

# The Contested Landscapes of Mnemosyne

## Constructing Maps of Memory

*There is a story in these landscapes...that's further out of reach*

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**Abstract:**

This is an unbound portfolio UV printed on plexiglass containing fragments and scenes from my master's thesis  
*The Contested Landscapes of Mnemosyne - Constructing Maps of Memory.*

by

**Valeria Rachel Herrera**

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**For  
my father Nicholas | my siblings | RR II | Paula**

with warmest thanks to my cohort at The Rhode Island School of Design  
– Anna, Audrey, Camila, Kate and Kelly.



# The Contested Landscapes of Mnemosyne

## Constructing Maps of Memory

### There is a story in these landscapes...that's further out of reach

"Perhaps it might be said rightly that there are three times: a time present of things past; a time present of things present; and a time present of things future. For these three do coexist somehow in the soul, for otherwise I could not see them. The time present of things past is memory; the time present of things present is direct experience; the time present of things future is expectation.

St. Augustine [1], Book 11, Chapter 20, Heading 26.

### A Curated Glossary:

**Erase** operates as the essential act for constructing negative space

**Maps** exist as recordings of superimposed and intertwined fragments of recollection

**Nomad** is the state of being that ignites the chemical reaction to seek grounding

**Absence** is manifest as a condition of personal sanctuary

**Landscapes** mark internal and external places, imagined and real, as constructs of nature and artifice

**Collapse** is the mechanism for acts of conflation, combination and compression

**Medina** is the metaphor for a chaotic + directionless place in time

**Continuity** is an unknown concept

**Simultaneity** describes the perpetual tension inherent in environments and experiences of coexistence

**Space** here is personal, material, psychological, meta-physical, cosmological, emotional and urban

**Mark-Making** is the primal human act of marking, recording and transmitting content

**Palimpsest** is the tactical + conceptual device used to combine independent layers of graphics + text

**Time** is the currency that provides the material basis for constructing a multivalent tapestry of memory

**Fiction** resides in histories that confuse reality with imagination - remembered, forgotten + reconstructed

**Episodic** moments are the disparate places and events that are recalled, redefined and reconnected

**Elusive** are the perceptions and feelings that make the construction of maps of memory a necessity

**Memory** is what distinguished human consciousness and what gives meaning to mortal existence

**Etching** is the act of permanently recording what is otherwise ephemeral and elusive

## **Content:**

We live literally and figuratively in three time spaces – present, past and future. We exist always in the present, we are defined by the perpetual conflation of memories that comprise our past while continuously engaged in a consciousness of what's next – the immediate as well as the infinite future of immeasurable time and of memories yet to be experienced.

This work is about imaginary worlds and fluid spaces. With *A New Babylon* by Constant Nieuwenhuys, and the notion of the ideal city as a grounding inspiration, this work explores a space where humanity is liberated from the notion of the requisite obligations and conventions of 'utilitarian life'. By incorporating play, creativity, and the saturation of oneself in leisure, Constant's *City of Play* is played out in urban scenarios where one is emancipated from the certainty of life's drudgery to a flight of fancy found in the deepest recesses of one's alternate consciousness.

This work reconsiders the city as an imagined autobiographical construct – one less interested in an idealized utopia than in an urban landscape of dystopian character. A place stark, heavy, chaotic and complex, sufficient to host the playful narratives of an elusive alter ego. It is a place for me and me alone – an inner space within outer space. There isn't an entrance for the viewer into this vast texture of void, and that is intentional and significant.

This world is representative of how I move in space as free and fluid, of how spaces collide into one another creating contested conditions of overlap and duality – a confluence of calamity. This is a place that is an amalgamation of places I have been and of my continuous childhood of discontinuity. It is influx, unstable, lacks order and is the ultimate convergence of the distinct and divergent paths that have contributed to the medina that is my personal history – that of a nomadic existence paradoxically confined to a labyrinthine world.

It is not intended to be illustrative of a clear, decipherable space but instead exists in its own complexity, its own in-definability. There are moments, elements, portals and thresholds depicted that mark tangible memory within an endless time-line, a long take video frame transcendent from a specific curated lineage of incidents. The space is dark, black and endless with unexpected collisions between episodic events and spaces – both fast and slow – deep and shallow – then and now. Things are in constant motion, moving shadows, ghosts oscillating between the here and there, elusive, never captured. The film continues to play.

Because of the fallibility of memory there is room for fantasy to come into play, to play. There is room for time to move away from its linear past, present and future and to transform into a dream state of fluidity, creativity, invention and escape.

## **Elusive Landscapes of Memory | Reconstructing the Contexts of a Personal History**

This body of work attempts to capture and evoke a vast and sometimes compressed, confined, obscure place often in a state of flux and erasure – an incomplete and imperfect state of existence. The landscapes and structures consider the critical notion of absence and destruction, retracing a preserved memory of that which was removed or excluded.

My work is interested in acts of revision encountered during the process of making. Regarding the concept of palimpsest, I am fascinated by the necessary ability to both add and subtract simultaneously as one advances a plate-based construction. These moments of subtraction and erasure reveal a differently liberating way to think about plates and prints, narratives and images, space and time. The literal act of palimpsest, both conceptually and technically, motivates my obsessive interest in the medium to revisit and reinvent this idea to construct multi-layered images and interwoven stories.

The passages above are recollections of moments, ideas, places and feelings that comprise an alternative reality – an 'other-world' that operated as a parallel reality to the mundane drama of a childhood of instability. These descriptions serve as the instigators, clues, and frameworks for spaces, places and environments constructed in the elusive landscapes series. In essence, the words are translated into a contested, congested landscape of episodes and experiences that reconstruct a non-linear memory of the conflation of reality and fantasy that provided the place of survival for my childhood.

The resultant two-dimensional works explore realms of spatial composition, depth, and contingent spatial relationships with the integration, insertion and overlay of narrative and or subjective content. My interest lies in employing multi-plate, multi-media processes to form dynamic spatial and compositional scenarios. This palimpsest-based approach to constructing images operates as the foundation for my process oriented investment in making layered visual constructs that mark, map and make records of contexts - material and metaphysical.

***If you look closely you may find these places, hidden in plain sight...or in the far off space of the imagination.***



















