

Vessels

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Critical rational

Vessels (2025) is a deeply personal, multidisciplinary project that explores the intricate relationship between feminine beauty and family heritage. The immersive blend of archive, film, projection, sculpture, sound, and scent invites viewers into a contemplative space, one that challenges societal expectations and how we perceive and relate to our own bodies. The body, inherited through generations, functions as a vessel of lived experience; yet, under the pressures of shifting beauty ideals, these inherited traits are often altered or erased, resulting in a fragmented and frequently disconnected relationship with the self.

Grounded in my personal experiences with the pressures of beauty conformity and the inevitability of aging, this project emerges from a common hereditary genetic disorder, varicose veins. Exposing me to the psychologically debilitating effects of inherited bodily traits within a culture of aesthetic idealism. Witnessing my mother's recent surgical removal of her varicose veins served as a catalyst for reflecting on the erasure of an inherited trait that once connected us to my late grandmother. Through *Vessels*, I open a dialogue about the intergenerational transmission of bodily identity and the pervasive influence of aesthetic norms. By doing this I hope to transform how the viewer interprets their body in both society and heritage in a space that is deconstructing my own.

To analyse the methodologies within this project, it is crucial to recognise the influence of a male dominated hegemonic culture, in which through the male gaze it reinforces restrictive beauty standards. Western visual culture has historically perpetuated this by representing women as passive objects for visual consumption. Suggesting the idea that women 'turn (themselves) into an object- and most particularly an object of vision: a sight' (Berger, pg.47, 1972). This reinforces societal pressure to conform to idealised beauty norms, further intensified by a cultural stigma around ageing. This fear of ageing is 'fuelled by an obsession with youth and physical beauty, (with the) illusion that we can keep making ourselves over to hold age at bay' (Sontag, pg.1,1972).

Observing and hearing my mother's struggle to maintain a positive perception of her body, formed by visible signs of ageing such as varicose veins, made me feel anxious to age and over analyse my social desirability. However, through the installation and archive our collective images as a family show me the beauty of a trait that bonds us together in experience and appearance.

While contemporary photographic and artistic discourses have increasingly embraced more diverse and empowering representations of women's bodies, which I actively support. *Vessels* adopts a more introspective and interpersonal approach; by engaging with my cropped family archive through the lens of hauntology, the project re-appropriates the female body through the symbolism of the legs and a surgical performance. Showing the repetitive and unfiltered nature of body modifications within the wider consumer culture which female viewers will all relate to. With this understanding I developed the work through 5 key outputs:

Sculpture (the folding screen)

Scent

Sound

Photography (archival)

Film/projection

The folding screen is a multimedia sculpture measuring 160 x192 cm made of pine wood. Inspiration for this is seen within Esther Teichman's body of work *Medusa* (2024) as seen in figure 1. Her exploration through textile of natural structures within ecology and its relation to women synthesised through a repurposed antique Victorian screen pose a beautiful representation. One in which that corresponds to how I use lavender to respond to the body. Also, the translucency shows the way light passes through inspiring me to use bandages, with the height of her folding screen poses it as well poses a conversation with the lower half of the body.



Figure 1, Esther Teichman, Medusa, 2024.

Contextually the folding screen explores its position within the division between the private space where we over analyse our bodies and the medical space where we alter our bodies. Within the sculpture it consists of frames made of scrap mirror, white bandages and handmade lavender infused wildflower seed paper. Metaphorically the sculpture is a vessel which when projected on by a surgical performance responds in different ways. Firstly, the white bandages wrapped around the interior frame reiterate the vessel as a body where these societal influences are distorted as they filtrate through onto the wall behind. Also, the dirty mirror reflects the tarnished projection around the room, showing how these societal conformities get reflected onto the family and one another as perceived by the viewer as they intercept this within the space. Challenges I faced with this concept was time as I had to construct the frames once in the space to integrate and experiment where the reflections from the mirrors would disperse to.

Lavender infused handmade wildflower seed paper reinforces the sustainability aims within my practice and position in photography as well as the use of scrap mirror. By handmaking lavender infused wildflower seed paper out of recycled egg boxes, I represented pregnancy and fertility as it increases the risk of varicose veins. Furthermore, its brittle texture had connotations to the texture of veins in the skin, combined with the wildflower seeds it creates a dialogue on the ecological synonymous relationship roots and veins share. Sourced from an eco-market the wildflower seeds were shared to me by Uniting Church Sketty, a community of women aiming to improve the local environment which enriches my project. With my sculpture being large in scale it posed a range of issues in sizing materiality to fit the frames, this was especially a problem when making the paper as the frame restricted me to A3. However, by collaging and sewing the paper together with twine I fed into the analogy of delicacy and stitches relating to skin. Reflecting on this if I could alter the height of the structure, I would relate it further to my body by using my height as a form of personal representation.

Subsequently through research into varicose veins I related my practice back to ecology by synthesising the direct impact lavender pose on the body. 'When lavender oil is inhaled for 10 min, there is an increase in blood flow rate and a decrease in galvanic skin conduction and systolic blood pressure (indicating a reduction in sympathetic nerve activity). Human studies with lavender have demonstrated a significant relaxation effect and reduced anxiety.' (Salamati et al, 2017). Including this within the paper effects the viewers body physically in the installation through scent.

Reference list:

Relaxing them and increasing their blood flow, additionally it is linked to varicose veins through its ability to emotionally reduce anxiety and stress while it is often also linked to healing properties. Reinforcing the viewers perspective of their body and the non-visible effects that inhaling the lavender is creating within their body, I have included sound into the installation to offer a reminder to the viewer of this internal process. Through recording my own heartbeat while inhaling the lavender and layering it with running water the sound resembles the flowing of blood inside the body, thus immersing the viewer to deeply analyse and relate to their body. While this gives an uncomfortable nature to the work it reinforces the concept of our hyper fixated views of our own bodies' appearance. Walking through the space will enhance further as the scent will have more of an effect the more you interact. Additionally, a women's beauty has historically been represented through flowers, which give of an appealing scent and are visually attractive this correlation led me to use lavender springs physically hanging from the ceiling to visually represent feminine beauty constructs within the installation.

Gathering images from my family archive I underwent a personal journey in selecting and cropping my heritage into representations of beauty constructs through legs. Firstly, my aims were to locate varicose veins through generations of women in my family and visually see how this has affected them, this transformed how I viewed these familiar images. Acknowledging the affects my grandmother undertook through having varicose veins became prominent through age as long skirts and the covering of the legs became a pattern, which my mother replicates today. Moreover, through researching and visually exploring the surgery that my mother had to remove her varicose veins, I recreated a performance onto selected images of legs through my archive. However, this performance replaced the surgical tools with beauty tools to portray our repetitive nature in altering our bodies to conform to beauty standards. The original length of the video is three and a half hours, the same duration of my mother's surgery. Through adjusting the speed to a new duration of 37 minuets I symbolise the fast-paced repetitive nature of our society and the rise in beauty commodification's. Within the imagery I undergo the surgery on images of children which creates an uncomfortable commentary on the pressures placed on women from a young age to consider their appearance in relation to societal expectations. By using plasters stained by my mother blood from her surgery into my performance to cover my incisions it connects the archive to the physical world, and to the viewers it becomes more of a reality. Projecting this performance onto the sculpture speaks to these forced perceptions of female beauty that intersect through the room.

Moreover, my biggest challenge within this project has been the ability to represent a personal aspect of my life and expose my mother's biggest insecurities through my art. I have deeply struggled in ensuring that I consider my mothers feelings and how she will experience my work in a way that will alter her perception of her own body and it's ongoing effects on myself. However, through my project I have ensured I communicate with her through the process, and this ultimately is shown through the braveness of my mothers want to create societal change.

Armaiti Salamati, Soheyla Mashouf and Faraz Mojab (2017). Effect of Inhalation of Lavender Essential Oil on Vital Signs in Open Heart Surgery ICU. *Iranian Journal of Pharmaceutical Research : IJPR*, [online] 16(1), p.404. Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5423266/#B27> (Accessed 5th May 2025).

Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin.

Sontag, S. (1972). The Double standards of ageing: The Saturday Review.

Figures list:

Teichman, 2014. Medusa. (online) Available at: <https://www.flowersgallery.com/artists/161-esther-teichmann/works/176206/>. (Accessed 10th May 2025).



Outcomes:

- **The folding screen**
- **The surgery (37 mins)**
- **Sound**
- **Prints (3)**
- **The Archive (17 pages)**



The Folding screen
160 x 192 cm
Mixed media sculpture made of Pine Wood



40 x 64 cm

White bandages, wound and stapped to frame.



40 x 64 cm

Upcycled scrap mirror, framed into sculpture using nails.



40 x 64cm
Patchwork, x2 A3 handmade wildflower seed
paper infused with lavender made out of egg
boxes.



40 x 64cm
Patchwork, x16 A5 handmade lavender infused
wildflower seed paper, made out of blue tissue and
cotton rag paper.



40 x 62 cm

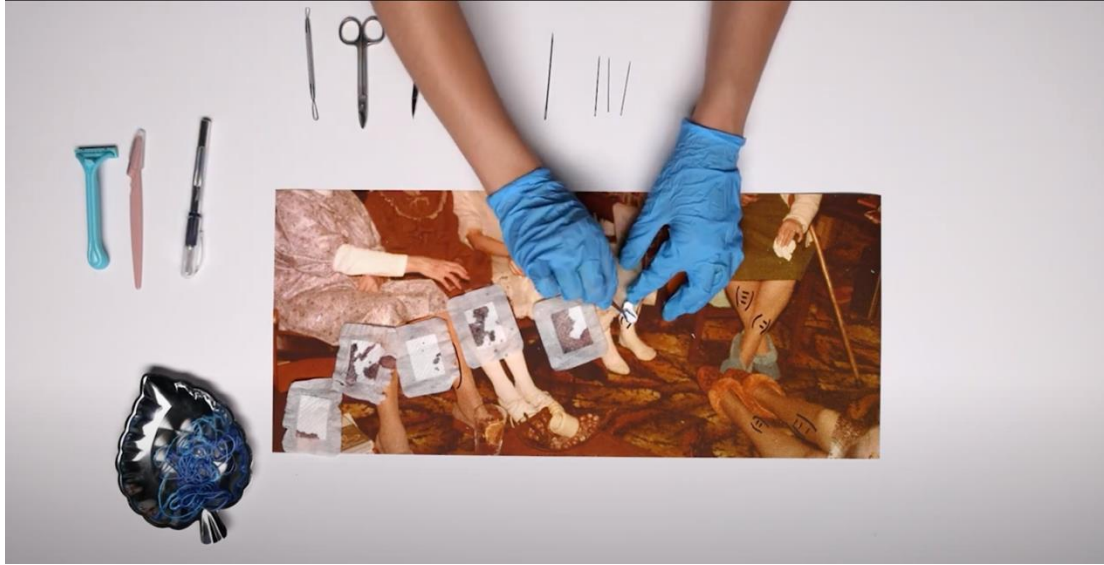
White bandages, wound and stappled to frame. Layered inside is a A4 handmade wildflower seed paper infused with lavender made out of egg boxes, with blue tissue detailing of lavender sprigs and twine string.



40 x 62cm

Mixed media, upcycled scrap mirror, framed into sculpture using nails. Handmade wildflower seed paper infused with lavender made out of egg boxes, with blue tissue detailing of lavender sprigs.

The Surgery



Full video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UiHF6r6Oyco>



Sound and Prints

Final prints selected for Swansea degree show

The installation is accompanied by sound through a speaker behind the folding screen, adding to the immersive concept. By using my own heartbeat as I inhale lavender I overlayed the sound of running water creating an audio that stimulates ideas of blood rushing through the body. Furthermore, this stimulates the viewer to reflect on their own internal bodily reaction to the installation with the strong scent of lavender entering and effecting their blood flow in their body.

Full Archive video with sound: <https://youtu.be/wxywnBFKLV8>



148 x 83 cm, Enhanced matt Vinyl.

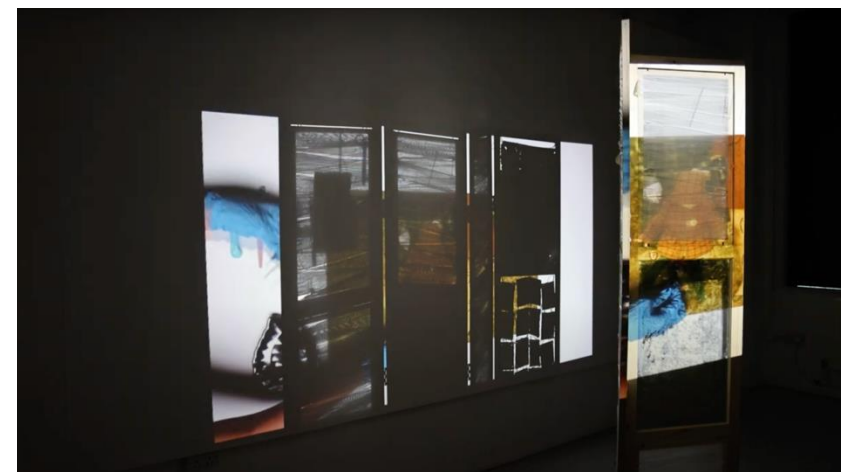
The archive as a book (17 pages)



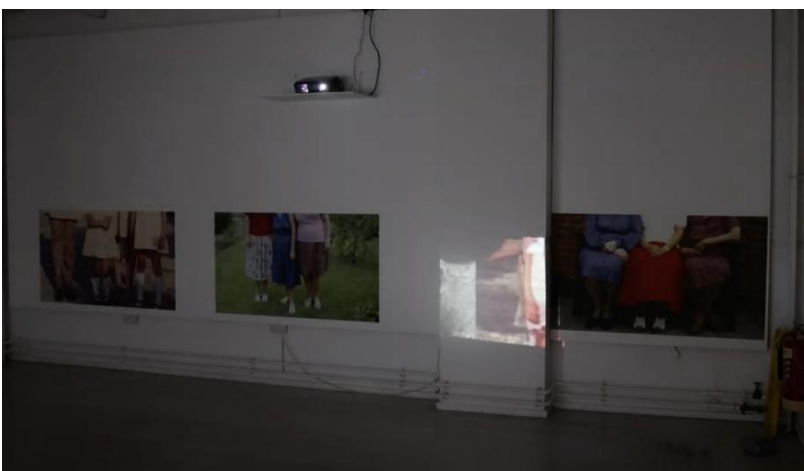
Full video of the Archive: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4MRgVuUvFE>



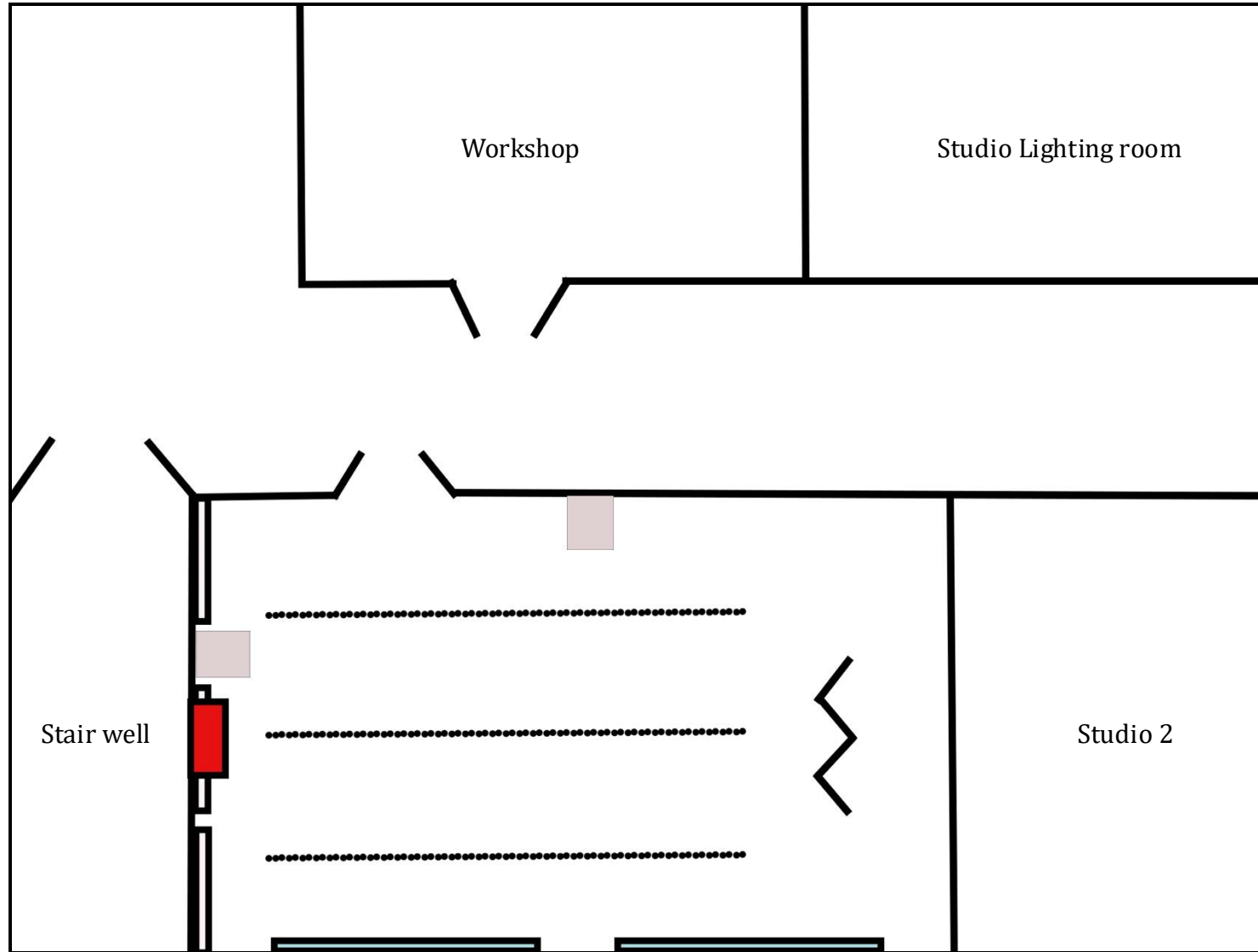
Final installation in Swansea degree show



Full video of the final installation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JFeX04AHzY>

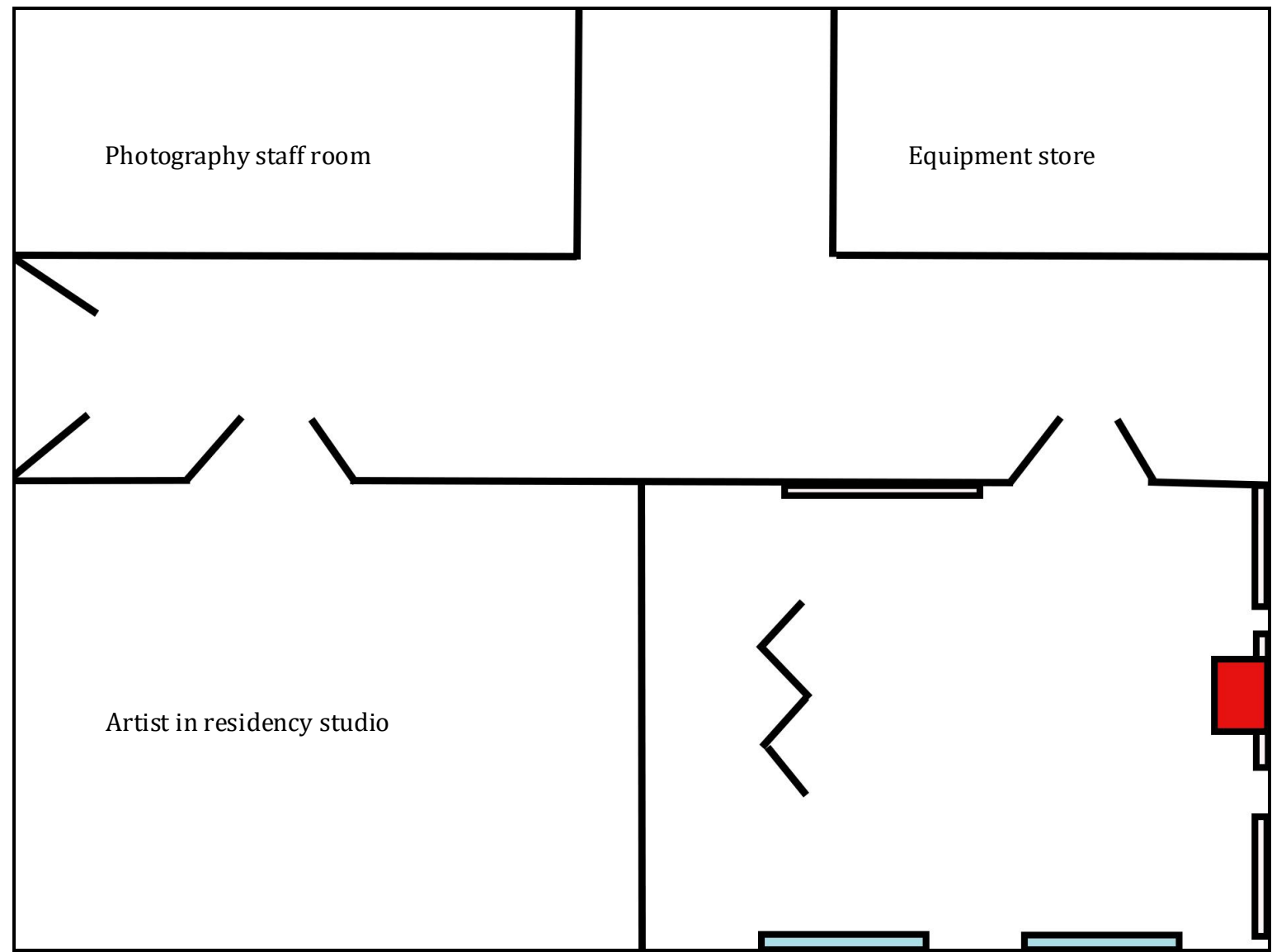


Location 1- Swansea Degree show



As my first location for the degree show, studio one offers an immersive and encapsulating space for my concepts to be explored. As a singular room it allows me to utilise sound in a contained space that doesn't affect others work. Furthermore, the windows have a built in blind that can transform the room into a dark space making a perfect location for my projection. Additionally, the light fixtures allow me to hang lavender from them in three rows resembling a lavender field. Moreover, the room also allows for the projector to be installed on a shelf at a higher level avoiding hazards and creating a more accessible and immersive space. When installed I was able to rotate the doors on the folding screen to allow the mirror to reflect the projection into specific spaces. Analysing the shape of the room I noticed the wall projected further out in some areas making the projection fit to this structure worked effectively.

Location 2 – Swansea Degree show



My second potential location for the degree show was an artist residency studio at the end of the corridor. While this room offered a lot of potential for my installation, the ceilings being too tall and not having a light fixture to attach my lavender to posed a problem. Additionally, due to the layout of the room the walls a wider variation in surface for my vinyl prints as the wall protruded in more irregular ways. While this is also a dark room and contains sound well it doesn't situate all components of my work to the best quality making location 1 a better alternative.

Copeland gallery installation

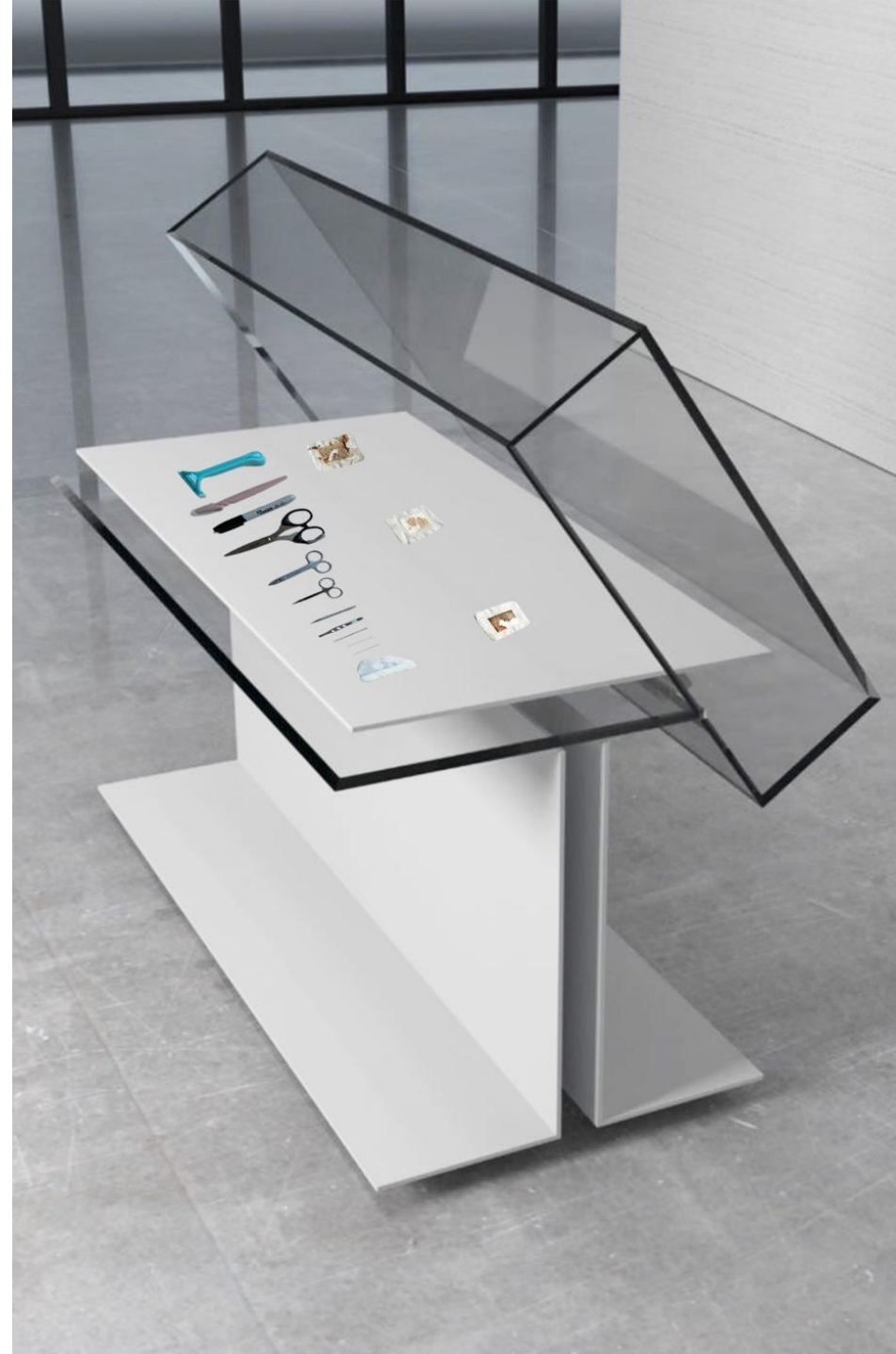
Lavender hung from lighting fixture



Dissecting the installation to Copeland gallery meant reconsidering the works relationship with each component. Due to the lack of dark spaces in the gallery, my projection wouldn't show meaning I will have to utilise my prints and scent to convey my project. Here I have experimented two ways that I could potentially display my prints. Firstly, the first installation shot of the prints are life size and low to the ground, relating back to the legs creating a relationship with the viewer to look down and see their own. Due to the large height of the wall this empty space can be very effective as seen in my archive book in a similar layout. Secondly, the next installation shot includes printing my images on a very large scale to present the intimidating and often overwhelming nature of the emotions that come with beauty standards. The image selected personifies this beautifully through the pulling down of the dress over the legs. Furthermore, I won't be able to use sound in this location due to the open floor plan as it would affect onto others work. However, to combat this I could use headphones making a more intimate experience. Finally, the light fixture makes a beautiful immersive loop that would surround my sculpture enhancing the viewers perspective of the sculpture as an object without the projection over it.

The archive of the surgical evidence

Laying out the tools and plasters coated in my mother's blood from my performance surgery creates a conversation around our current consumer society as a poignant time in history. The use of beauty tools as a replacement for surgical tools relays the wider question around the extensive modification of our bodies in today's culture. As women we use these tools daily to conform to beauty standards, by having them layered on a display table with the plasters of my mother's varicose vein surgery creates an archival encapsulation that future generations and look back too as a form of representation. Furthermore, the glass case offers a way to exhibit the physical bloodstained plasters in a public setting, showing the raw and unfiltered physical evidence.



Collaboration with Hospital Rooms (Charity)

Removing my sculpture out of a gallery setting and into the public space shows the multi purposeful opportunities that the sculpture lends itself to in set specific element. Collaborating with Hospital Rooms a charity that installs visual art within hospitals to create a more happy and vibrant atmosphere. The use of my sculpture adds a visual aesthetic quality, but its main purpose would be through the scent of lavender that would directly relax and positively effect the patients. It will also help healing the body which can create a big impact on the patient's recovery.

