

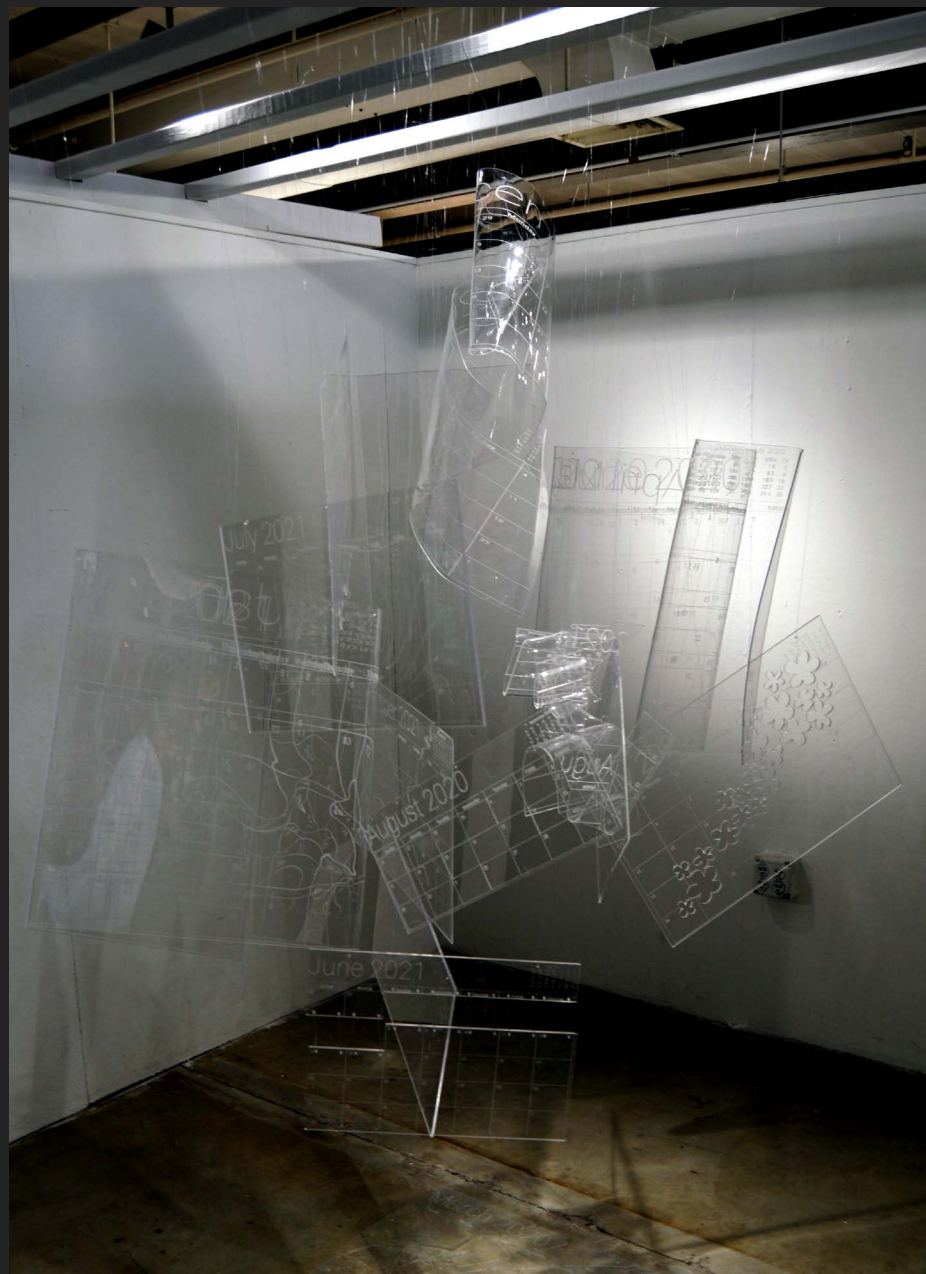


BY NAOMI SHAND

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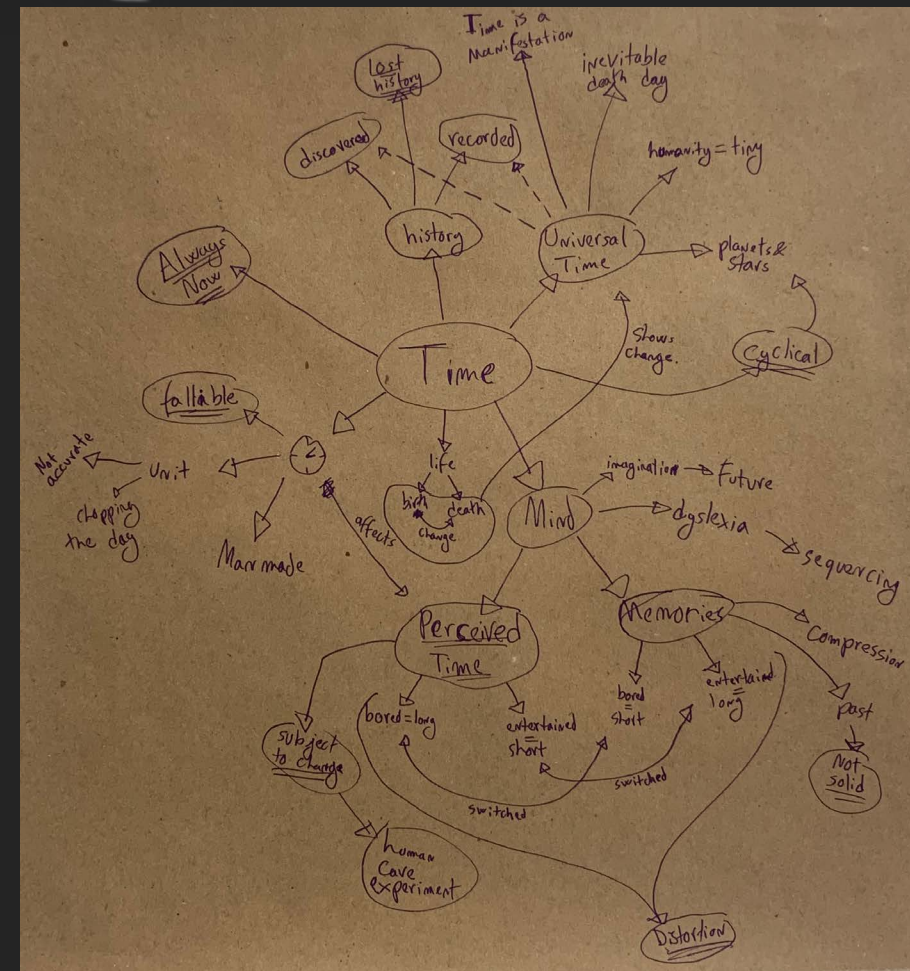
INTRODUCTION

I feel that time is a subject that has always eluded me. It's so difficult to wrap my head around. The objective truth is that time moves forward in a linear and consistent fashion but that is not how time feels. I believe there is a big difference between how time works and how it is experienced by the mind and that discordance is something I have struggled with for as long as I can remember. Time feels inconsistent, hours and days seem to flow at different speeds. Activities never take the right amount of time. It always seems to move faster than expected, making me play a seemingly endless catch-up game. It's a topic I find very confusing. This struggle I experience was exacerbated by the recent Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. Time felt more warped than ever before, which led me to want to understand time. I was hoping that studying how time works would help me fix my sense of time or at the very least make it easier to grasp. However, after doing my research, I could not achieve those goals, but I was able to gain a greater understanding of how the mind reconciles time.



RESEARCH AND PROCESS

I started this project by researching time, I wanted to understand why my experiences were the way they were. I found an overwhelming amount of information; time is a very complicated subject with many ways to study it. During my preliminary research, I discovered a term called psychological time which piqued my interest. Looking into it further I read *Psychological Time* by Dan Zakay, a chapter in the book *Philosophy and Psychology of time*. The chapter describes the various ways time is processed by the human mind and explains a lot about why time in the mind is so different from the time in physics. To briefly paraphrase: Our sense of time is based on an amalgamation of different sensory information. Zakay says the reason is likely that we do not need a dedicated perceptual system for time because our bodies natural processes, like aging or our change in moods, allow us to sense/experience the flow of time. But because we do not have a dedicated system our sense of time is prone to temporal illusions which is why psychological time is non-linear. While time in physics happens at a constant rate, psychological time can speed up, slow down, and pause. Time as we know it is built on two aspects, our awareness of the present and our ability to remember the past. With these two we can see how things change around us and that becomes our sense of time.

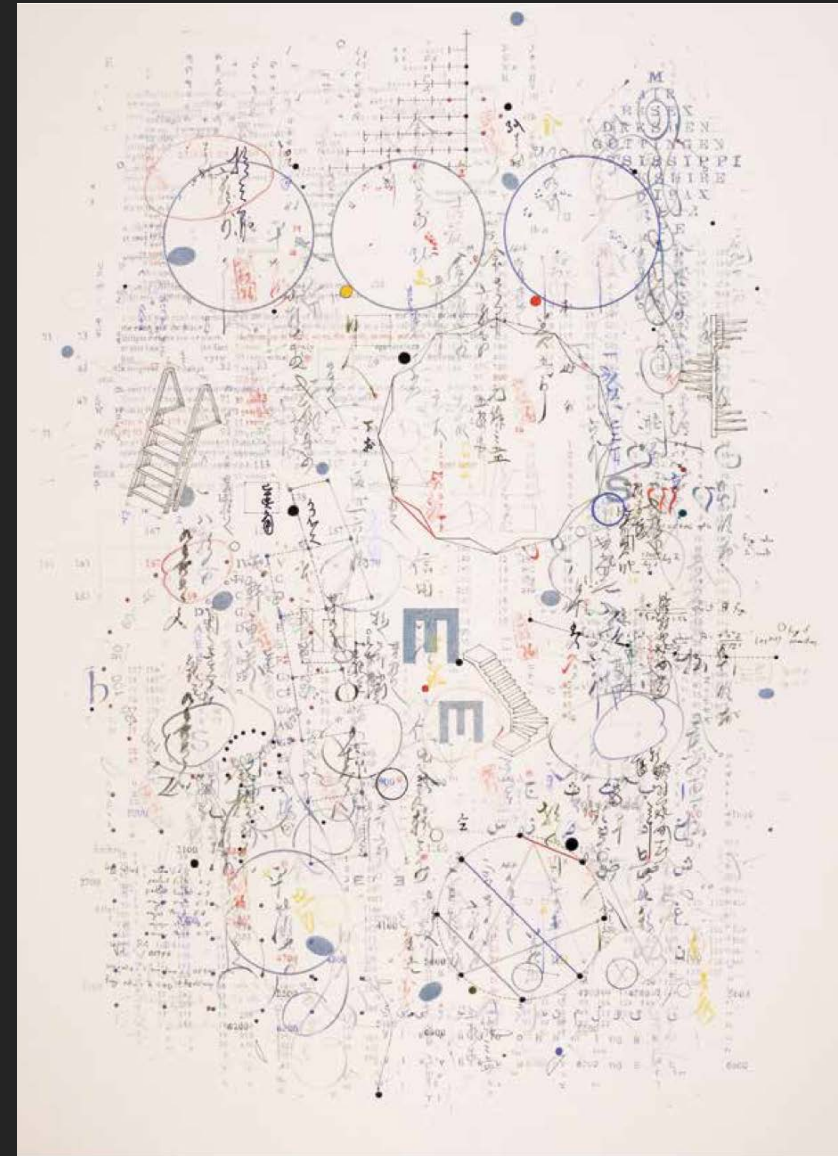


Example of an initial exploration of the subject through mind maps

Upon reading this I got interested in psychological time and what I learned here became the keystone of my project. Around the same time as this reading, I found an article called “There Are No Hours or Days in Coronatime” by the Wired that discusses people’s perception of time during the pandemic which helps further explain psychological time. This article discusses the phenomenon many experienced during quarantine that is jokingly called “Coronatime”. This term is used to describe the feeling of time all blending in together. Days turn into weeks, weekends and weekdays have no distinction, a month and a week feel the same, that is Coronatime. The article goes from describing the phenomenon to looking at psychological research as to what is causing it. In short, it boils down to how the brain remembers events. Periods with a lot of activities, especially a wide variety of activities, will take a lot of space in your memory and thus feel like they took more time. On the other hand, slow and repetitive activities will seem less important to the brain and thus it will feel more compressed.

Throughout this year-long project, I changed my mind a lot on what I should make. I have counted 6 somewhat distinct iterations but throughout it, all the knowledge I gained from these two readings remained central to the work.

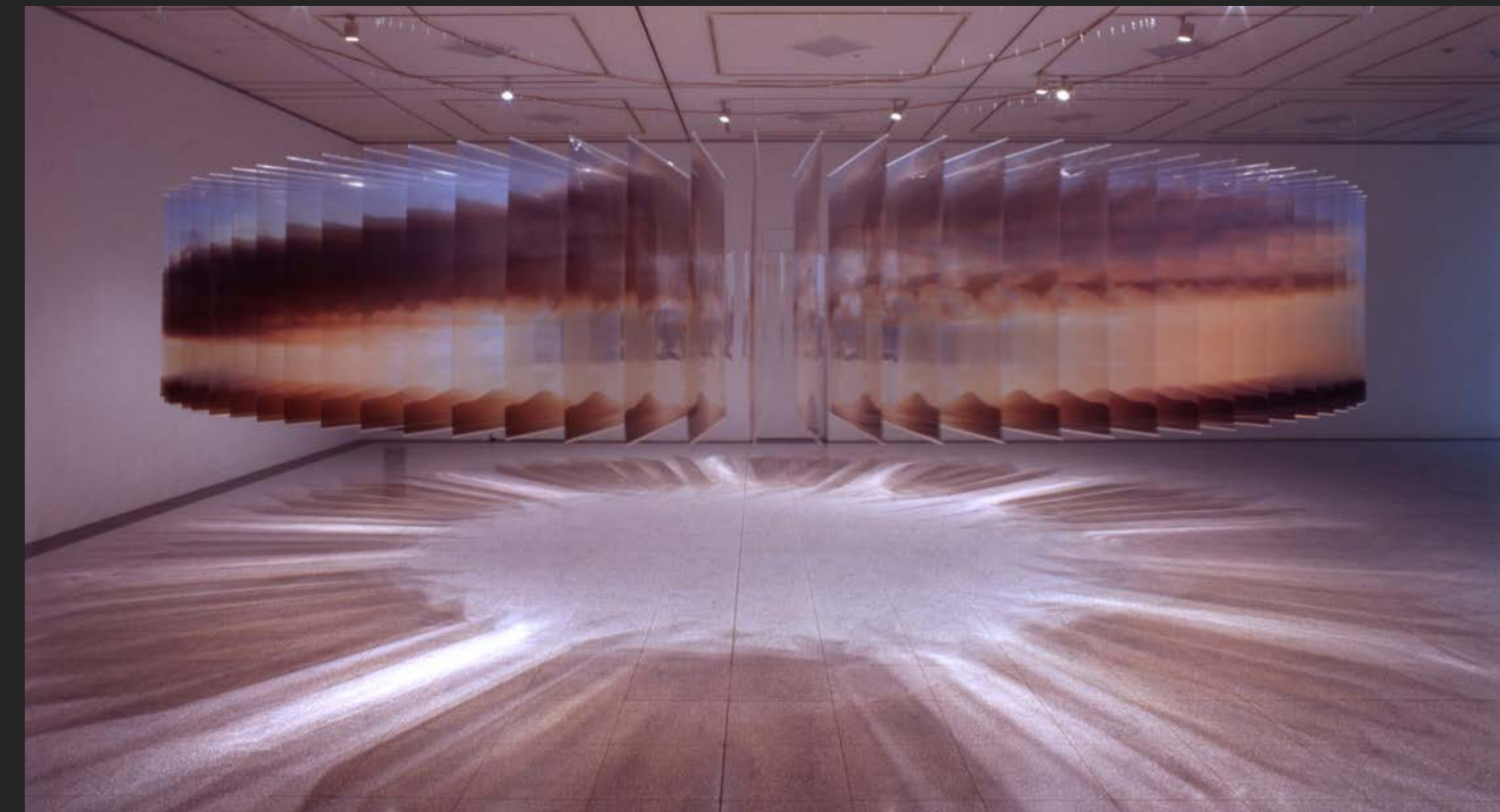
At first, I was very interested in how memories play a role in our sense of time, they seem to be the main reason why our time feels distorted. One of the first art sources I looked at in my research was the *Accounting For* series by Paul Gabicki, featured in the book *Tick tock: Time in contemporary art*, which is a large series of drawings based on a 1930’s Japanese accounting ledger. In this series, Gabicki transcribed each page and layered over them various bits of daily life information ranging from important to banal. All the information creates a sense of cacophony, the sheer abundance drowns out all information making it difficult to gather any useful information from the mess. Although the description of the work points out the utilitarian recording of time as a piece of interest in the work, I was a lot more interested in the aspect of overlaying information to the point of illegibility. It reminded me of how time gets layered in our memories and how information can be drowned out over time. At the time I was interested in doing a series of layered drawings based on reflections of my past and the ways time affected my recollections. But as I explored this idea, I ran into issues of not knowing where to start and running out of ideas on subjects to draw about. I realized my project needed to be more grounded and that I had started to lose interest in the project.



Accounting For by Paul Gabicki

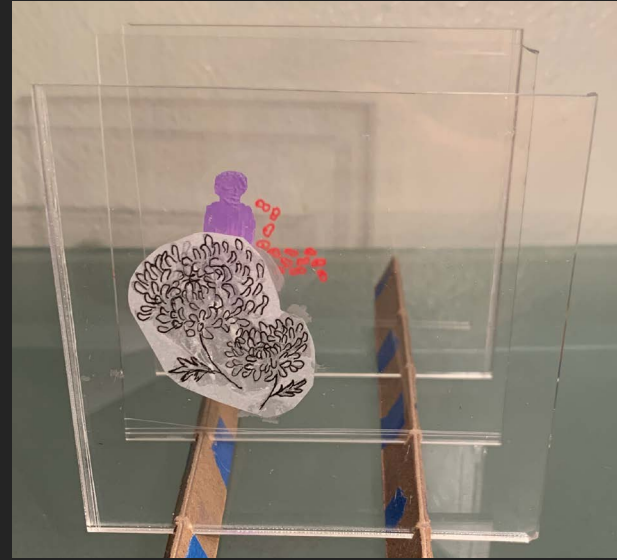
That was the first big pivot my project took. Previously I had taken interest in doing a 3D hanging installation where people could look at the work from multiple angles because when reflecting on time there isn’t one right way to remember. That aspect of the hanging installation survived the pivot. During the transition of my project idea, I started looking into acrylic sheets. I wanted to keep the layering aspect from my past iterations, I felt it connected well to the nature of time. I liked that with transparent acrylic sheets I could have a layering aspect in physical space where no matter how you looked at the installation you would be able to see the other layers behind it. No layer could be singled out and alone.

Wanting to explore transparency and acrylics led me to look at the work *Layer Drawings* by artist Nobuhiru Nakanishi. The series consists of photographs printed on transparent film and mounted on acrylic sheets. Each piece is made of a series of photographs mounted one behind the other. The photographs are all in the same places at slightly different moments in time. It allows the viewer to see through multiple panels at once making it easy to see the changes in the scene as time goes by. I was very interested in how the layers interacted with each other. Although I went through a couple of levels of iterations after seeing this piece, I kept the idea of using transparent sheets to create a layering aspect in part thanks to this work.



Layer Drawings by Nobuhiru Nakanishi

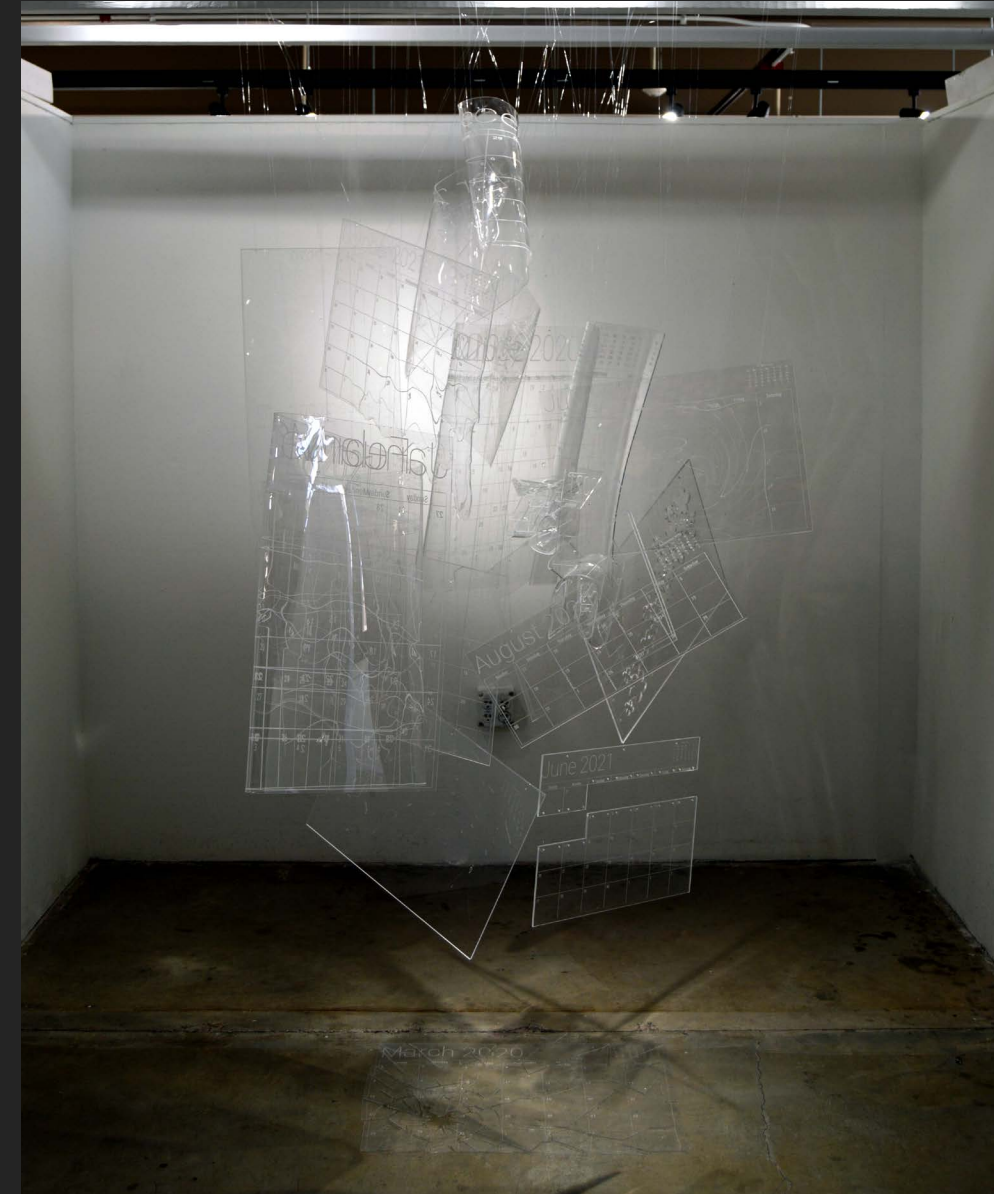
Throughout my iterations, I kept on running into the same issue of my ideas feeling too open which is why I felt the need to ground them. After the big pivot I mentioned earlier I decided my project needed to have more of a framework from which I could then expand. I started feeling more interested in how the time itself left distorted and less on the memory aspect of time. It took a couple of iterations, but I eventually got interested in modifying calendars. I liked the image of calendars as a time-keeping tool we all recognize. It is consistent and rigid; it pushes forward the linearity of time. By modifying it I could take a time structure (a month) that everybody experienced but change it into what it felt like to me. Physically distorting it just like how the time I experienced was distorted in my recollection. I could make a month shorter or stretch it out. I could take the rigidity and consistency of physical time and change it to be warped. Taking a transparent acrylic sheet, which is straight and rigid by nature, and using heat to physically change its shape to be wavy and irregular lent itself perfectly to the ideas I was trying to push across.



Early iteration of layering images using acrylic sheets



This was one of my first test on the possibility of using a heat gun to bend acrylic sheets, this test informed what sort of heat modifications I could do to my calendars.



ARTIST STATEMENT

Time since Covid has been weird. Although I can objectively tell it's moving, it feels like it's been frozen in 2020. Time is weird like that. It's the objective truth that time is moving sequentially forward at a consistent rate, yet it rarely feels like it does. That disconnect exists because of how our brains process time. It's built from a collage of short-term and long-term memories mixed with the knowledge of the present moment. This collage is susceptible to change by our emotions and our environment. 5 minutes of boredom feels like ages at first and then is forgotten when looking back. Everybody experiences time in their own distorted way.

Time felt especially distorted during the lockdowns when my daily reference points were taken away. I've felt a great disconnect between the time that was passing and my experience of it. Seeing time advance without feeling its passing was quite distressing and that's what led me to do this project. I decided to explore that disconnect using sequential time-keeping devices like calendars and modifying them to what my experience of that represented time felt like.

My final piece is a series of 13 acrylic sheets suspended in the air with a 14th sheet on the ground at the center of the cluster. Each sheet is engraved with a calendar month ranging from March 2020 to December 2021. The calendar on the ground is March 2020. It is shattered with the center of the crack being the 25th, the day Michigan went into lockdown. The start of the lockdown felt like a catalyst for the pronounced time distortion of 2020 and 2021. Thus, I decided to place March 2020 at the center of the cluster with the other sheets surrounding and raising from it. The hanging months are packed tightly together in a disorganized manner to remove any sense of temporal linearity. I stretched, superposed, and cut apart months based on how I remember experiencing them

