



Richard Allan Thomas

Black Prairies

Reflections on Undertold
Canadian Histories

Curated by Alyssa Fearon

2025

On Loss, Memory, & Radical Futurisms

On the pieces: If you really think about it life shouldn't feel this strange & We think we figured out why it was like that.

The following body of work began as an exploration of temporal cartography, maps of time. The investigation started by working with archives, maps, routes, territories, timelines, historic family photographs, artifacts, interviews, literature reviews and a series of deep material explorations. At a time in my life where I am reflecting on the past, how we came up, trying to understand myself, my family histories - and what's next. New readings on chronopolitics; shedding light on the colonization of futures, of untold and undertold histories influence the shape of the work. Assembling and integrating concepts of black temporalities, radical futurisms, hauntologies and ancestral conversations 'outside of time'. To approach a broad and open inquiry into temporal systems, I attempt to first identify my place in them. Which is why, at first, the work is so personal. Visualizations of time broadly, as I have come to understand, can be more atypical and lie outside of the conventional tropes of timeline, roadmap or non-linear webs of relational temporalities. It is in this freedom of form where I started experimenting with sculptural and two dimensional portraiture as a vehicle for transtemporal storytelling..

Within the framing of the two dimensional pieces featured in the 'In, Through and From' series titled: 'If you really think about it life shouldn't feel this strange' and 'We think we figured out why it was like that' - is a conversation with my mothers memory, and their basic architecture addresses 'inquiry and insights', questions and answers gained during the research phases of the work. What can I recall and revive. Through the making of them, I was able to better contextualize my family's experiences living and growing up in Alberta in the 80s and 90s. By accessing histories of black settlements through Canadian archives of newspaper articles, family and subject matter expert interviews, art on the subject and documentaries like CBCs Black on the Prairies, I was able to build a deeper understanding of the world we were living in. Context which was not accessible through education in my adolescence.

The discovery of Junkins, Keystone (now Breton), Campsie (near Barrhead), and Pine Creek (later Amber Valley) settlements and the unfavourable treatment of these settlers by the surrounding farming communities, felt familiar. Time moves slowly in the prairies.

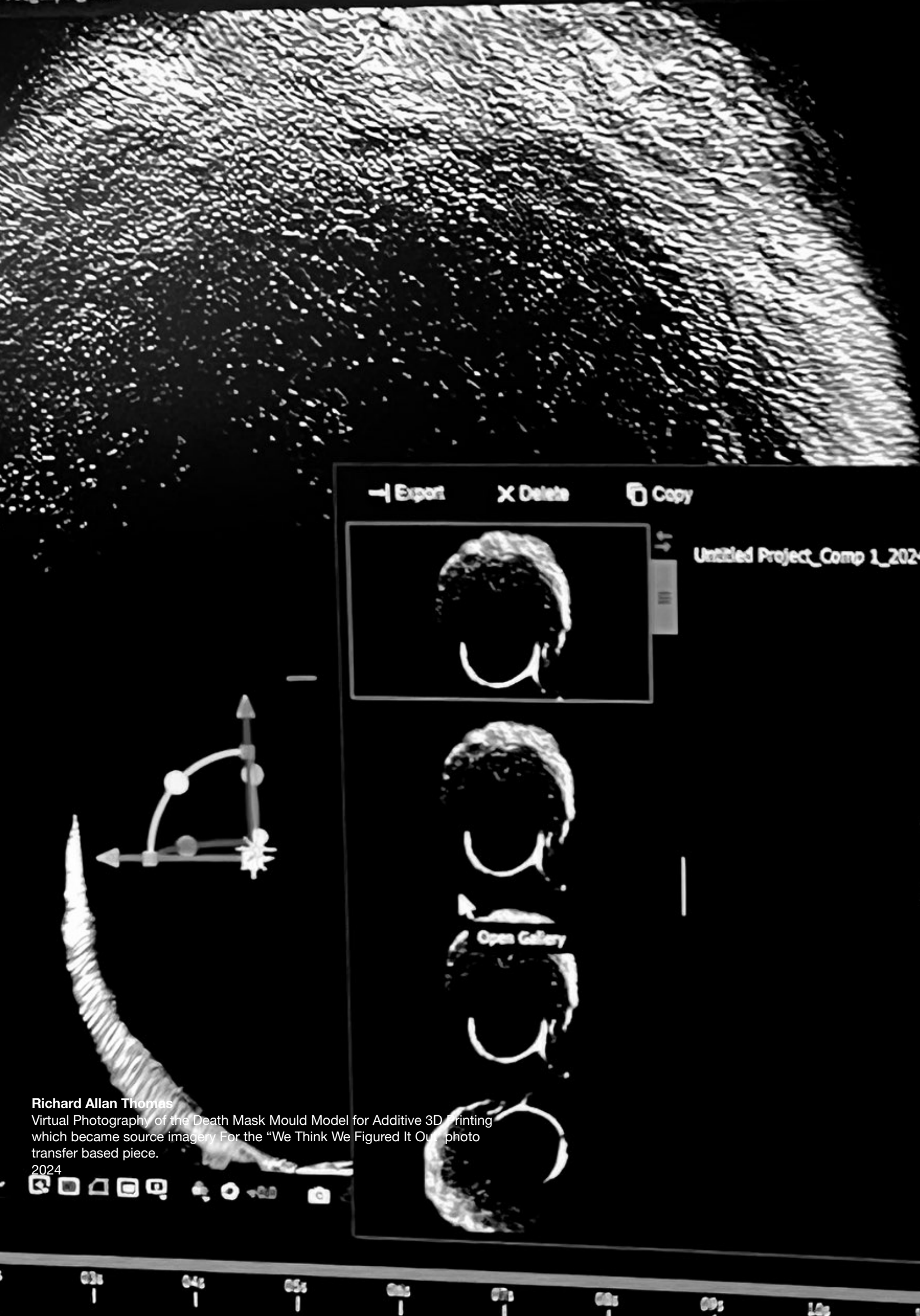
The gouache landscape transpositions atop - Japanese ink block washed gel image transfers in the following pages show a shroud-like crown of my mothers silhouette, binding these two not-so-distant times together. The landscapes sample archive photography of Obidiah Bowens farm near Amber Valley, a place unknown to me until recently - is located only miles away from where I grew up in northern Alberta countryside. The black on black painting intentionally forces the viewer to 'find the farm', to discover it, as I have. One painting is centered, grounded, powerful, in focus, even beautiful, while the other is glitched, disturbed, uneasy, uprooted, fractured, even violent - which reflects the experience of the dual realities of living multiracial and black in rural Alberta. A world that can be both peaceful or turned upside down with offside comments, connects the timelines of a century ago and today. I consider these two pieces unconventional maps of time, and my first step into a new direction of temporal cartography. A result of a conversation between research, painting, photography and sculpture.





Richard Allan Thomas
Depth Map Imagery of Archival Family Photographs and Virtual Photography
of the Death Mask Mould Model for Additive 3D Printing which became source
imagery For the “We Think We Figured It Out” photo transfer based piece.
2024

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Richard Allan Thomas
Virtual Photography of the Death Mask Mould Model for Additive 3D Printing
which became source imagery For the “We Think We Figured It Out” photo
transfer based piece.
2024



Archival Image reference of Obadiah Bowens Farm in Amber Valley, Alberta
Photographer Unknown
Early 1900s

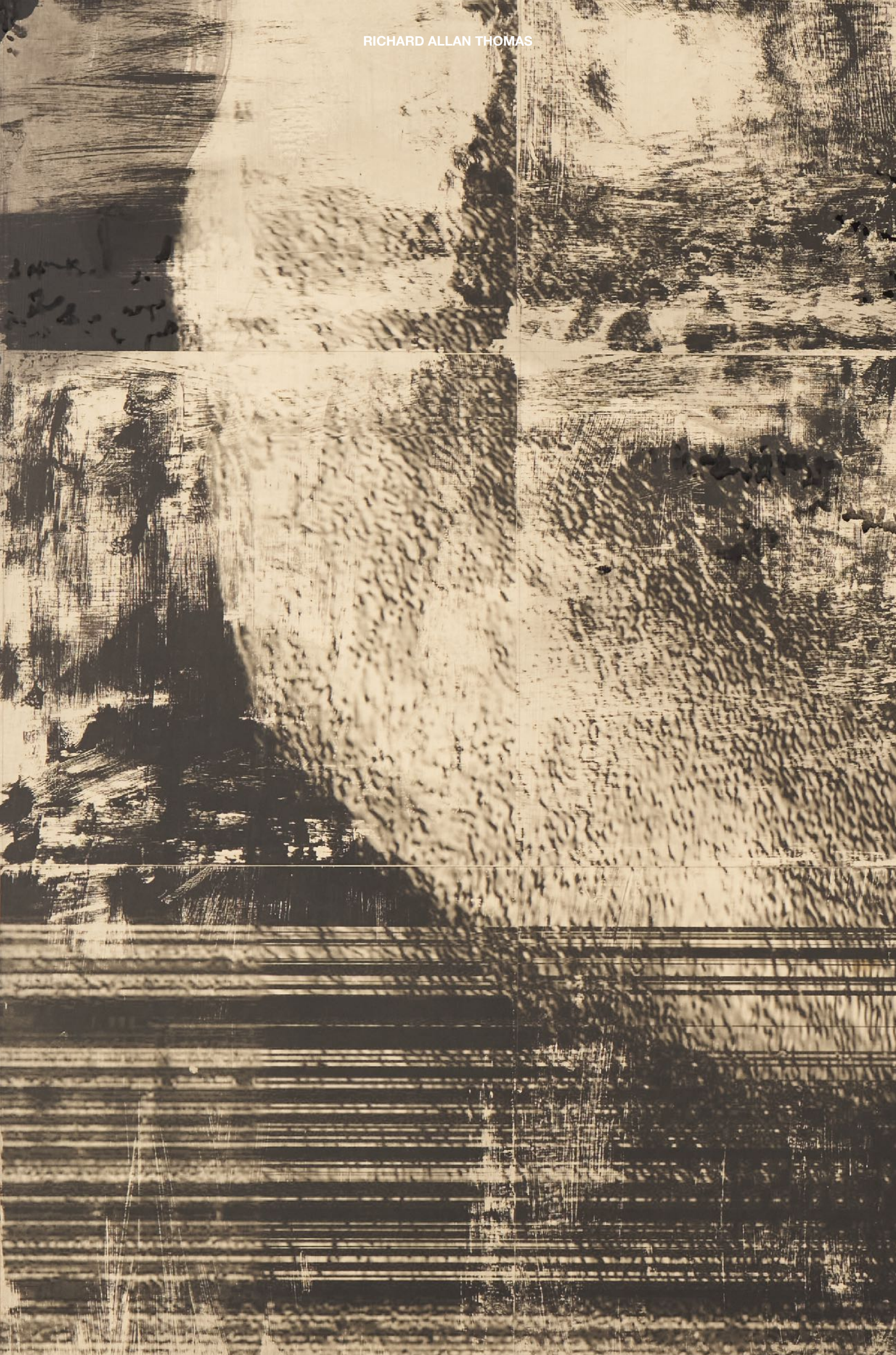


Richard Allan Thomas
If you really think about it life shouldn't feel this strange
2024
Gouache Landscape transpositions, 36 Japanese Ink Block washed Gel Image Transfers on Manila
121.9 x 121.9 x 0.6 cm / 48 x 48 x 0.25 in
125.7 x 125.7 x 3.81 cm / 49.5 x 49.5 x 1.5 in (framed)





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Richard Allan Thomas
We think we figured out why it was like that
2024

Gouache Landscape transpositions, 36 Japanese Ink Block washed Gel Image Transfers on Manila
121.9 x 121.9 x 0.6 cm / 48 x 48 x 0.25 in
125.7 x 125.7 x 3.81 cm / 49.5 x 49.5 x 1.5 in (framed)









I first encountered Achille Mbembe's work in Kathryn Yusoff's *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. In Mbembe's 'Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive', Mbembe calls for 'a radical reimagining of the archive to centre marginalized voices and epistemologies'.

The Death Mask Mould of Zorina Thomas (m. Baldwin) implicitly aims to contribute to this recentering. Many who encounter it are not aware of the western archival practices of deathmasking, taking facial casts of the recently deceased in order to preserve their likeness in perpetuity for reproduction and 'reperformance'. The power of an archive of death mask moulds is transtemporality, its ability to reproduce and continually recenter European thinkers through time. For many, Zorina's Death Mask Mould is the first they encounter. A death mask mould of a mother from the prairies, contributes to offset the archive, and center Black and multiracial people in it.



Richard Allan Thomas

Death Mask Mould of Zorina Thomas (Maiden name: Baldwin)
b.1951- d. 2017
2024

Death Mask Reference:
The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland
Interior of the mould of Dean Swift's Death Mask at Trinity in Dublin, Ireland
1951

IRELAND

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Journal of Medical

PLATE XVI.]

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Interior of the mould of the later (Trinity) death-mask.



Richard Allan Thomas

Death Mask of Zorina Thomas (Maiden name: Baldwin)

b.1951- d. 2017

2024

Carbon Black Pigmented UltraCal 30 Cast from Thermoplastic Additive Print

Generative Depth Map from family album sourced imagery

Gilded in 23 Karat Gold

50.8 x 38.1 x 17.9 cm / 20 x 15 x 7 in















In, Through & From series
is currently on view in the
Black Prairies Exhibition
at Dunlop Gallery,
curated by Alyssa Fearon.

2025

richardallanthomas.com