

# *Material Witness*

**A mixed media exhibition by Nancy Marks**

**Exploring my mother's experience as a Holocaust survivor and the parallels immigrants are living through today.**



## About Material Witness

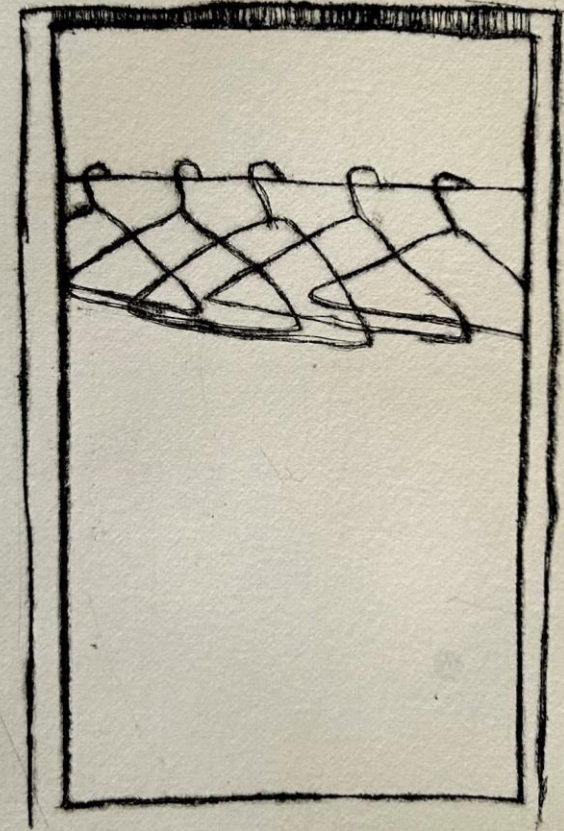
Material Witness is a dialogue in print and poetry, an unearthing of the fragile bridge between past and present. It is born from my experience as the daughter of a Holocaust survivor and delves into my mother's harrowing girlhood in Nazi-occupied France. Crucially, it confronts the chilling parallels between her ordeal in the 1940s and the realities faced by immigrants today.

The heart of this exhibition lies in my mother's memoir, *Me in Bits and Pieces*, penned in her eighties. It recounts her life in Nice and the terror of the Holocaust, which forced her into hiding at age 14 with her four-year-old brother. During this time, my grandparents navigated the risky paths of the Partisan Underground.

As a child of a survivor, I inherited a legacy of intergenerational trauma. This deeply embedded experience, both conscious and unconscious, has sharpened my senses to the insidious creep of fascism, leaving me unsurprised—though profoundly unsettled—by the current global currents. The echoes between the 1940s and our contemporary world are, for me, undeniable and demand witness.

This mixed-media installation, which premiered in Boston 2025, features twenty-five drypoint prints and original poems. **(This PDF highlights selected works.)** The images invite viewers to see them through a dual lens: 'then' and 'now.' What befell Jews, Roma, leftists, and so many others targeted in that era resonates starkly with the experiences of immigrants navigating hostile systems and rhetoric today. The captions accompanying the artwork are therefore deliberately ambiguous, for it is these resonant parallels—the shared human experience of persecution and displacement—that I am driven to explore.

Material Witness is my endeavor to understand these interwoven histories, to hold the pain of the past alongside the urgencies of the present. It is a search for clarity, an artistic response to the imperative to recognize our shared humanity and, in understanding, to choose the next right thing.



**We took what we could**  
Drypoint  
10" x 6"

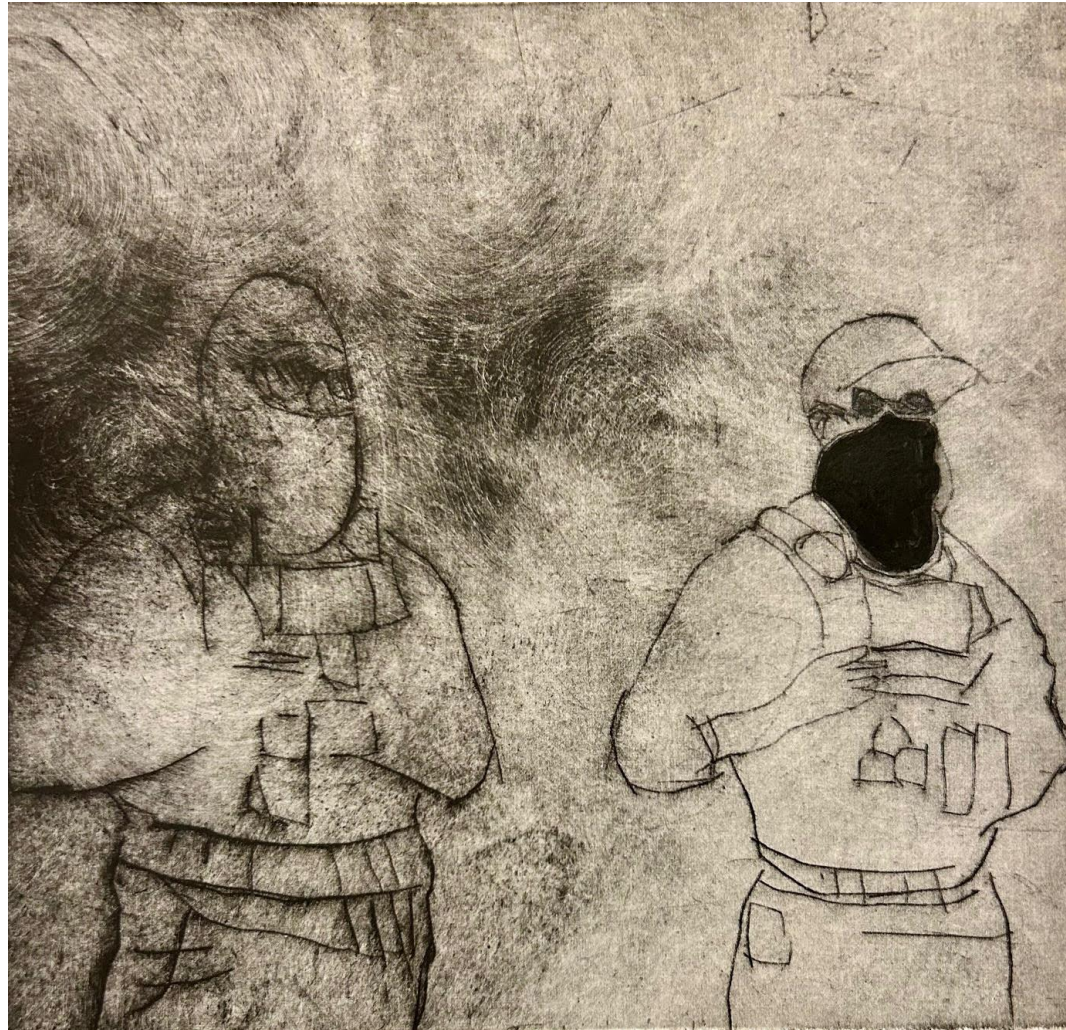


“The boots scared us.”

*Lina Marks, my mother*

**Nazis wore Jackboots**  
Drypoint 11” x 15”





**ICE**  
Drypoint 8" x 8"

**"We are terrified all the time."**

*L.J., immigrant*

## Reflection/Confession by Nancy Marks

Forgive me if I forget  
that it's 2025  
and not 1942.

Forgive me if I forget that it's Massachusetts  
and not occupied France,  
the place where my mother  
hid in darkness.

The boots, then, were worn by Nazis.  
Today, they are worn by ICE.

The people in hiding, then, were Jews.  
Now they are Brazilians, Haitians, and Dominicans,  
stilled into silence by the pounding on their doors.

Later, when I get into bed,  
I will put on glasses and open my book.  
In time, I will lean over  
and turn off the light.

Questions still loom:  
ones which chased me as a child,  
and keep me writing poems as an adult.

What would I have done then?  
What will I do now?

In the morning  
I hope I will like the person  
I see in the mirror.



**Boy Hiding under Couch**  
Drypoint 6" x 8"



**Banned Books Ready to Burn**  
Drypoint 11" x 15"



## THEN

“**Nazis** immediately started rounding up **Jews**. At first it is (only) those who fled **Central Europe**, but—like the concentric circles of a stone thrown into a pond—the orders gradually expanded until they were deporting all **Jews**, no matter the origin and status.”

*Lina Marks, on 1942*

## NOW

**ICE** immediately started rounding up **immigrants**. At first it is (only) those who fled **South America**, but—like the concentric circles of a stone thrown into a pond—the orders (could) gradually expand until they are deporting all **immigrants**, no matter the origin and status.

*Nancy Marks, 2025*



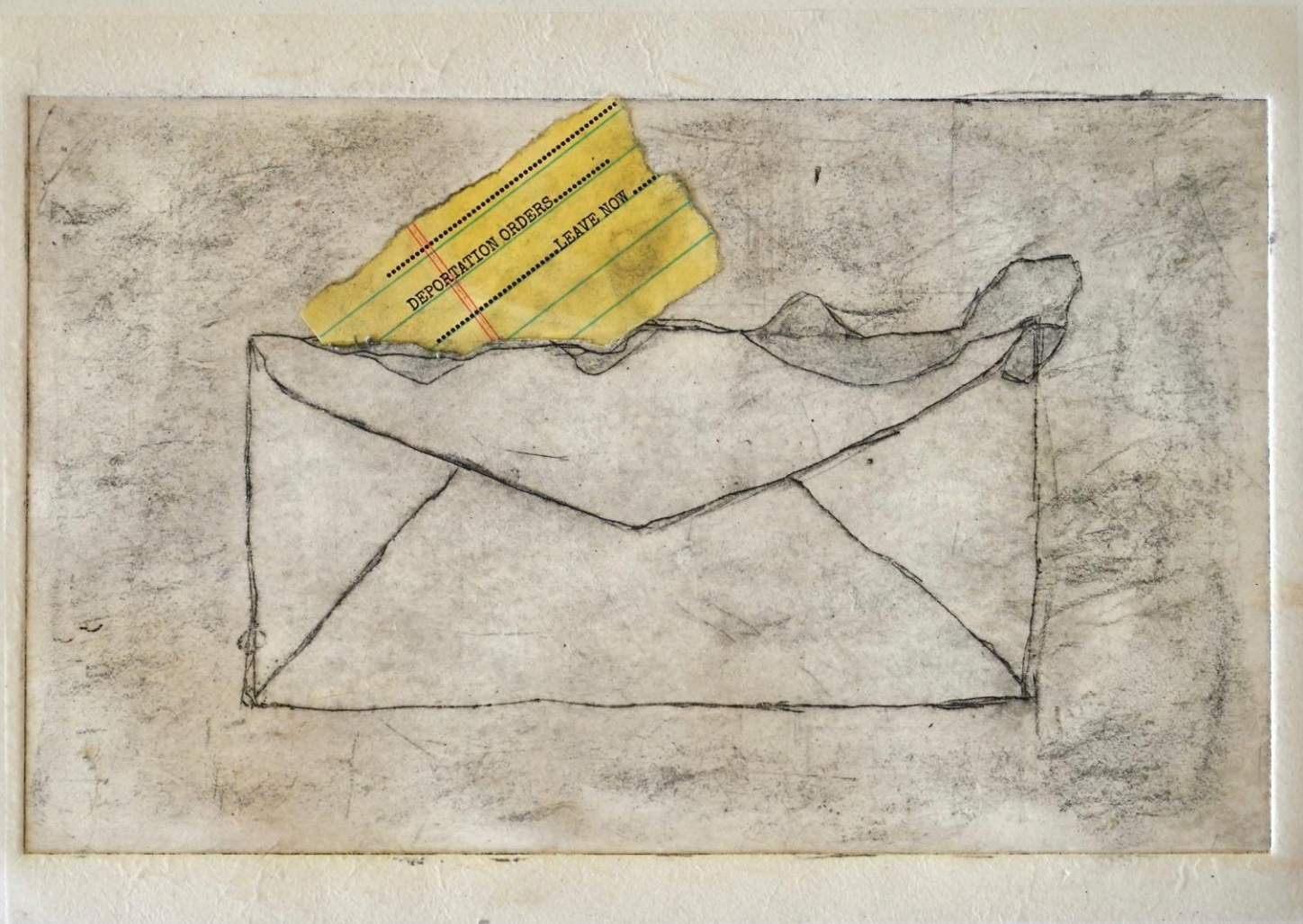


**Uganda, El Salvador...Where's Next?**  
Drypoint 12" x 16"

**“I haven’t done anything wrong, but I am afraid to leave my home, worried a simple trip to the store could end in my deportation.”**

*I.M., immigrant*



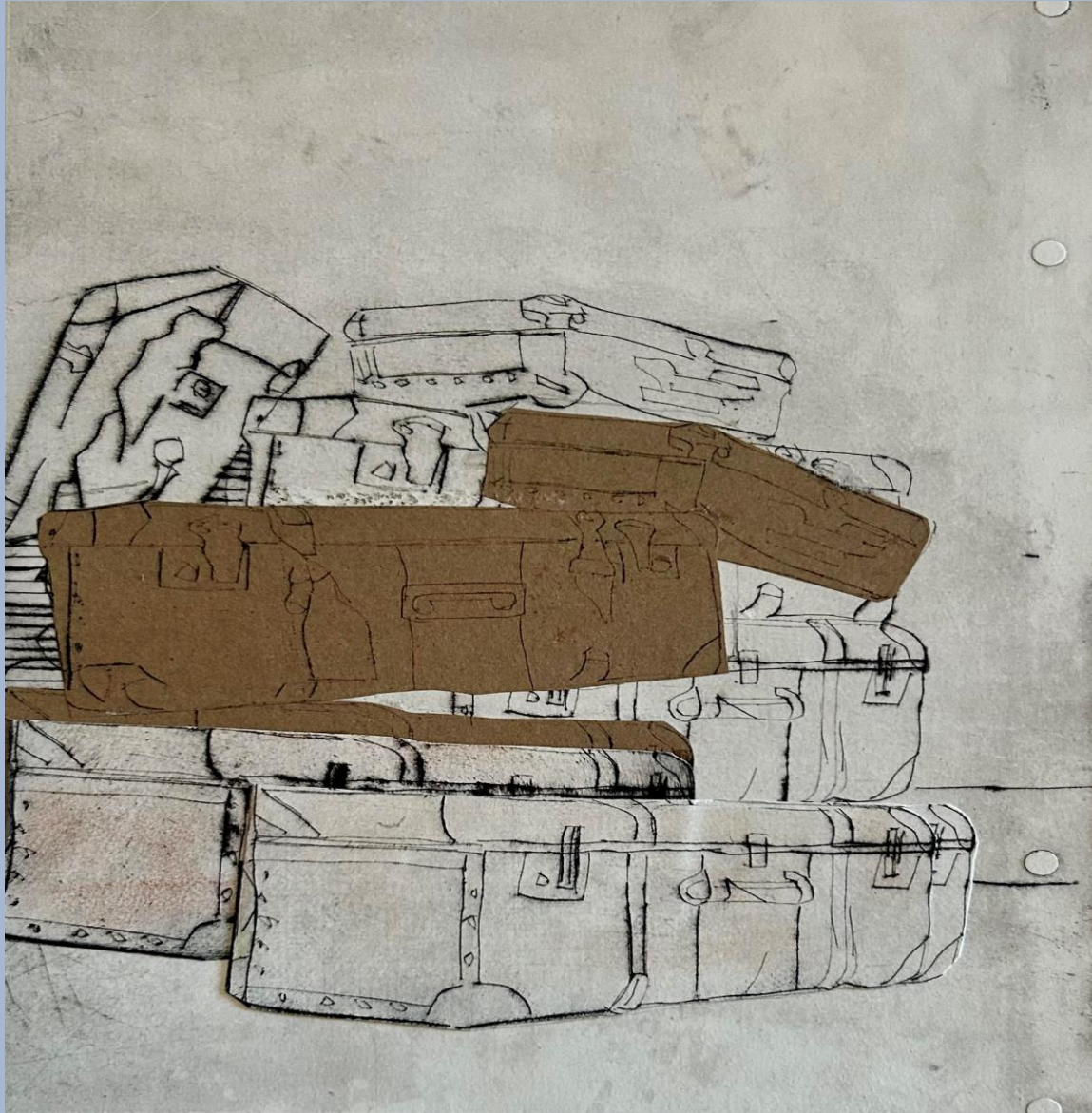


**It happened then.  
It's happening now.**

*Nancy Marks*

**Deportation Letter**  
Drypoint 11" x 15"





“Papa and Maman slip away immediately, suitcases in hand, walking down the road without even trying to find transportation.”

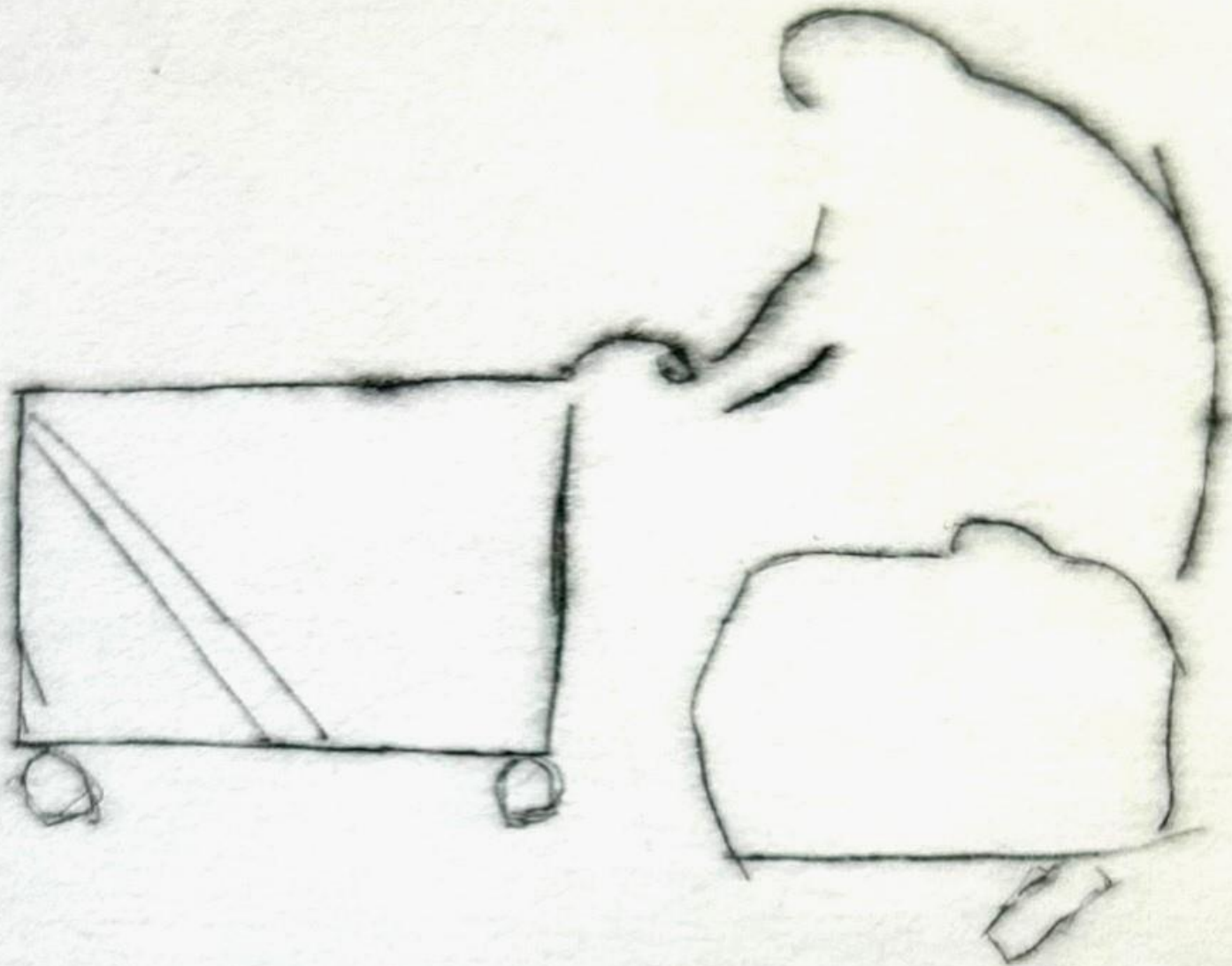
*Lina Marks*

**Packed**  
Drypoint and collage 8” x 15”



“In the meantime,  
false papers in hand,  
my parents fled—  
leaving behind my  
grandmother,  
who only  
spoke Turkish  
and Ladino  
and could  
never claim  
she was a  
French Catholic.”

*Lina Marks*



**Trudge**  
Drypoint  
11" x 15" unframed



Material Witness has been shown in galleries, on college campuses, in the community, etc. either hanging or on small easels. Together, the art, poetry, and quotes from my mother's memoir and immigrants shed light on what happened then and what is happening now.

Conversations that follow an exhibit are tailored to the group and have included discussions of the fears of authoritarianism, the role of courage in taking action, and how to do the next right thing.





**“We heard  
ICE  
bang  
at our door,  
and  
everyone  
just ran.”**

*F.C., immigrant*



**Knock on the Door**  
Drypoint 8" x 10"



**Girl Hiding**  
Drypoint 11" x 15"

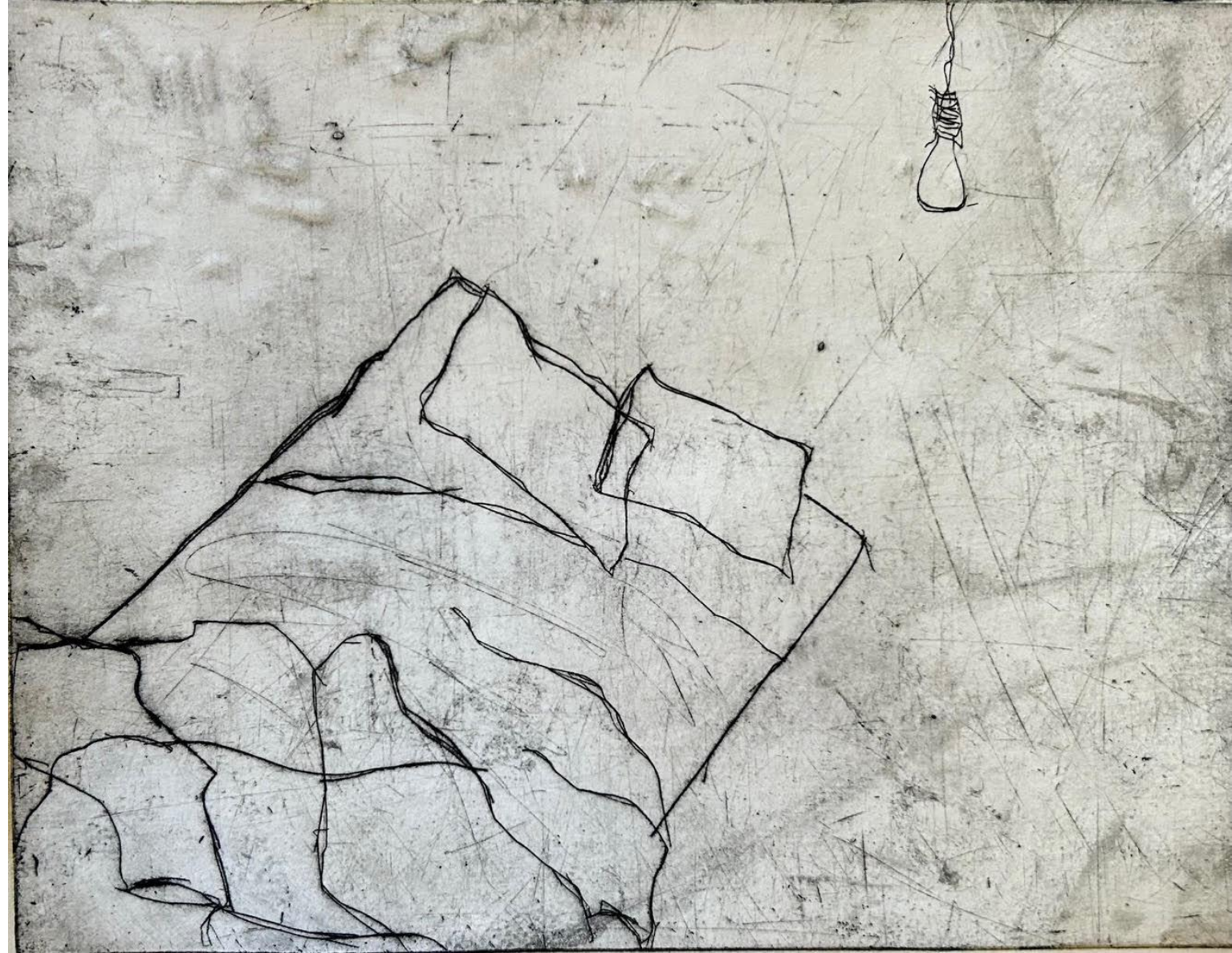
**It happened then. It's happening now.**

*Nancy Marks*

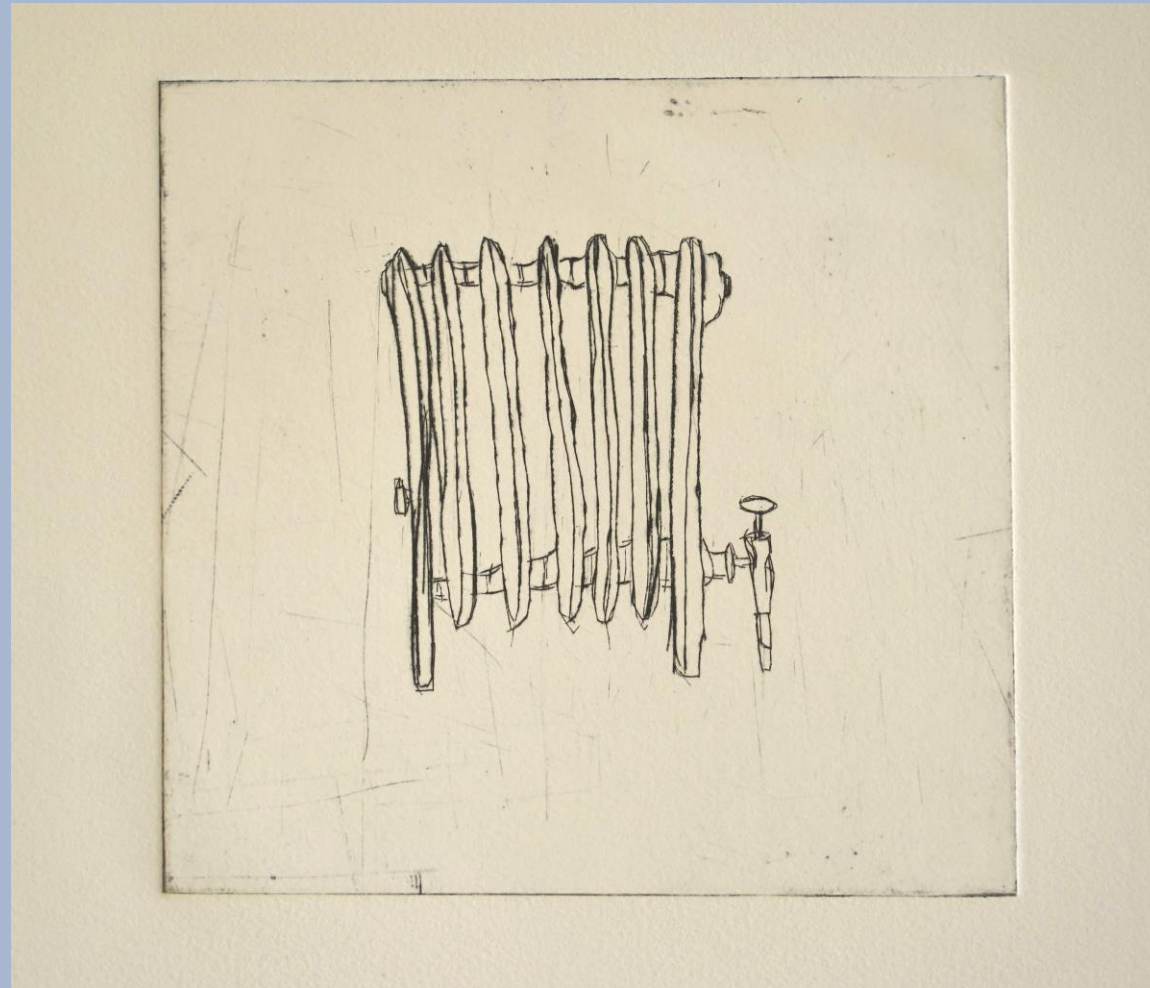


**“My parents would leave us  
every night, tiptoe into an  
empty apartment and quietly  
drop onto the bed.”**

*Lina Marks*



**Empty Bed**  
Drypoint 11" x 15"



**Radiator**  
Drypoint 11" x 15"

"Sometimes we were so cold. I can still feel the frigid running water of the waist-high outdoor tank in which I am scrubbing the laundry with chilblained hands."

*Lina Marks*





**Spilled Milk**  
Drypoint 6" x 14"

**"I watch helplessly as they pour my brother's milk into their coffee. There is nothing left in the pitcher by the time it comes around to our side. When I complain to my mother about our treatment, she pleads with me, *"Please, I beg you, don't say a single word, they might get angry and kick you out. What would we do then?"*"**

*Lina Marks*



## Material Witness By Nancy Marks

The radio reports  
there is a genocide happening.  
For real and right now.  
And what am I doing?  
Matching socks:  
a heap of wool and cotton,  
aligning heel to heel  
rolling, tossing and piling.  
And then again.

Someone was matching socks  
while my family was heaving  
worn brown luggage  
down *la rue*.  
Did they take a right or a left?  
Toward or away from the setting sun?

I know of piles:  
eyeglasses, teeth, shoes, souls—  
the weight of war.

We forget  
what we most need to remember:  
how fragile the body  
how damaged the spirit  
how ragged the socks.



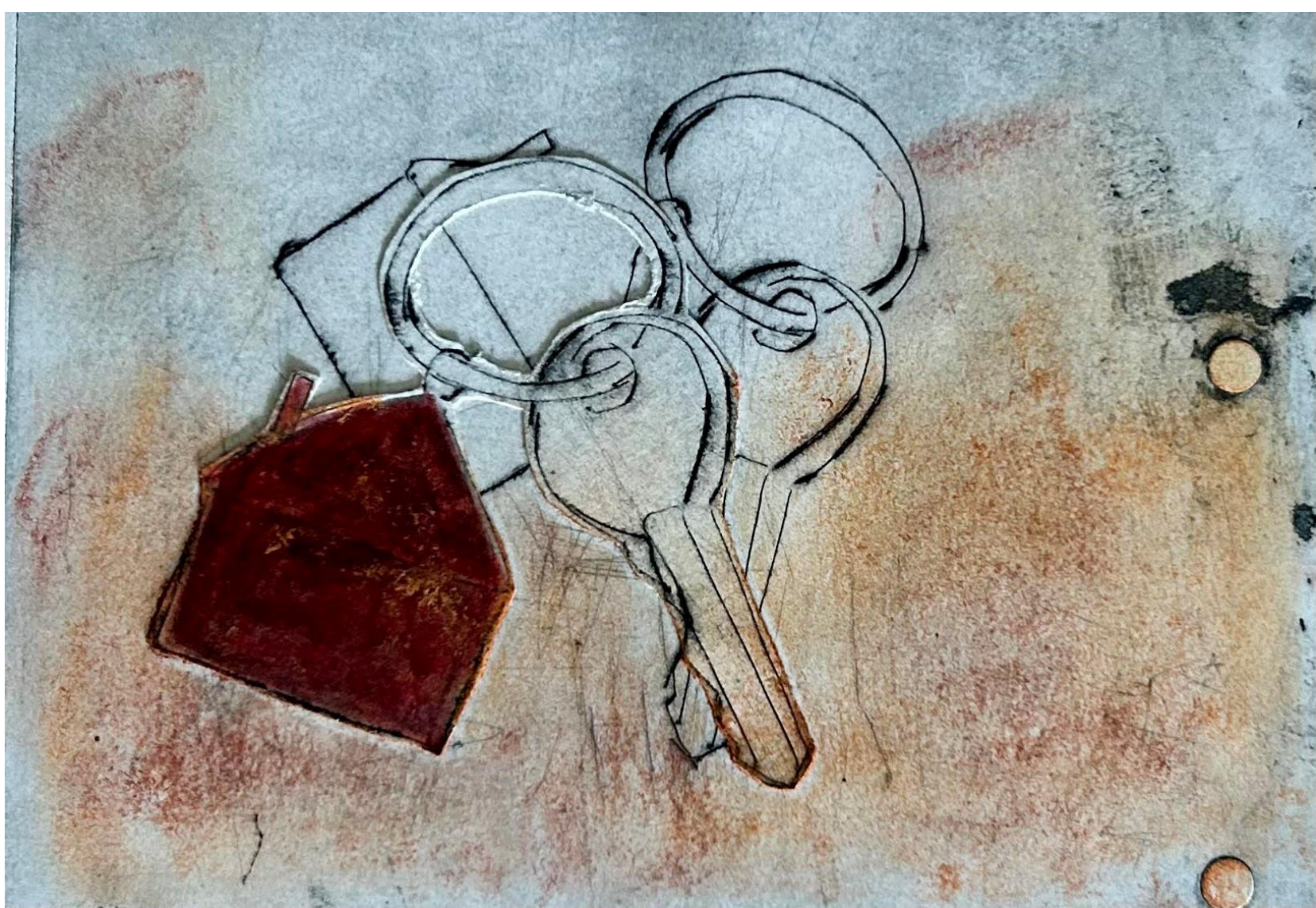
**Like my family who had to leave their home  
to flee violence, so do most immigrants.  
Many bring their house keys with them.**

*Keys are:*

**A connection to a former home**

**A symbolic bridge to a potential return**

***Nancy Marks***



**House Keys**

Drypoint and collage 8" x 10"



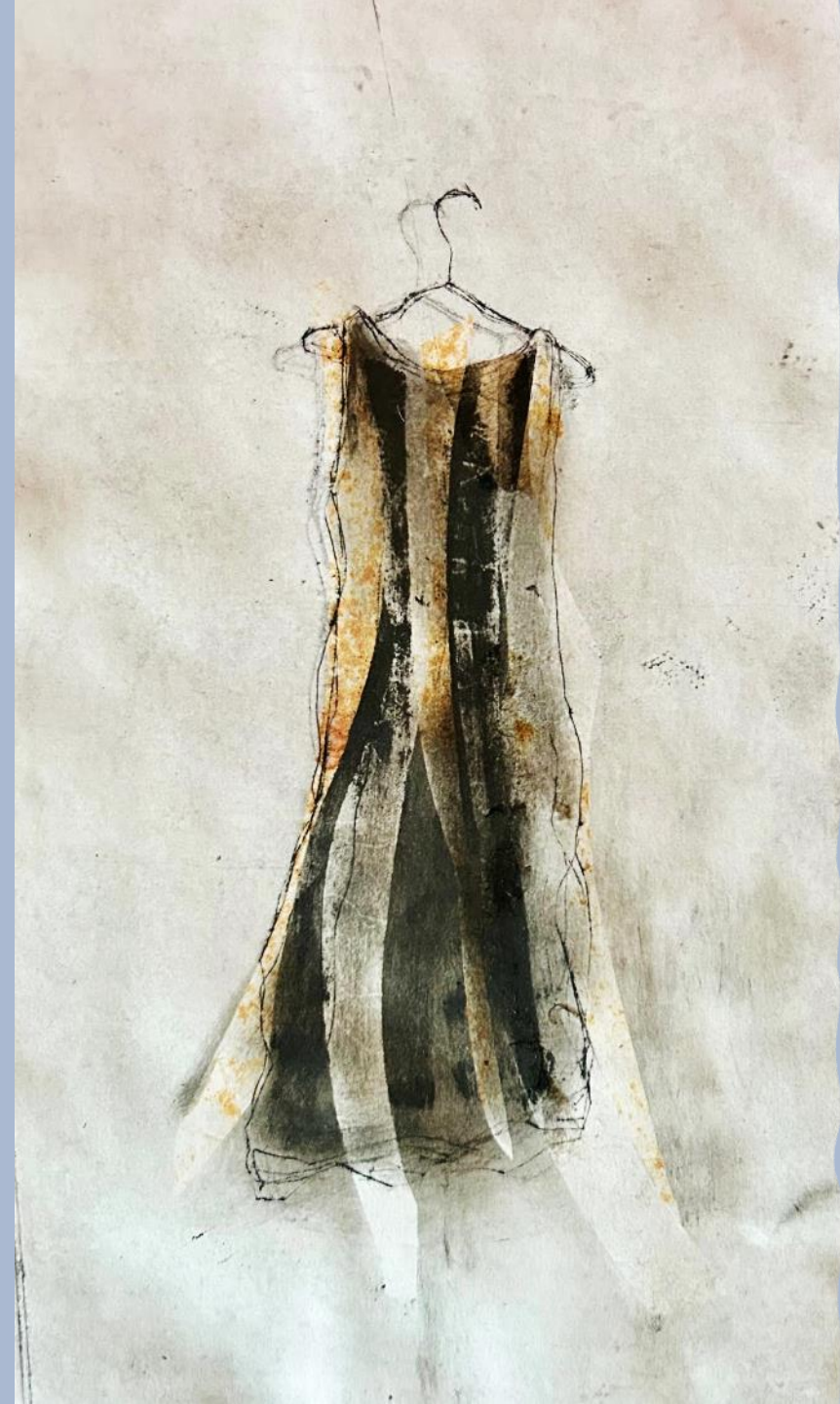


**Found: Child's Hat**  
Drypoint 8" x 16"

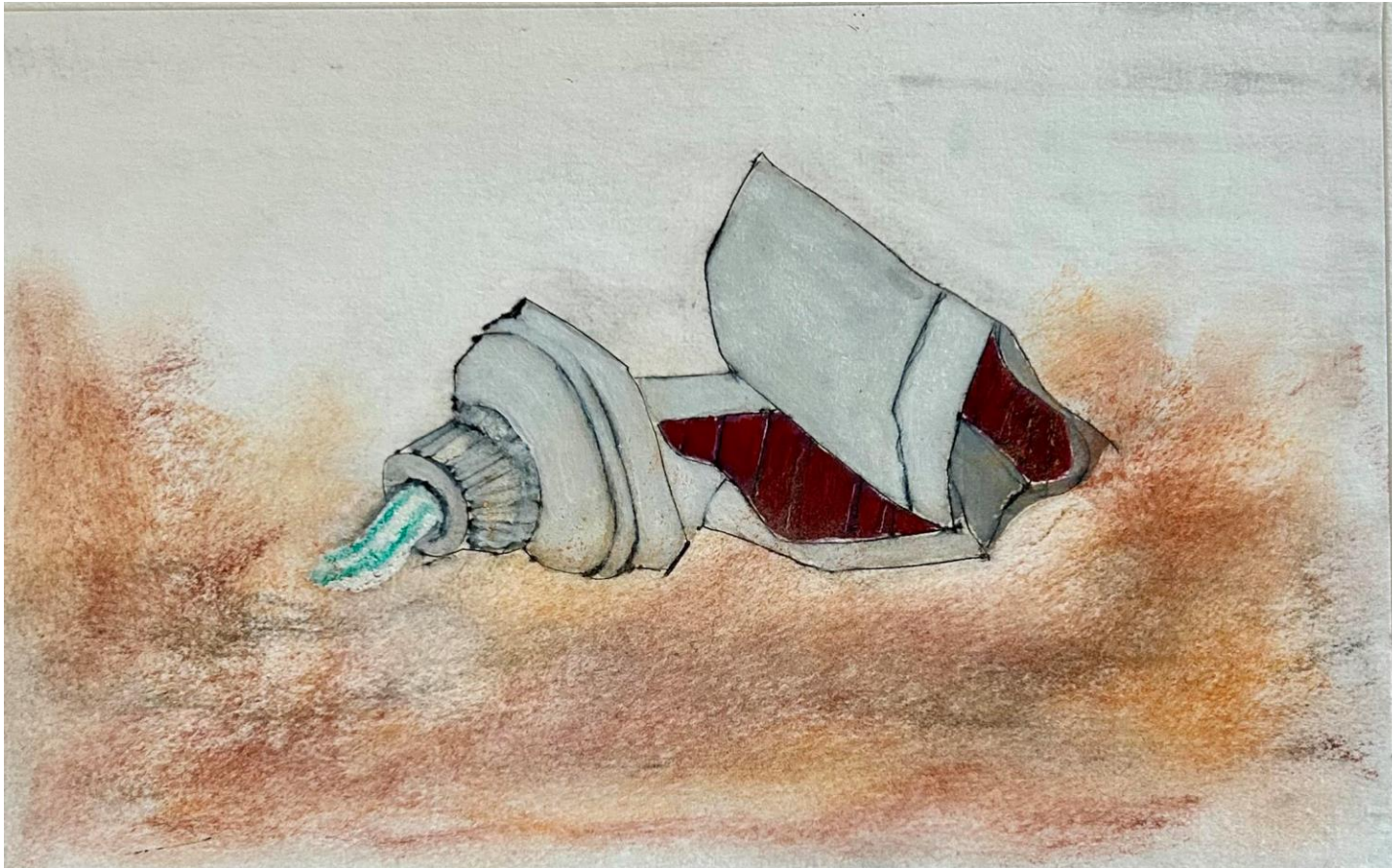


“We were lucky that my mother was so handy. She made new garments out of old clothes, using the back side of the fabric.”

*Lina Marks*



**The Dress**  
Drypoint 12 " x 16"

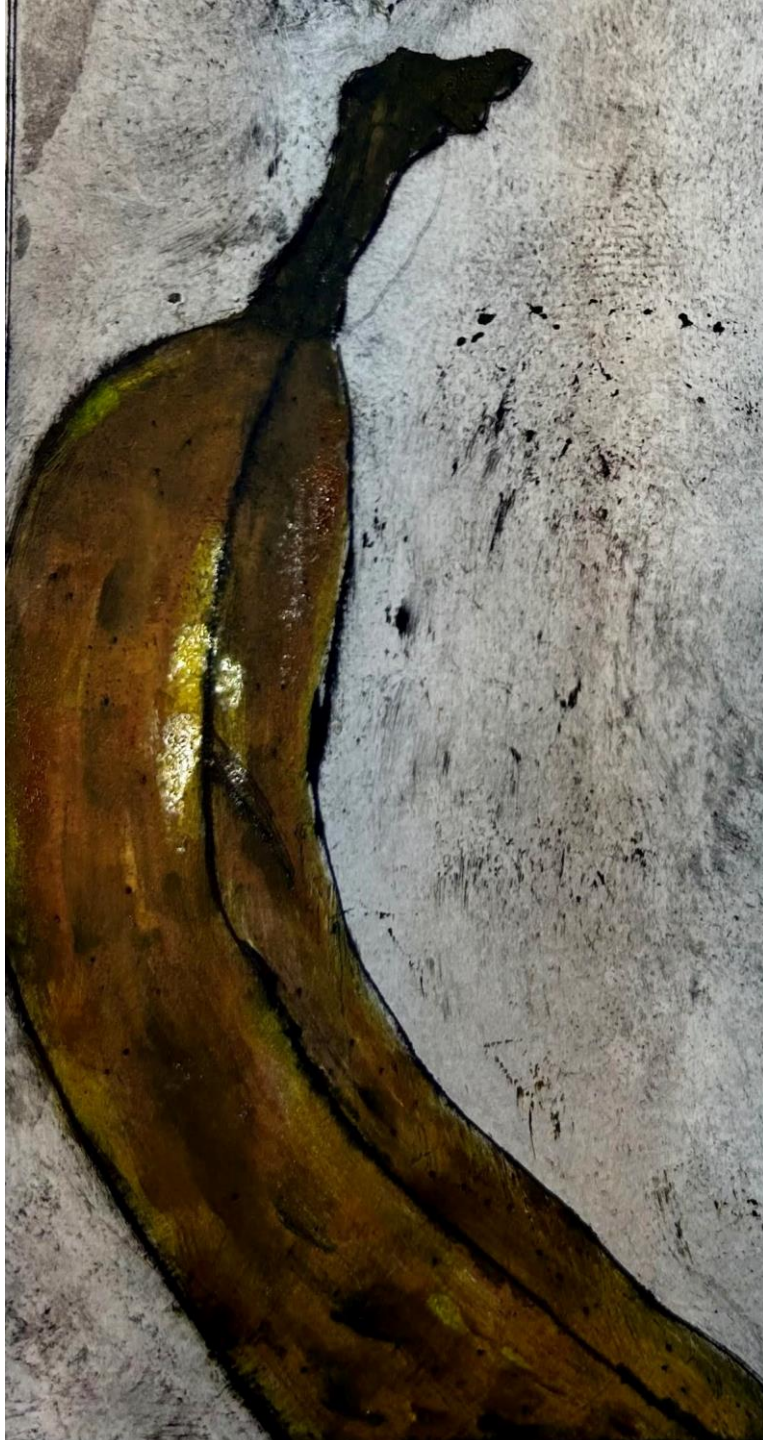


**Left Behind**  
Drypoint 11" x 16"

**As immigrants walk for miles, in the Arizona desert,  
objects left behind bear witness to their journey.**

*Nancy Marks*





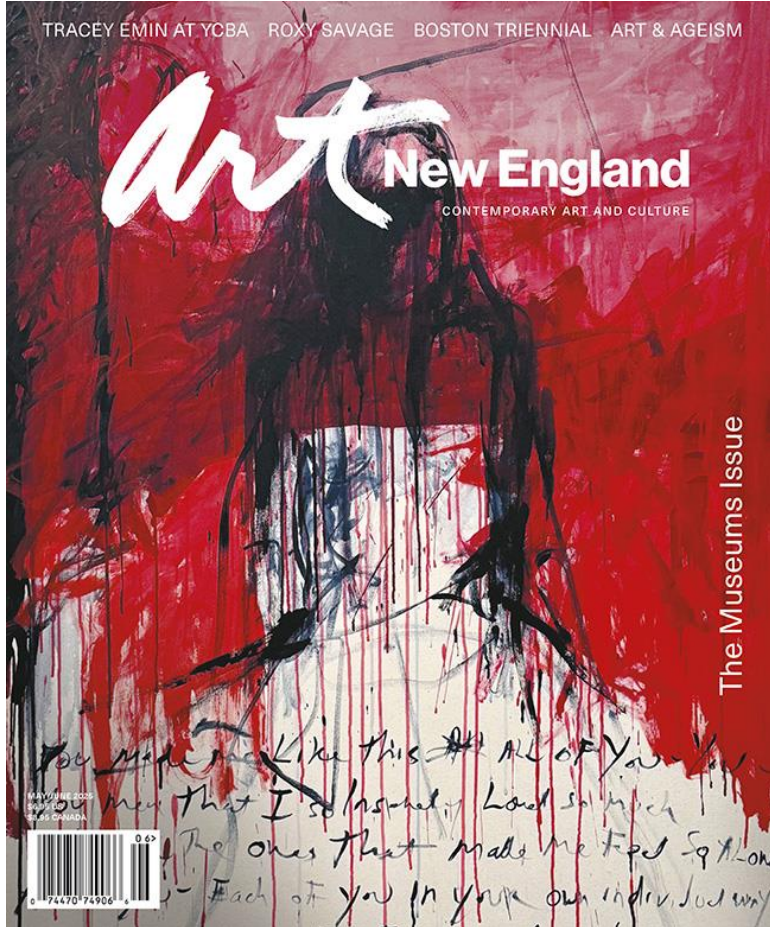
**It happened then.  
It's happening now.**

*Nancy Marks*

**We eat everything**  
Drypoint 14" x 8"

# REVIEW FROM ART NEW ENGLAND

May/June 2025



REVIEW: MASSACHUSETTS

## Material Witness: A Haunting Reflection on Persecution

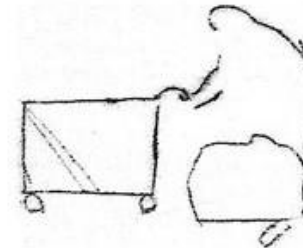
Studio 53 Gallery and Art Space, Roslindale, MA • nancymarksartist.com • Through June, 13 2025

**W**hat does it mean to hide? To live in the shadows, afraid that a knock on the door could change everything? These are the questions that linger in *Material Witness*, Nancy Marks' powerful mixed-media installation. The exhibition explores Marks' mother's experience hiding in Nazi-occupied France and draws a striking parallel to today's rising anti-immigrant sentiment.

What makes this work so powerful is Marks' fearless comparison between the Nazi officers of the 1940s and ICE agents today—both forces tearing families apart, instilling fear, and forcing people into the shadows. Through gripping prints, using aquatint and drypoint techniques, Marks transforms ordinary objects into potent symbols of displacement and resilience: an empty bed speaks to absence and loss, torn envelopes hint at broken communication and severed ties, a ball of yarn represents the fragile thread of survival. Each piece is paired with excerpts from her mother's memoir and Marks' own poetry, forging an emotional bridge between past and present.

One striking poem questions the banality of everyday life in the face of atrocity.

*"The radio reports*



*Fleeing, 2023, Dry point on paper, 8 x 10".  
Courtesy of the artist*

*there is a genocide happening.  
For real and right now.  
And what am I doing?"*

This connection is deeply unsettling—and necessary. *Material Witness* forces us to confront the uncomfortable truth that history is repeating itself, that oppression may wear different uniforms, yet its impact remains devastating. Marks calls us to action, urging us to recognize these cycles of injustice and resist them.

At its core, this exhibition is a reflection of history as well as a challenge to the present. Marks reminds us that resistance happens in the

choices we make every day. As she writes in one of her poems:

*"In the morning when I rise,  
I hope I will like the person  
I see in the mirror."*

It is an urgent call to act with integrity, to stand against injustice, and to ensure that history does not repeat itself under our watch.

An opening reception will be held on May 16, featuring an artist talk where Marks will delve deeper into these themes. This is an exhibition that demands to be seen, felt, and remembered. — Celine Gomes



***Material Witness* can be exhibited as a one-session art viewing with community discussion pop up and/or hung on walls for a longer show.**

**If you are interested in exhibiting *Material Witness* and/or having Nancy speak at an event, please reach out.**

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**[nancymarksartist.com](http://nancymarksartist.com)**

## ***About Nancy Marks***

Nancy Marks is a Boston-based artist and social justice advocate who uses her art to address critical issues. She is co-founder of *"The Opioid Project: Changing Perceptions Through Art and Storytelling,"* an initiative that uses art to raise awareness and combat the stigma of the opioid crisis. In 2024, her dedication was recognized when she received First Place from the National Organization for Arts in Health in the category of Arts Advancing Social Justice.

Marks's current traveling exhibition, "Material Witness," connects her mother's experience as a Holocaust survivor with the struggles of today's immigrants. Her other art falls under the moniker, *Urban Abstraction*, and explores the city, steeped in its aesthetic and social paradoxes. This interest in the power of place can be traced back to her New York roots. Dialogue/Interpretation grows out of her connections with nature and abstract emotional world. It represents her enduring respect for the human spirit, as it engages in the profound and complex process of healing.