

# a Room, for a While

Ada Denil

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# Background

## A Room of One's Own // Rent Free



Gallery view of *A Room of One's Own // Rent Free*, 2023 at the Anna Leonowens Gallery, 1891 Granville Street, Halifax, NS.

In 2023 I had a solo exhibition at the Anna Leonowens Gallery in Halifax marking the end of my time at NSCAD. *A Room of One's Own // Rent Free* was a week-long open-studio performance reflecting on process, production and space. During the exhibition I used the gallery space as my studio during regular gallery hours. The space was arranged and furnished as an active studio environment, including work-purposed furniture, works in progress, various sculptures, drawings, inspirations and tools. The performance and the new work produced presented an active process of reflection on the limited resource that space is today, and aimed to demonstrate that having one's own space is crucial to the creative process.

# Artist Residency

## Lunenburg School of the Arts



"South Studio", second floor of the Lunenburg School of the Arts ("LSA"), 6 Prince St, Lunenburg, NS.

My time here has been defined by the aspiration to use this private studio space in a way that continues to demonstrate my assertion of the crucial role of personal space, and how access to space can help facilitate the transformation of nascent creative inclinations or quandaries into concrete artworks and new artistic directions.

During this residency I have been given access to a large private room on the second floor of the LSA, with 24/hour access, a material stipend, and a key: A room of my own. When this residency comes to a close I will have had this space for about 4 months. This has been a privilege. By continuing production of my paper cube series, *Rent Free*, in tandem with material explorations of copper as a sculptural medium, I was able to work my way through various ideas and technical challenges. After a winter of working in this way, I developed and began producing an entirely new body of work, which I intend to continue after this residency.

# The Cubes

My *Rent Free* cubes are constructed from scanned copies of pages of my sketchbooks printed on heavy cardstock.

The visual content of each page is fragmented somewhat through the process of cutting, folding and gluing. In some cases meaning is obscured, in others new connections are made. The pages (containing my ideas, thoughts, notes, sketches etc. all held in a private, two dimensional space) are lifted from my books, elevated to objecthood, and now placed in a public space. With their newfound presence as objects, they take on a certain personifiable quality, an individual character.

The making of this work began as (and continues to be) an attempt to work through and question issues surrounding space, while reflecting on my own desires and dreams of continuing to freely manifest my creative ideas and queries.

Imagine doing so in a secure space, and without the looming and existential threat that if I *make* this I need to *put it somewhere!* By creating these cubes, indiscriminately making all of my ideas into tangible, three dimensional objects that take up space in this way, I am intentionally constructing a conundrum. Previously, with the exception of the physical volume of a sketchbook, these ideas lived rent free in my mind. Now they need to be housed too...

That is why I am asking the public to house my cubes. To become a Caregiver, members of the public are asked to complete and sign an Art Caregiver Registration and Agreement, binding them to certain terms which dictate proper custodianship of the artwork.

Each cube and its Caregiver is listed on my website, with information regarding the location and time it was produced, as well as documentation (if provided by the Caregiver) of the cube in the space it now lives.

The cubes produced during this residency are available for adoption beginning as of the opening reception of this exhibition.



"The prospective Caregiver agrees:

1. The art is to live in a private residence (or a commercial setting occupied by the Caregiver)
2. To provide the art with sufficient and reasonable space, care and consideration
3. Never to strike or otherwise harm the art
4. Never to have the art declawed
5. Spaying or neutering the art is discouraged. The caregiver is invited to create art inspired by, referenced or influenced by the art. The caregiver is furthermore encouraged to generally engage in acts of making of all kinds.
6. To ensure that if the art is damaged, lost or stolen, to attempt to either repair, or recover the art if reasonably possible. The Caregiver may contact the Artist for assistance if needed.
7. If the art must be relinquished for any reason by the Caregiver, they MUST NOT turn the art over to garbage collection services, yard sales, or use the work as fire starter, but MUST return the art to the Artist. If the contact information for the Artist listed on the Artist's website is no longer operative, the Caregiver will make a good faith effort to locate and contact the Artist.
  - A. Transferring ownership of the art is acceptable only in the form of a gift.\*
  - B. The art shall not, under any circumstance, be sold/traded by the Caregiver.
8. The Caregiver gives the Artist permission to use their first name as part of the documentation of the artwork online.
9. The Caregiver hereby agrees that failure to perform the foregoing terms and conditions will constitute a breach of contract. In the event of any such breach of contract, the Caregiver hereby authorizes the Artist to reclaim possession of the adopted art.

In return for fulfillment of the above conditions, the Artist agrees to allow the Caregiver to adopt the above mentioned art." (from the Art Caregiver Registration and Agreement)



*Rent Free cubes created during the Winter  
artist residency at the LSA, 2025*



CUBE 076

Caregiver: n/a  
[not yet adopted]

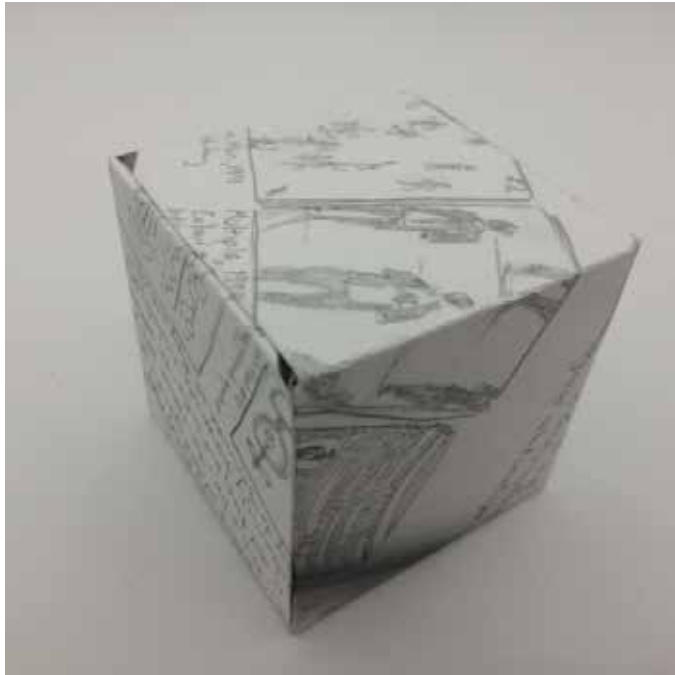
Date produced:  
February 28th 2025



CUBE 080

Caregiver: n/a  
[not yet adopted]

Date produced:  
March 1st  
2025



*CUBE 081*  
(two views)

Caregiver: n/a  
[not yet adopted]

Date produced:  
March 1st  
2025

# The Copper

During this residency I was able to spend the time I needed to acquaint myself with my materials, my tools, and adapt my working methods to a new-to-me space. This all takes time, and in addition to figuring out the *how*, I of course needed to nail down the *what*.

My material focus of this residency was copper. I worked on several small projects at first, some quite playful, others more technically challenging, and serving as trial runs of certain processes (annealing, soldering, and forming). This, paired with my *Rent Free* series of cubes, got the ball rolling.







At a certain point, after a few good weeks of exploratory work, something clicked, and I hit my stride. I excitedly started to develop and begin working on an entirely new series of copper sculptural works.

The works I've produced since that moment are informed by both dry and living seaweed specimens. I collected these inspirational bits and fragments while working as the railwoman on a small lobster boat this winter, with my partner (who is also my captain, in this context). My fascination and the delight I experienced with each new species that came up with our traps quickly led to a process of collecting, experiments in preservation, and the challenge of translating these salty weeds into sculptural forms.







I noticed that these weeds, unlike terrestrial plants, don't seem to depend heavily on roots. They grip and grab at different structures (rocks, traps, mooring lines, even the lobsters themselves), just to find a footing—a temporary anchor allowing them to find pause from the strength of the sea currents. That thought felt relatable to me. I think many people are, in so many different contexts, managing to survive in a very similar way today; adrift, looking for moments of steady footing, sustaining themselves as best they can with whatever their surroundings can offer. These observations left me thinking about where these weeds came from: where are the borders that define what is invasive, what is at home, and what is simply out of place? How far have these weeds drifted to find footing on this wharf, this rock, or this shore?







The body of work presented here stands as the starting point of a project I intend to pursue further; In this work I am exploring the concept of place and home through the lens of oceanic plant life. For this series of sculptures, I have chosen to work with copper as the main material with which I aim to capture the forms, textures, characters, and colours of the seaweed that I've been cataloguing. Copper is incredibly malleable when annealed, it doesn't rust, and is well known for developing a natural green patina when exposed to the elements. For centuries, copper has been used in marine applications, largely due to its resistance to corrosion, making it the ideal material for my marine-inspired sculptural forms. I aim to give my copper weeds a sense of self and humble pride, imbuing them with the personality I see in the plants on which these sculptures are based. When I collect them, the moment they hit the surface, pulled out of their water-world into ours, they slump and droop, caving in on themselves without the ocean to support them. But I don't think it's fair to judge these weeds of the sea by our terrestrial standards. I've attempted to honour their unique forms by mirroring the postures they adopt underwater. After all, when they're in their element they —like all of us—flourish.



# Selected Works





















# About the Artist

Ada Denil is a visual artist. Mainly working in sculpture and installation, she also engages with drawing, printmaking, painting, mixed-media, animation, or whatever she has at hand. Ada grew up on the south shore of Nova Scotia, and currently lives, makes art, and works in the same community.

Ada's work created during this residency involves material explorations of copper alongside ongoing investigations and reflections on notions of space. Her work often considers these ideas as defined by Michel de Certeau, who draws a distinction between *space* and *place*. A place is "an instantaneous configuration of positions"<sup>2</sup> where elements are fixed and distinct, and nothing can occupy the same location. On the other hand, space is made up of the intersections between moving elements. Any particular place can contain multitudes of spaces which exist simultaneously (intertwined, overlapping, in conflict, in tandem or in symbiosis). De Certeau argues that individuals *practice* space by moving within a place. The ground we stand on, the structures which surround us, these are only half of the equation. The physical structures of place influence and facilitate the creation of space(s), and the same is true in reverse.

Ada's work aims to call attention to how active presence, awareness, and action can alter our perception of the environments in which we find ourselves, as well as our place in them.

Ada received her Bachelor of Fine Art from NSCAD University in 2023 with a major in Fine Arts (Sculpture), and a minor in Art History, and was a recipient of the Arthur Lismer Award for academic excellence (GPA of 3.7 or higher).

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# References & Notes

The title of my exhibition held at the Anna Leonowens Gallery, *A Room of One's Own // Rent Free* (2023), makes direct reference to Virginia Woolf's essay of the same name, first published in 1929.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. Penguin Classics, 2004.

The definitions of space and place I reference are pulled from the writing of Michel De Certeau.

Certeau, Michel De. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. University of California Press, 1984.



