

Lena Okafor

MFA Application Portfolio

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Table of Contents

Current Research: Holding Patterns 1

Artist Statement 2

Biography 3

Curriculum Vitae 4

Selected Works 5

Contact 17

Current Research: Holding Patterns

Holding Patterns is a developing fictional body of work combining painting, fabric, wood, and modular display structures.

The project began with small paintings of shelves and storage spaces. Over time, those images led to freestanding wooden forms and folded textile elements that echo the same proportions.

My current research focuses on how painting can move beyond the wall without becoming purely sculptural. I am testing arrangements in which images, supports, and stored objects share the same visual hierarchy.

The work is still developing. For graduate study, I want to expand this research through larger installations, material experimentation, and sustained critique around the relationship between image, object, and memory.

Artist Statement

My practice moves between painting, handmade objects, and small installations. I use repeated domestic forms such as shelves, folded fabric, table edges, boxes, and window-like frames to think about storage, inheritance, and the way personal histories are organized.

I often begin with painted studies based on family photographs or remembered rooms. These images are then translated into objects or spatial arrangements. Rather than reproducing a specific memory, I focus on how partial information can still carry emotional weight.

I am currently interested in building installations in which paintings function as objects within a larger physical system. The work asks how an image changes when it is placed beside a material that can be touched, moved, folded, or carried.

Lena Okafor is a fictional interdisciplinary artist based in Chicago. She works across painting, textile, wood, and installation.

Her recent work examines domestic storage, inherited objects, fragmented memory, and the relationship between painted images and physical supports. She is preparing a fictional MFA application portfolio while developing a new installation-based body of work.

LENA OKAFOR

Lives and works in Chicago, United States

Selected group exhibitions

- 2026 *Material Memory*, East Room Projects, Chicago, IL
- 2025 *New Work Open*, Platform Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 2024 *After the Room*, Lake Street Project Space, Chicago, IL

Residencies

- 2025 Summer Studio Program, North Yard Arts, Milwaukee, WI

Education

- 2019–2023 BFA Studio Art, Lakeshore College of Art, Chicago, IL

Grants & awards

- 2023 Departmental Studio Award, Lakeshore College of Art, Chicago, IL



Shelf Study I

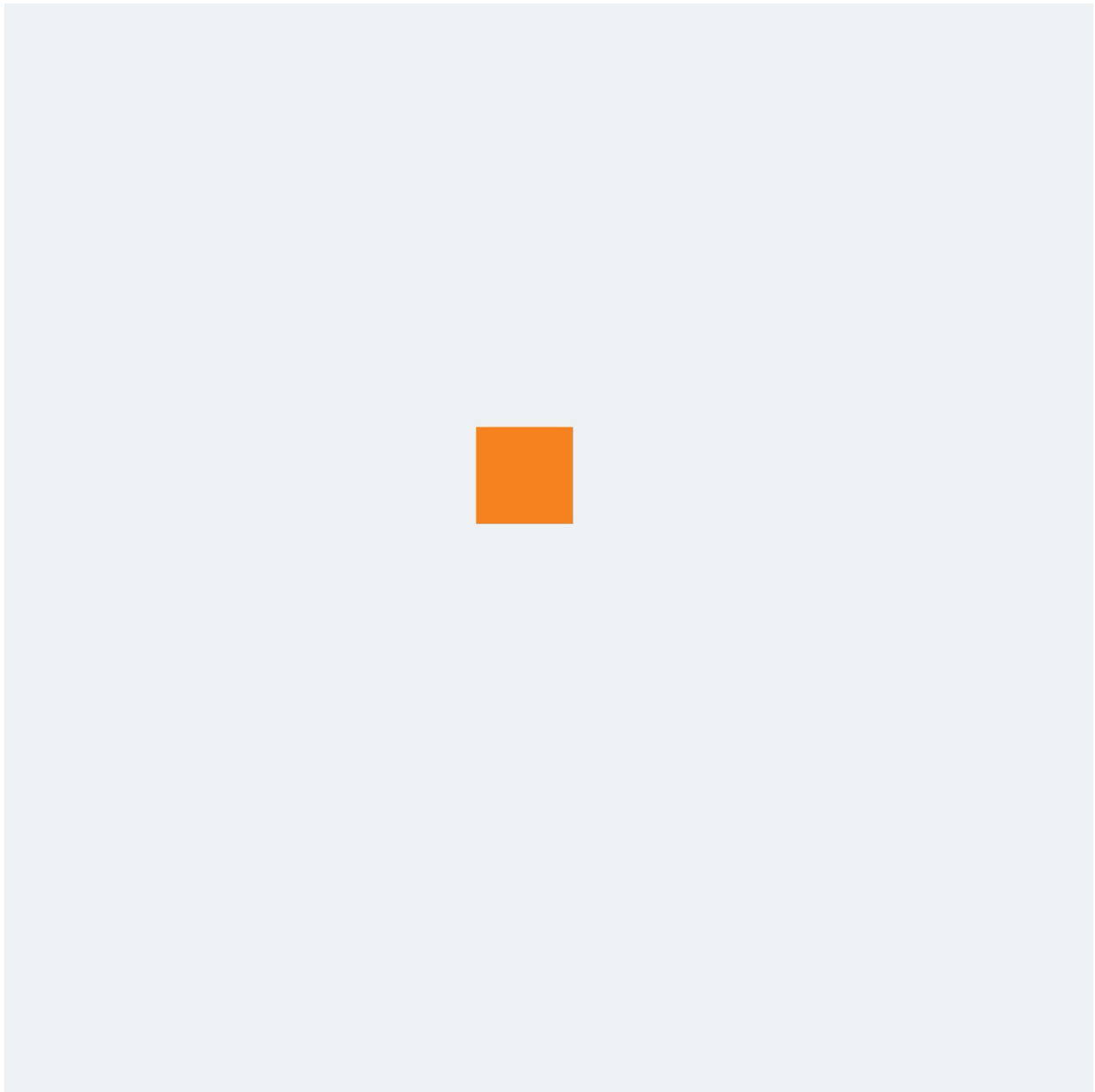
Oil and acrylic on canvas

76 x 102 cm

2025



Folded Room
Oil on canvas
91 x 122 cm
2025

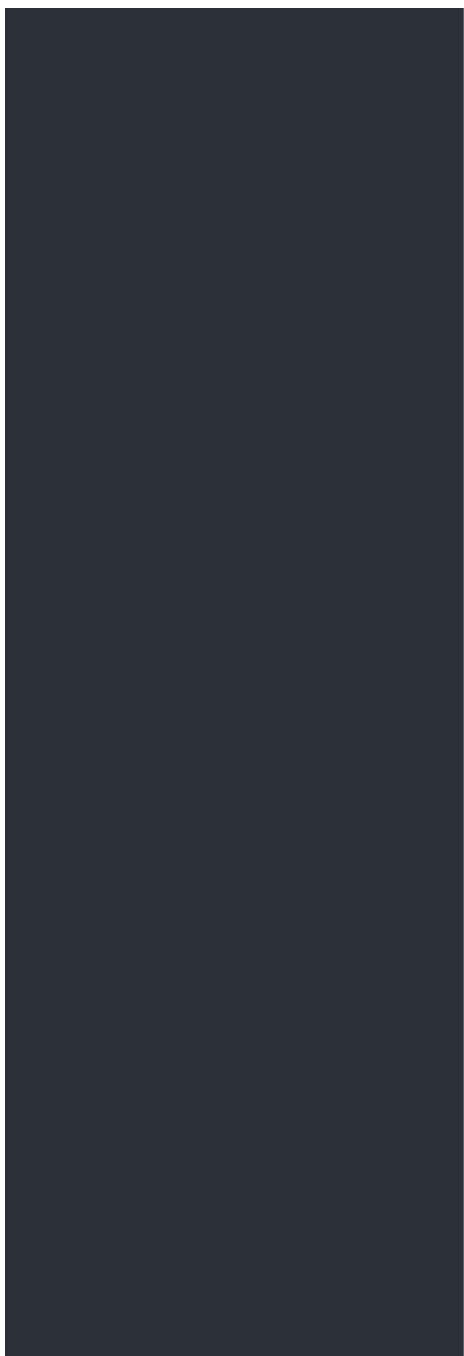


Stored Forms

Oil and acrylic on wood panel

80 x 100 cm

2025



Holding Pattern I

Painted wood panel and cotton textile

118 x 82 x 12 cm

2026



Fold Support

Cotton textile, plywood and hardware

126 x 74 x 48 cm

2026



Shelf for a Remembered Room

Plywood, paint and found fabric

142 x 96 x 42 cm

2026



Window Frame Study

Painted wood, textile and canvas

154 x 108 x 24 cm

2026



Table Edge

Wood, cotton textile and acrylic

98 x 164 x 72 cm

2026



Holding Patterns II

Painting, textile and wood installation

220 x 280 x 180 cm

2026



Between Rooms

Wood, canvas, textile and found hardware

190 x 240 x 160 cm

2026



What the Shelf Keeps

Painting and mixed-media installation

240 x 360 x 210 cm

2026



Holding Patterns III

Painting, textile and wood installation

260 x 420 x 230 cm

2026

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