

STUDIOS + GALLERY



[de]fragmentation

Curator essay by Meadhbh McIlgorm

(de)fragmentation is an experimental group show featuring mixed-media artists, running in Gallery 2 of QSS from March 13th to April 10th, 2025. Curated by Meadhbh McIlgorm, the exhibition explores the review and/or reuse of the varied “stuff” accumulated throughout an artist’s practice. Artists are invited to reexamine and reinterpret past trials, tests, and studies, presenting them in new iterations in response to the theme.

Exhibiting artists: Alacoque Davey, Anushiya Sundaralingam, Cathy Scullion, Clare French, Gail Ritchie, Grace McMurray, Kate O’Neill, Meadhbh McIlgorm, Sharon Kelly, Vasiliki Stasinaki.

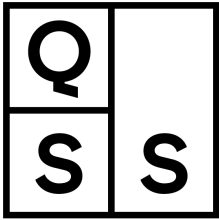
(short Artist Bios are available online at www.queenstreetstudios.net and a printed gallery copy can be found on the main desk)

Curator’s Essay

Part 1 - on processing

Defragmentation is a manual digital file sorting process used to free up memory, heighten efficiency and optimise performance of hard-drives. This process is now approaching obsolescence as modern storage devices, like those in our laptops and phones, no longer have moving parts, with most of our data now residing in ‘The Cloud’. The Cloud sounds like an endless, intangible storage but in reality - it’s a very physical, resource heavy network of giant data centres, cooling systems, servers and cables strung around the world, rapidly firing synapses in the global brain, keeping us all connected.

The oldest stories were embedded in the landscape, and accessed through ‘ars memoriae’ (the art of memory) in the knowledge held by bards and storytellers. However it’s become a profoundly human act to outsource the storage of our knowledge and stories into ‘things’. Brains are for generating ideas, not holding them. Early writing was hewn into stone. And books - bound up bits of ink and paper - have long been the preferred place to hold all that we have learned, dreamed and discovered. Although so much is now digital, the material world still holds everything, even the conceptual or theoretical. The artist’s practice is no different.



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Accompanying every new stand of enquiry and research there is a collection of 'stuff' which gets carried along by it - the found objects, the sketches, the offcuts, samples and tests. The recommended books, the notes pinned on studio walls, the 'almost finished' parts kept around, certain that one day they will be useful. All of these ephemeral things, stashed in boxes, pushed into drawers, they gather up meaning along the way. When rediscovered we find them altered by everything that's happened since we last considered them. These new qualities settle on top of them like a patina, they have somehow changed in the process.

If things exist forever digitally with AI and the Cloud, are we losing the ability to remember - and also to forget -? Are we failing to be our own, self-optimising storage devices and if so, what might we be losing in the process? Still, we hold onto things - real, weighty, material things - and in doing so, they hold onto us.

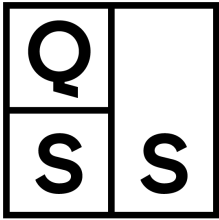
Part 2 - on holding

In putting together the exhibition I have gathered artists - whose work I admire and relate to. Through shared time, conversations, and even shared storage space at QSS, I've come to know that they, too, are serial 'keepers of stuff'—artists whose practices fluidly cross mediums and materials.

The concept of defragmentation serves as a metaphor. In the face of the climate emergency, this theme encourages artists to prioritize revisiting and reusing existing materials over creating new ones, making mindful use of available resources and creating space to re-organise thoughts. The curatorial concept is a development from the ['ReView exhibition and gathering'](#) project I developed with the Glass Society of Ireland in 2022, creating an exhibition opportunity that attempts to be as regenerative as possible - not asking for more from artists OR from the environment but instead breathing new value into existing work and shaping space for reflection and imagination.

Considering the theme of the exhibition I don't think it's a coincidence that again, as occurred in 2022, we are a group of women artists. I keep returning to [Maria Shriver's poem 'Women Holding Things'](#)—a piece that feels particularly relevant. Here are the last few lines:

*there is never an end to holding
and certainly there is often the feeling of never doing enough
and then there is the next day, and the next day
and one holds on.*



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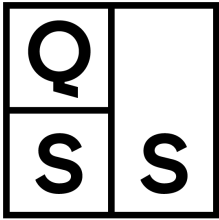
That is not to say that men don't hold on, hold dear, hold tight. They do. But, as Shriver's verse says, 'not quite in the same way.' While researching, I chat with AI - our newest way of accessing information held in the global brain - about women and extreme endurance sports, a growing category where they regularly equal or outperform men. Women are 51% of the global population, not because of a difference in birth rates but because we are likely to live longer. To endure and carry on despite / in spite of harsh survival conditions. I tell AI that it sounds like women endure and hold on to the whole world. It replies with affirmation:

Absolutely — it's a beautiful and undeniable truth. Women often shoulder an incredible range of responsibilities, from physical endurance to emotional and social resilience, keeping families and communities together. It's inspiring and humbling when you really think about it.

In this context, it's perhaps no surprise to see that in response to the concept of (de)fragmentation - many approaches include the use of traditionally women-associated crafts of care and repair. Processes such as weaving, knitting, stitching, patching. Making and remaking processes which require steady, ongoing and undervalued labour. Techniques in which repetition creates a sense of structure and order, allowing for both focus and mind-wandering.

The project is fundamentally about connecting with materiality and all the real embodied connections and tacit knowledge that is tied up in the memories of making / making of memory. In the months leading up to the exhibition, the group was asked to consider prompts such as, 'what have you been holding on to and why?'. We met one-to-one, and once, collectively to share our approaches and responses. There were striking similarities across the group; everyone trying their best to hold on to things, seeing the potential in the leftovers both out of curiosity and a sense of personal responsibility. Many approaches centre on holding space for others, telling stories for people unable to speak them for themselves, imagining narratives of empathy, respect and solidarity. Dozens of acts of care and consideration - softening edges, elevating humble materials and bringing fragmented and disjointed things back into wholeness.

In the resulting works from each individual artist, past meanings are not lost but layered—codified, encrypted, fragmented yet still present. They hold memories and, just as importantly, space. Space for reflection, for play, and imagination. As in defragmentation, these intentions are reorganized rather



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than erased, creating new pathways between the past and the future, between holding on and letting go. I hope this exhibition, too, while it stands for a few weeks in QSS Gallery 2 serves as a physical space for consideration—a moment to pause, to sift through what has been gathered, and to find new ways of seeing the overlooked. More than a collection of disparate fragments, I hope it is a generative process, one that enlivens both those who take part and those who encounter it, offering a reminder that what we hold onto—whether materials, ideas, or each other—continues to shape us in return.

Written by Meadhbh McIlgorm.

Thanks to all participating artists for contributing their words on process which have helped shape this text (you can read some of them on the reading table) and special thanks to Gail Ritchie & Cathy Scullion for the editorial support.