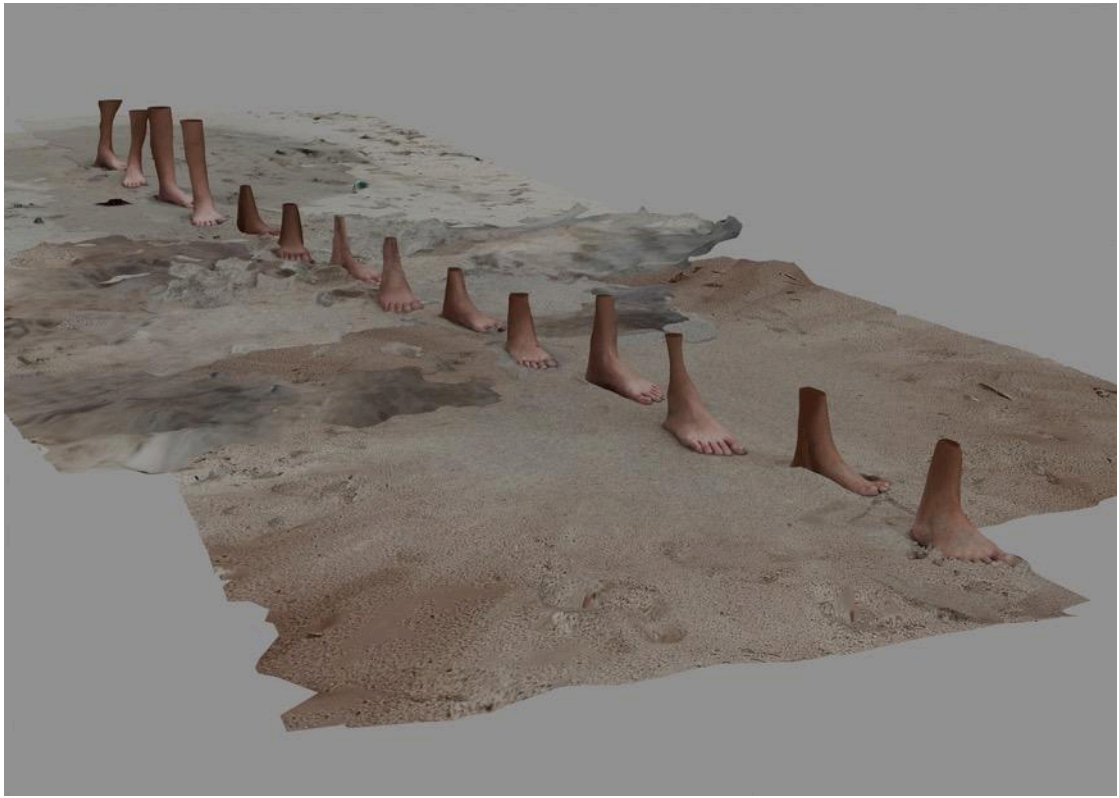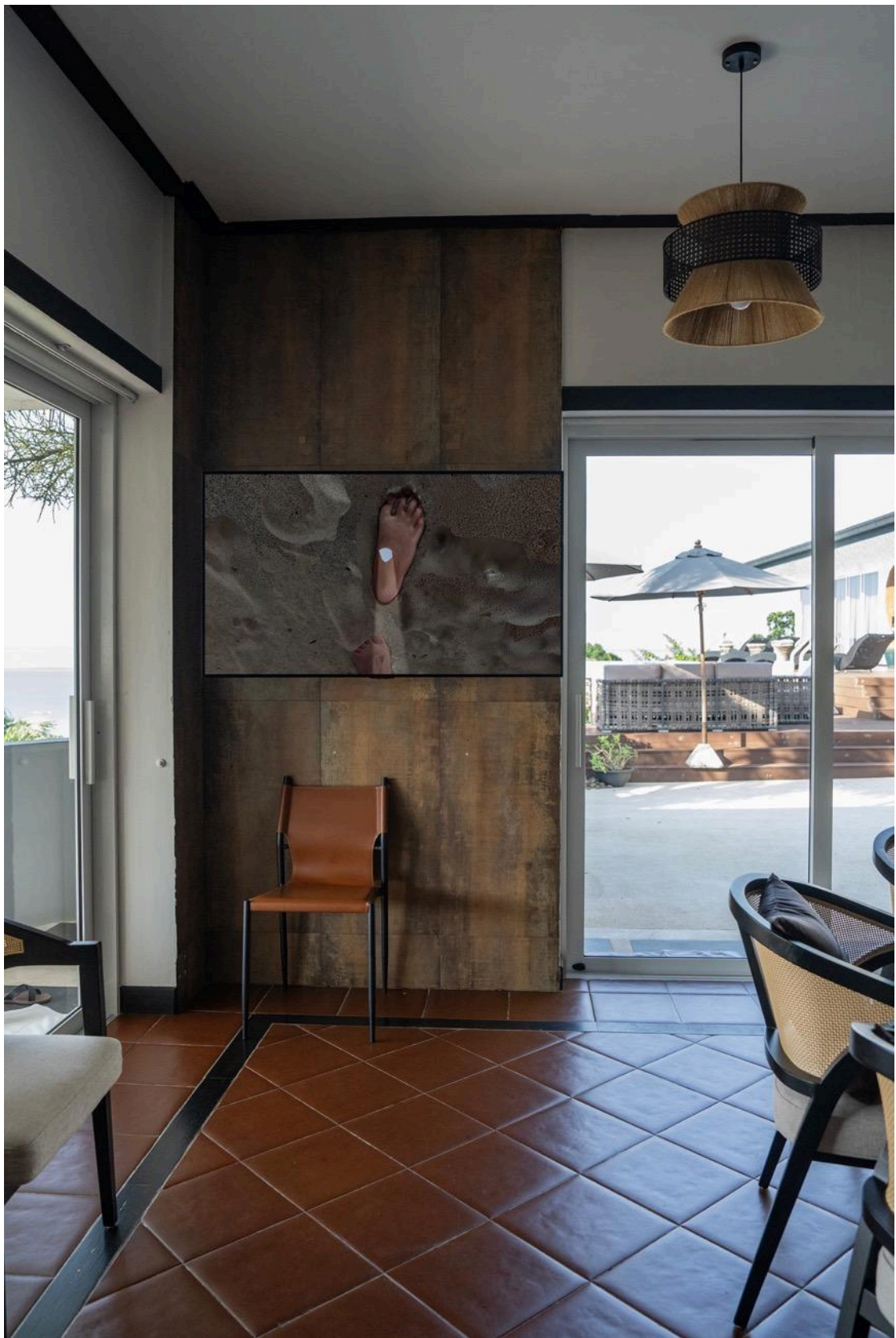
*All the artworks in this document were created with the support of the Herman Zhou Art Hub.