



ECOCENE

CAPPADOCIA JOURNAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES



Volume 6/Issue 1/June 2025

Ecocene Arts



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Ina, Andrew. 2025. "Between Places and Passages: Examining Fractured Identities through Nationhood, Memory, and the Archive." *Ecocene: Cappadocia Journal of Environmental Humanities* 6, no. 1 (June): 62–67. <https://doi.org/10.46863/ecocene.127>.

Artwork/ Received: 19.05.2025 /Accepted: 19.05.2025

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by Andrew Ina



About the Artist

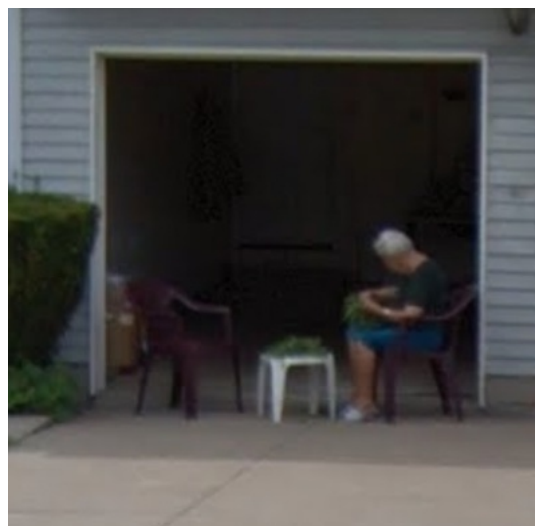
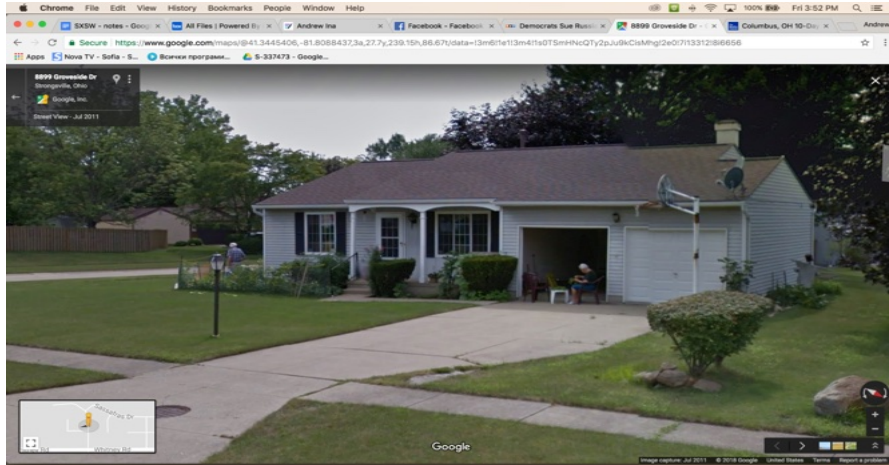
Andrew Ina's practice explores notions of ethnocentricity, familial histories, and memory through moving images and installations. His work has been exhibited widely, including recent exhibitions at RBC Media Gallery in Vancouver (BC), CO-OPt Research and Projects (TX), and Otterbein University (OH). In the spring of 2024, he participated as an artist in residence at the True/False Film Festival (MO). He also received the Similkameen Artist Residency Award (2025) in partnership with Griffin Projects (BC). His work has screened widely, including San Francisco Documentary Film Festival (CA), St. Louis International Film Festival (MO), Portland Film Festival (OR), The Glasgow Film Theatre (UK), and the Wexner Center for the Arts (OH). Andrew holds an MA in Animation from the Glasgow School of Art (UK) and an MFA from Emily Carr University in Vancouver (BC).

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Andrew Ina

During a serendipitous moment in 2011, I discovered an unexpected artifact of my Lebanese grandparents unknowingly photographed outside their suburban home in Cleveland, Ohio (USA). This image of my Teta (grandma) and Jido (grandpa) was captured by the tech conglomerate Google using its all-encompassing automated system. It was taken, stored, and uploaded to a server within seconds. I don't believe my Teta and Jido knew what Google was. I doubt either of them ever surfed the web, and neither had an email address. They didn't speak English, did not drive, and never owned cell phones. They were born, raised, and built a life for themselves in a remote village on the mountainside in the Bekaa Valley in eastern Lebanon. As the civil war intensified, they made the challenging decision to migrate across the ocean. Several of my audio/video materials showcased in this paper depict the land they left behind.

These images are microcosms representing the intersection of my family history and the experience of living between cultures (see Fig. 1-8). For example, the first figure shows my grandparents, carrying on as if they're still living in that village on the mountainside. In the photograph, Jido walks through his expansive and unruly vegetable garden that wraps around his entire suburban property. Teta trims a harvest of parsley that will soon be turned into a fresh batch of tabbouleh. I have always admired my grandparents' resistance to conformity. They chose not to embrace the conveniences of modern technology and the middle-class American lifestyle. It wasn't just stubbornness or a refusal to accept change; it was a conscious effort to preserve their way of life.



Figures 1–3. Google Maps artifact; Details of Teta and Jido from Google Maps artifact.

How should we reconsider the cultural identity of those between here and there? For people whose sense of self is destabilized and separated from their place of origin

this undermines their role within the societal structures they have learned. How do they navigate the space between two or more cultures, oscillating between familiarity and estrangement? This condition can also distort their perception of time and place. As Stuart Hall writes: “This loss of a stable ‘sense of self’ is sometimes called the dislocation or de-centering of the subject. This set of double displacements—decentering individuals from their place in the social/cultural world and themselves—constitutes a ‘crisis of identity for the individual” (597, 1996). This is the space where my work operates. I explore the malleability of identity by melding audio/visual materials related to my family’s multifaceted experiences. These rhythmic exchanges, in which time and place are always in question, embody the essence of hybridity.



Figure 4. Ina, Andrew. *Do You See How Big the Sea Is*, 2024.

What many diasporic people carry with them are their memories—the memories of a different time. Especially those who have limited or no access to their place of origin. These reverberating narratives are rooted in nostalgic bliss, carefully maintained, and often idealized. As Benedict Anderson says:

All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives . . . The photograph is only the most peremptory of a huge modern accumulation of documentary evidence, which simultaneously records a certain apparent continuity and emphasizes its loss from memory. Out of this estrangement comes a conception of personhood, identity, which, because it can not be ‘remembered,’ must be narrated (2006, 204).

Similarly, my work investigates how these memories are shaped and whether they are reshaped over time. How are they passed down to a generation separated from the homeland as oral history, outside their original context? Do they hold the same value?



Figure 5. Ina, Andrew. *Do You See How Big the Sea Is*, 2024.

Toward the end of her life, my Teta, who reluctantly immigrated to the United States in her older age, used to tell me (in Arabic) that the Lebanon she knew was gone; it no longer exists. I wasn't always sure how to respond to this sentiment. Lebanon still had its borders, and while mired in corruption scandals and dysfunction, a government was in place. However, after years of conflict and external occupation, it felt like it was failing. Her imagined community, Lebanon, as she saw it, could not be sustained.



Figure 6. Ina, Andrew. *How Often Have You Sailed In My Dreams*, 2023-24.

As Dr. Jumana Bayeh explains in her book, *The Literature of the Lebanese Diaspora*, the term diaspora is complex. Bayeh writes: “This exposes diaspora’s capacity to disrupt many normative ideas about place, as expressed through homes, homelands, and nation-states, and challenges the earlier described closed definition of the term . . . It is this aspect of the diasporic condition, its very uncertainty and instability, that confronts the concept of place and disrupts its seemingly fixed character” (2014, 10). Bayeh’s book focuses on the literature produced in the aftermath of the Lebanese Civil War and how these various experiences shaped Lebanese diasporic identity. It also investigates varying perspectives of the conflict, as no two historical accounts are the same. This broader

systemic structure has plagued the state of Lebanon, and the ripples of colonial partitioning are still being confronted.

I reference these themes in my recent work, *How Often Have You Sailed In My Dreams* (2023–24), in which I created a mixed-media animation project anchored by three photographs. The first photograph features my father standing in front of the Litany River with his friends, just before he left Lebanon in 1972. He appears young and seemingly unaware of the immense turmoil he would leave behind. The second image, from 1978, represents a very different moment—a depiction of success. He stands in the parking lot of his franchised restaurant, shaking Big Boy’s hand after capturing his piece of the American Dream. The third image shows my sister and me as children during our first return visit to Lebanon in the summer of 1986. We stand on my Jido’s land, posing with his donkey, on the same soil where my father stood in the first picture I referenced. The animated sequence also incorporates the floral wallpaper of my childhood home, British maps from the early 20th century illustrating how the Levant would be partitioned, and a looping video of the sea. The animation is projected in space on a vertically oriented rectangular form seamlessly conjoined to the wall. It loops in the space without a clear beginning or end. Sound plays an integral role in this project as well. The soundscape accompanying the projection weaves audio from various sources, including crashing waves, church bells, rumbling tanks, Fairuz, and an 8-bit Nintendo.

As I source my primary images, I search for common threads and overlapping narratives within my familial history that connect to my broader ideas. I am drawn to images that feel both familiar and unfamiliar. Moreover, I want to emphasize celebratory performances, unique cultural rituals, and images of domestic mundanity to alter perceptions of Levantine culture in the West’s collective unconscious.



Figure 7–8. Ina, Andrew. *How Often Have You Sailed In My Dreams*, 2023–24.

Nostalgia also acts as an activator in the materials I employ. Through specific media and sound, I aim to revive emotions that may have gone dormant and reconstruct memories that have strayed. In her book titled *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym describes nostalgia as a condition that “desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time as space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition” (2001, xv). The sound of Fairuz’s voice, which lives in the collective memory of the Lebanese people, is iconic and tranquil. Even as a first-generation immigrant, I am transported to another place when I hear her singing, like drinking coffee with my grandparents on their balcony. But that is where the romance ends. Interweaving nostalgic, multi-sensory elements, such as Fairuz’s voice or floral wallpaper, disrupts our sense of presence and temporality. Boym also discusses what she describes as two ways we reminisce: “Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt” (2001, xviii). She elaborates that “reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and demoralizes space . . . It reveals that longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another (2001, 49–50). This distinction in our experiences of nostalgia, particularly her thoughts on a reflective approach, aligns with my research. I do not idealize the homeland as unquestionable and homogeneous. I view my identity and that of others in the Levantine diaspora critically, visualizing a fragmented search for a home.

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