



2025

30 Oct.-6 Nov.
Custom Lane

Presented in partnership
with Creative Scotland and
Edinburgh College of Art.

Eclipsing Presence

– The Chromatic Traces of Death

Figure 1

Emerging Curator : Haonan Zhang
University of Edinburgh, Contemporary Art Theory



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/01

Exhibition introduction

Exhibition concept and background

Figure 2

Vanishing Existence is a **multidisciplinary exhibition** that reimagines death not as a singular endpoint, but as an ongoing **process of transition, memory, and symbolic transformation**. Rooted in **cross-cultural perspectives**, the project draws inspiration from **Eastern philosophies**—such as **Daoist notions of cyclical existence and impermanence**—and **Western existentialist thought**, notably the writings of **Camus and Sartre**, which confront the absurdity and meaning-making of mortal life.

Through **color, materiality, spatial intervention**, and **multisensory immersion**, Vanishing Existence explores how death is simultaneously **universal and deeply subjective**. The exhibition invites audiences to contemplate **personal mortality** and **collective remembrance** by tracing the **chromatic, material, and sensory residues** left in the wake of disappearance.

Situated within **Edinburgh's rich cultural landscape**, Vanishing Existence acts both as a **tribute to fading existence** and as an **open space for reflection** on how we **perceive loss, negotiate memory**, and **continually reconstruct meaning** in the face of **impermanence**.

Figure 3



Zhuangzi's Drumming on the Bowl,

Figure 4



Tao Yuanming's reflections on mortality

The inspiration for this exhibition is rooted in Eastern philosophy and Western existentialist thought. In Daoist traditions, Zhuangzi famously responded to his wife's death by drumming on a bowl, demonstrating an understanding of death as a transformation rather than a tragedy. Similarly, the poet Tao Yuanming embraced impermanence, writing, "Drifting along with the great transformation, neither joyous nor afraid."

Sartre & Beauvoir & Camus



Figure 5



Figure 6

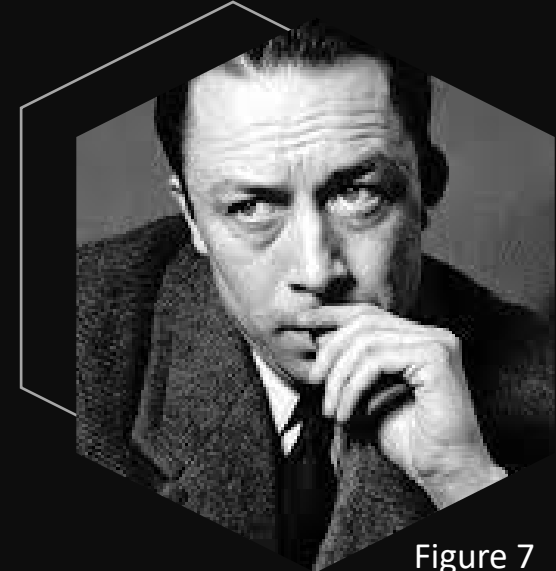


Figure 7

Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre

“Existence precedes
essence.”

Simone Lucie Ernestine Marie Bertrand de Beauvoir

“What is an adult? A child blown up by
age. Death does not create
meaninglessness. The real tragedy is
when life loses its meaning.”

Albert Camus

“There is only one really
serious philosophical
problem, and that is
suicide.”



/02

Format of the exhibition

Format of the exhibition

2.1 Physical Exhibition

- Birth love death, vagina pussy cunt by San Zhang
- Gravestone with Branches by Keyi Ju
- Monument of Loss by Shatha Altowai
- Deep dive (pause) uncoiling memory by Alberta Whittle

2.2 Workshops and Interactive VR

2.3 Online Website Extension

02

Physical Exhibition

Duration : 1 week (9:00-17:00)

Admission : Free entry

"Vanishing Existence" embraces a multi-format approach, combining physical exhibitions, interactive workshops with VR immersion, and an online platform.

(For details of the artworks, please refer to the relevant part of Section 3.2.)



In the **physical exhibition**, four artworks explore death, memory, and transformation: paintings by San Zhang, sculpture by Keyi Ju, and installations by Shatha Altowai and Alberta Whittle.

Through **workshops**, visitors engage in creating final message cards, symbolic artifacts, and scent-memory rituals, deepening personal reflection on loss. The **VR** experience leads them into a virtual "memory cemetery" where ephemeral memories can be left behind. **Online**, the project continues through a participatory platform archiving artworks, workshops, and global contributions to an evolving memorial archive.

2.2 Workshops and Interactive VR



‘ Final Words Workshop ’

Audience members can handwrite their personal "Last Words Cards" and express their farewells and confessions on the paper.



Figure 8

‘ Echoes of the Past: VR Memory Cemetery ’

Enter the virtual "memory cemetery" through VR equipment, leaving a word, a painting or a sound in the digital world, symbolizing the existence that has passed away but is not forgotten.



Figure 9

‘ Symbolic Creation Studio ’

Participants will create miniature objects (such as small sculptures and pendants) that represent personal memories, loss and hope. They will be guided to make these objects by hand.



Figure 10

‘ Memory Fragrance Lab ’

Participants create "scent memory bottles" using scents (such as incense or chamomile fragrance) to evoke sensory memories of past moments.



Figure 11

Virtual Memory Cemetery

The online platform (accessible via computer and mobile)

Design Schematic

The virtual 'Memory Cemetery' adopts a circular layout to symbolise the entrance space of separation and concealment, enhancing the audience's sense of participation and ritual atmosphere. Visitors can leave their memories of the deceased virtually, echoing the mode of collective mourning in the current digital age.

Figure 12



Vanishing Existence Interactive interval virtual memory cemetery
Innovative: VR Interact

VR

2.3 Online website

The online platform

(accessible via computer and mobile) will include:



- Selected exhibition highlights (artwork images and artist statements)

- VR experience clips and documentation



- Recordings and archives from workshops

- A participatory Open Memory Archive inviting global visitors to contribute digital memories related to loss, rituals, and personal reflections

- Artist interviews and behind-the-scenes curation notes

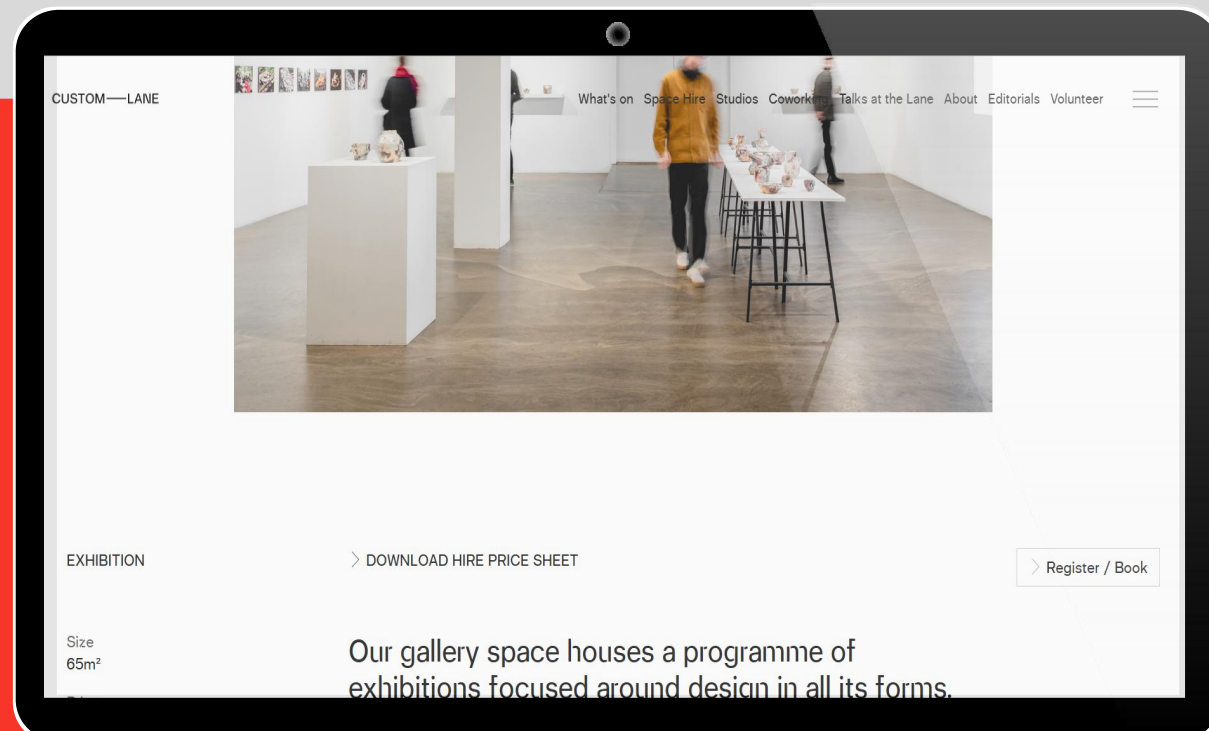


Figure 13

The online extension will be built using the open-source platform WordPress integrated with the Artsteps tool for 3D virtual gallery experience. Visitors can access the exhibition remotely, navigating an interactive digital "Memory Cemetery." Social media platforms like Instagram and X (Twitter) will be synchronized for audience engagement and updates.

Content will be managed via CMS (Content Management System) with tiered user access. Submissions for memory contribution will undergo moderation using built-in review tools, ensuring ethical compliance and data protection. The model references frameworks from MemorySpace.org and the "To Absent Friends" festival.

Invited artists and artworks

3.1 Invited artists



Figure 14

1.San Zhang (Zixin Zhang)

Contemporary Art Practice, University of Edinburgh



Figure 15

2.Keyi Ju

Contemporary Art Practice, University of Edinburgh



Figure 16

3.Shatha Altowai

A multi-award-winning Yemeni artist. Based in Edinburgh, UK



Figure 17

4.Alberta Whittle

Barbadian-Scottish multidisciplinary artist



Triptych Artwork

《Birth love death, vagina pussy cunt》

"Birth love death, vagina pussy cunt" No.1

Figure 18



Triptych Artwork

《Birth love death, vagina pussy cunt》

"Birth love death, vagina pussy cunt" No.2

Figure 19

"Birth love death, vagina pussy cunt" No.3



Figure 20

1.San Zhang.

@san.s.laughter

Contemporary Art Practice, University of
Edinburgh

Through mixed-media paintings, the cyclical
process of life and death is confronted,
showing the intertwining of the body and
the experience of existence.

3.2 Invited artwork



Gravestone with Branches

Metal

Finished on 3 October 2024

80 × 100 cm

2.Keyi JU

Contemporary Art Practice, University of Edinburgh

blending organic and monumental forms to symbolize fragile remembrance

3. Shatha Altowai

A multi-award-winning Yemeni artist. Based in Edinburgh, UK

Shatha Altowai confronts the deep emotional scars of war and displacement. Through etchings in bright red tones, Altowai depicts abstract, skeletal human figures, whose twisted and intertwined forms are filled with the pain of loss and longing. The delicate surgical suture marks in the images symbolise the physical and emotional wounds that are difficult to heal.



Figure 22

< Monument
of Loss >

@shatha.altowai

4. Alberta Whittle

Figure 23



Deep dive (pause) uncoiling memory (2022)

In deep dive (pause) uncoiling memory, multidisciplinary artist Alberta Whittle explores the intertwined relationships between trauma, memory, and healing. Through a hauntingly poetic blend of moving images, performance, and text, Whittle invites audiences to navigate collective histories of colonial violence, racial trauma, and personal loss. The work unfolds as an immersive, rhythmic experience, encouraging moments of reflection and pause amidst turbulent narratives.

By weaving together personal storytelling with global issues, Whittle emphasizes the fragile yet resilient nature of memory. The piece creates a space where grief, resistance, and care coexist, resonating deeply with the themes of vanishing existence, cultural remembrance, and emotional survival. Within the exhibition, deep dive (pause) uncoiling memory offers a profound meditation on the possibilities of healing through remembering.



Figure 24



Figure 25

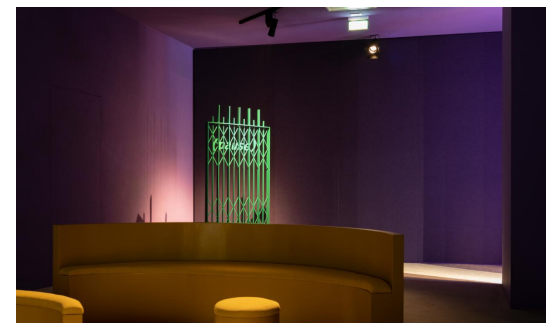
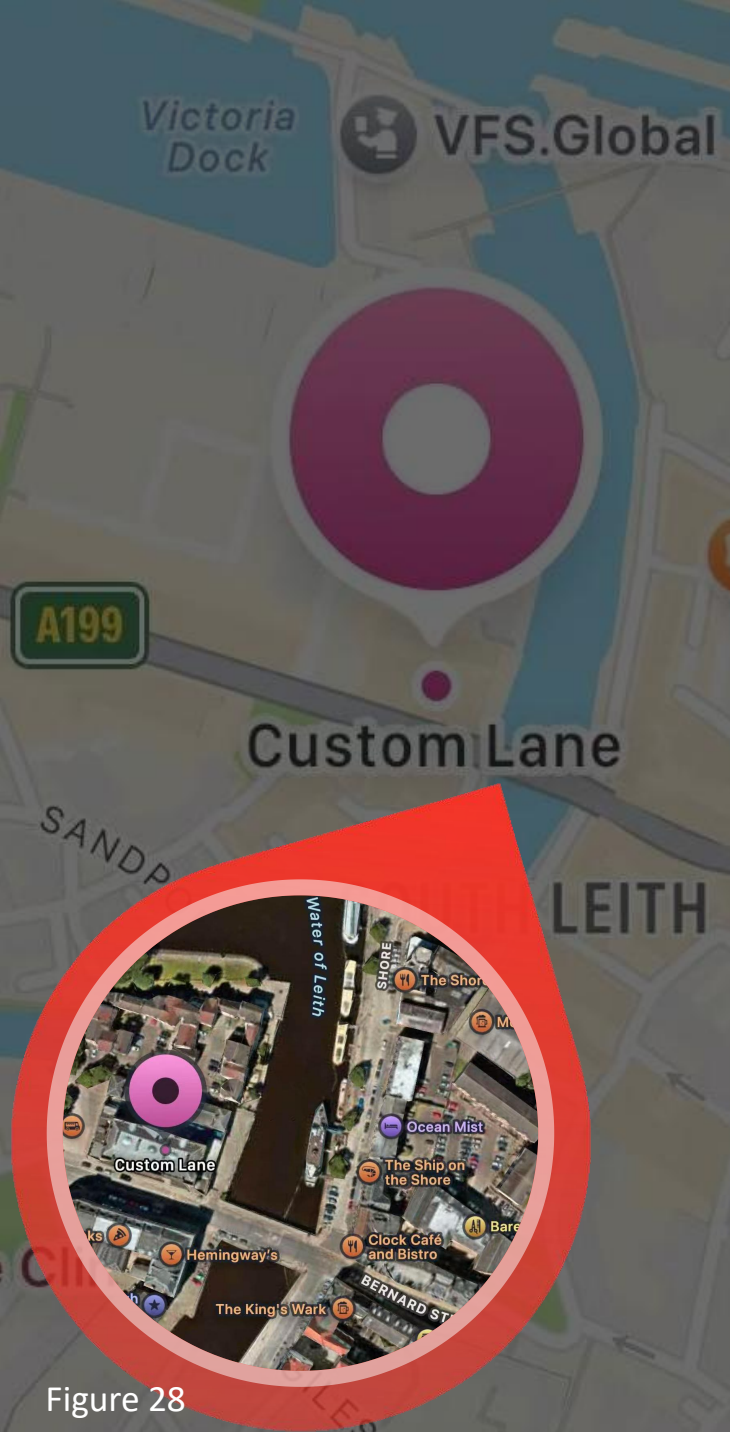


Figure 26



Figure 27



/04 Exhibition space and diagrams

Location: 1 Customs Wharf, Leith, Edinburgh EH6 6AL

▼ Edinburgh EH6 6AL

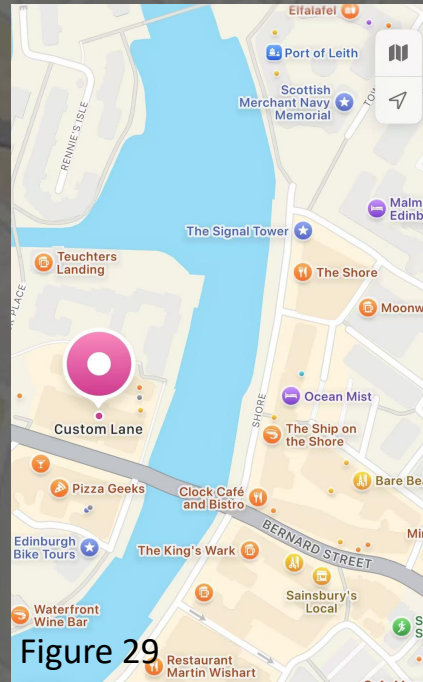


Figure 29

▼ Custom Lane | Exhibition Space | Ground Floor

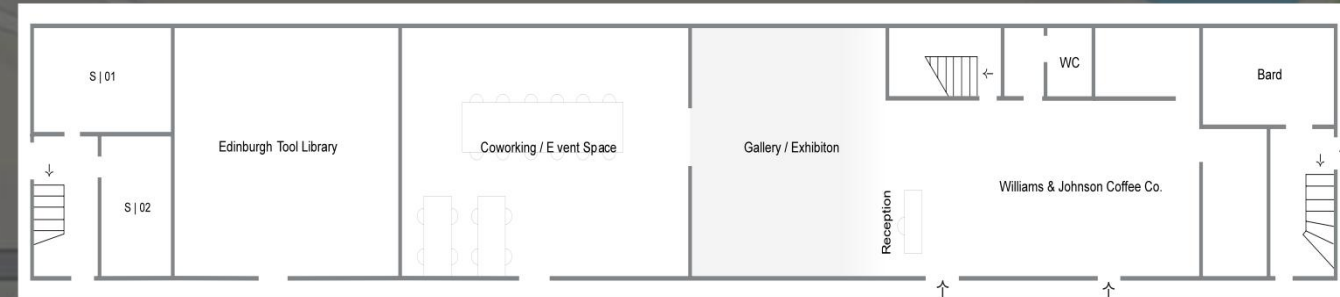


Figure 30

▼ Custom Lane | Meeting Room | Top Floor (The top floor will not be used for exhibitions.)



Figure 31

Figure 28

/04

Exhibition space and diagrams

· Open period: 1 week

· Size: 65m²

· Price: Various/£1200 per week

(Data source: official website of Custom Lane)

- Snacks & Drinks
- Exhibition Brochures & Flyers
- QR Codes for Online Archive & VR Access
- Volunteer Information Desk

· 'Birth love death, vagina pussy cunt' by San Zhang (Triptych)

'Echoes of the Past: VR Memory Cemetery'

Custom Lane | Exhibition Space | Ground Floor ▼

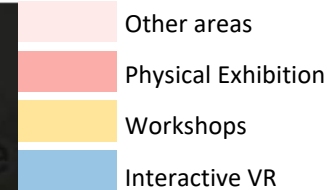


· 'Gravestone with Branches' by Keyi Ju

Deep dive (pause) uncoiling memory by Alberta Whittle

'Monument of Loss' by Shatha Altowai

Workshops*3
'Final Words Workshop'
'Memory Fragrance Lab'
'Symbolic Creation Studio'



Curatorial funding

INCOME

Item	Amount (£)
Creative Scotland Small Project Grant	2500
University of Edinburgh Support (Including the base, seats, partition boards and other tools used for the exhibition)	1000
In-kind Venue Support (Custom Lane)	1200
In-kind Artwork Donation from San Zhang and Keyi Ju	1200
Postcard & Brochure Sales	300
Community Collaboration Support	500
Own Resources	300
Total	7000

EXPENSES

Item	Amount (£)
Artist Fee & Artwork Rental (Whittle&Altowai)	2200
Materials & Installation Installation	900
Venue Rental	1200
VR & Technical Support VR	800
Printing & Promotion	400
Opening Event & Refreshments	200
Workshop Materials	300
Volunteer Subsidy	300
Documentation (Photography & Video)	200
Contingency Fund	300
Total	6800

Exhibition Timeline

1. Planning & Infrastructure Setup

September – Early October 2025

Confirm artists (San Zhang, Keyi Ju, Shatha Altowai, Alberta Whittle) and book Custom Lane venue

Finalize exhibition layout and technical setup (VR system, digital tombstone projection)

Launch initial promotion (Save the Date posts, Eventbrite registration)

3. Exhibition Period

October 30 – November 6, 2025

Opening event with artist talks and tea reception (October 30)

Daily operations: exhibition viewing, VR interaction, and two workshops:

- Whisper to the Wind (farewell message cards)
- Scent of Memories (collective scent ritual)

Online platform launch for global participation

01

02

03

04

October 24–29, 2025

Install artworks, set up VR and scent-memory areas

Test lighting, sound, and all interactive systems

Finalize signage, labels, and distribute exhibition brochures

2. Installation & Pre-Opening

November 6–8, 2025

Dismantle exhibition and restore space

Collect feedback and archive VR/online contributions

Submit final project report and maintain online archive for 12 months

4. Closing & Wrap-up

01. Artist Representation & Fair Practice

All participating artists in Vanishing Existence are women, reflecting a conscious curatorial commitment to amplifying female voices in contemporary art. The exhibition celebrates gender diversity, supports emerging talents such as postgraduate students from the University of Edinburgh, and ensures fair acknowledgment and respectful representation for all artists involved.

The exhibition design strictly adheres to the policies of the Edinburgh College of Art regarding equality, diversity and inclusiveness, ensuring an open and barrier-free participation opportunity.

If in the future there is participation by teenagers or vulnerable groups, the project will follow the requirements of relevant municipal and institutional authorities (such as the PVG certification) for ethical approval and safety guarantee arrangements.

02. Audience Ethics & Emotional Well-being

Given the sensitive theme of death and memory, the exhibition provides clear trigger warnings. Visitors are informed about potentially emotional content in advance. The exhibition ensures emotional support materials (e.g., counseling information cards) are available discreetly at the info desk. All installations are designed to be physically accessible for disabled audiences (barrier-free pathways, tactile elements).

03. Data Privacy & Online Platform Ethics

Visitors participating in workshops and VR activities will have the option to share memories anonymously. The Online Archive strictly follows GDPR regulations: no sensitive personal data is collected, and submissions can use nicknames or remain unnamed. Technical measures such as data encryption and periodic backups are adopted to safeguard audience privacy.

04. Environmental Ethics

The exhibition commits to sustainable practices: reusing display materials, renting VR devices, minimizing printed outputs, and encouraging digital interaction instead of wasteful physical handouts.

05. Copyright and Intellectual Property Compliance

All exhibited artworks and contributions made by audience memories are strictly in compliance with copyright regulations. In necessary cases, usage fees will be paid and usage agreements will be signed to ensure respect for intellectual property rights.



Figure 32

Other Details

Staffing arrangements

Workshop facilitator:

Two volunteers assist the audience in participating in the scent awakening experience and creative activities.

VR Area Technician:

One person is responsible for equipment operation guidance and order maintenance.

Front desk receptionist:

One person is responsible for welcoming the audience and providing information guidance.

Audience positioning and exhibition planning methods

- This project is mainly targeted at adult audiences aged 18-65, professionals in the field of art and culture, as well as the general public interested in memory, death studies, and new media art. The exhibition emphasizes multi-sensory experiences, focuses on privacy and accessibility, and integrates slow rhythms and spaces for personal reflection in the design.
- Audience considerations directly influence the exhibition layout (such as setting quiet areas), interactive sections (such as memory message areas), and barrier-free experiences (such as VR subtitles and convenient flow design).

Figure 33



Reference

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13. Whittle, Alberta. deep dive (pause) uncoiling memory. Glasgow International 2022.

Author's Declaration:

Except for those specially marked, all the pictures, photos, diagrams and digital illustrations in this proposal were taken or created by Haonan Zhang myself in 2025.



Atlas

Figure 1-2: custom lane: On-site photos. Photo by author, 2025.

Figure 3-7: Photos: Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain).

Figure 8、10、11: Image courtesy of Xiao Hong Shu, author unknown, Public Domain.

Figure 9: Virtual interactive scene, the image is created by the author, 2025

Figure 12: Circular cemetery, image created by the author, 2025

Figure 13: The picture was obtained from the official website of Custom Lane. 2025

Figure 14-15: The photo is provided by the artist herself. 2025

Figure 16-17: Photos: Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain).

Figure 18-20: The images are provided by the artist herself. 2025

Figure 21: The image are provided by the artist herself. 2025

Figure 22-27: Photos: Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain). licensed under Cc BY 4.0.

Figure 28-29: Images: From Google Maps Shared Resources (Public Domain).

Figure 30-31: The picture was obtained from the official website of Custom Lane. 2025

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