

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

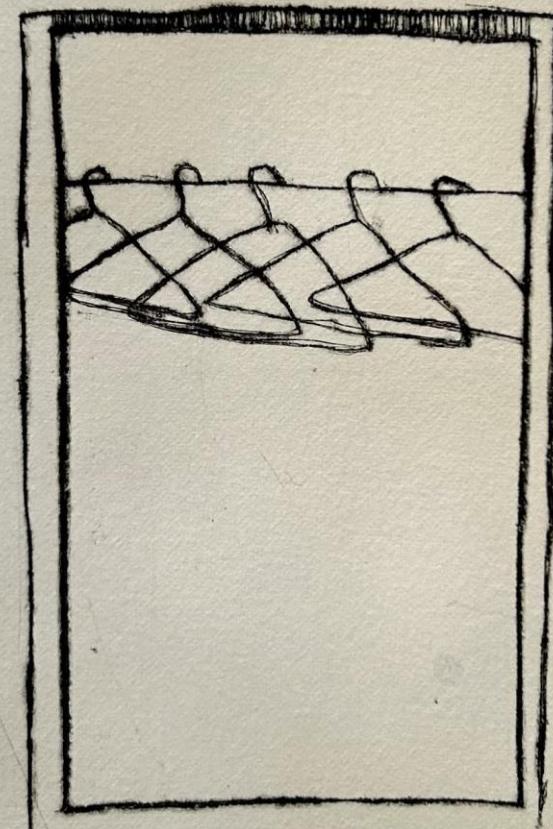
Material Witness is a dialogue in print and poetry, an unearthing of the fragile bridge between past and present. It is born from my experience as the daughter of a Holocaust survivor and delves into my mother's harrowing girlhood in Nazi-occupied France. Crucially, it confronts the chilling parallels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



Nazis wore Jackboots
Drypoint 11" x 15"

“The boots scared us.”

Lina Marks, my mother



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.

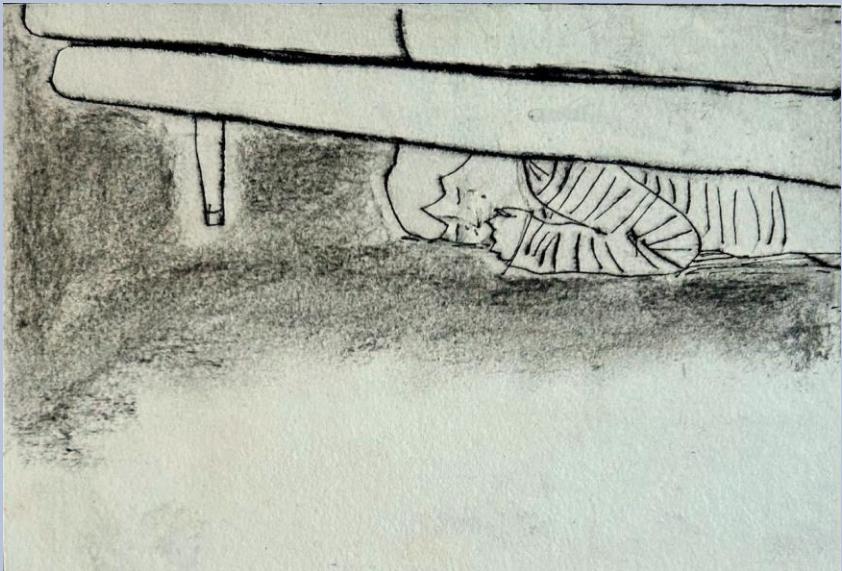
The people in hiding, then, were Jews.
Now they are Brazilians, Haitians, and Dominicans,
stilled into silence by the pounding on their doors.

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.

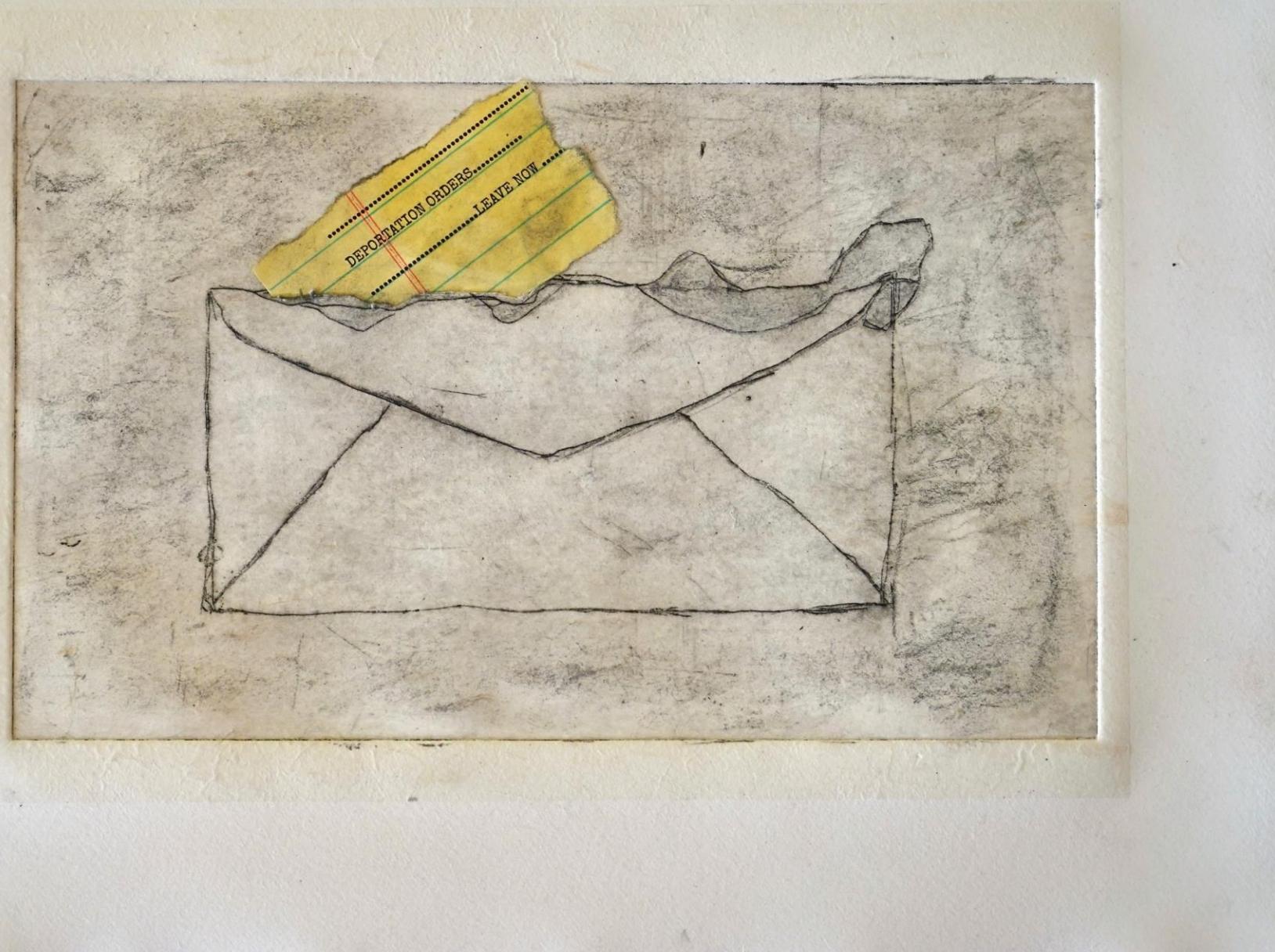
Nancy Marks, 2025



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.”

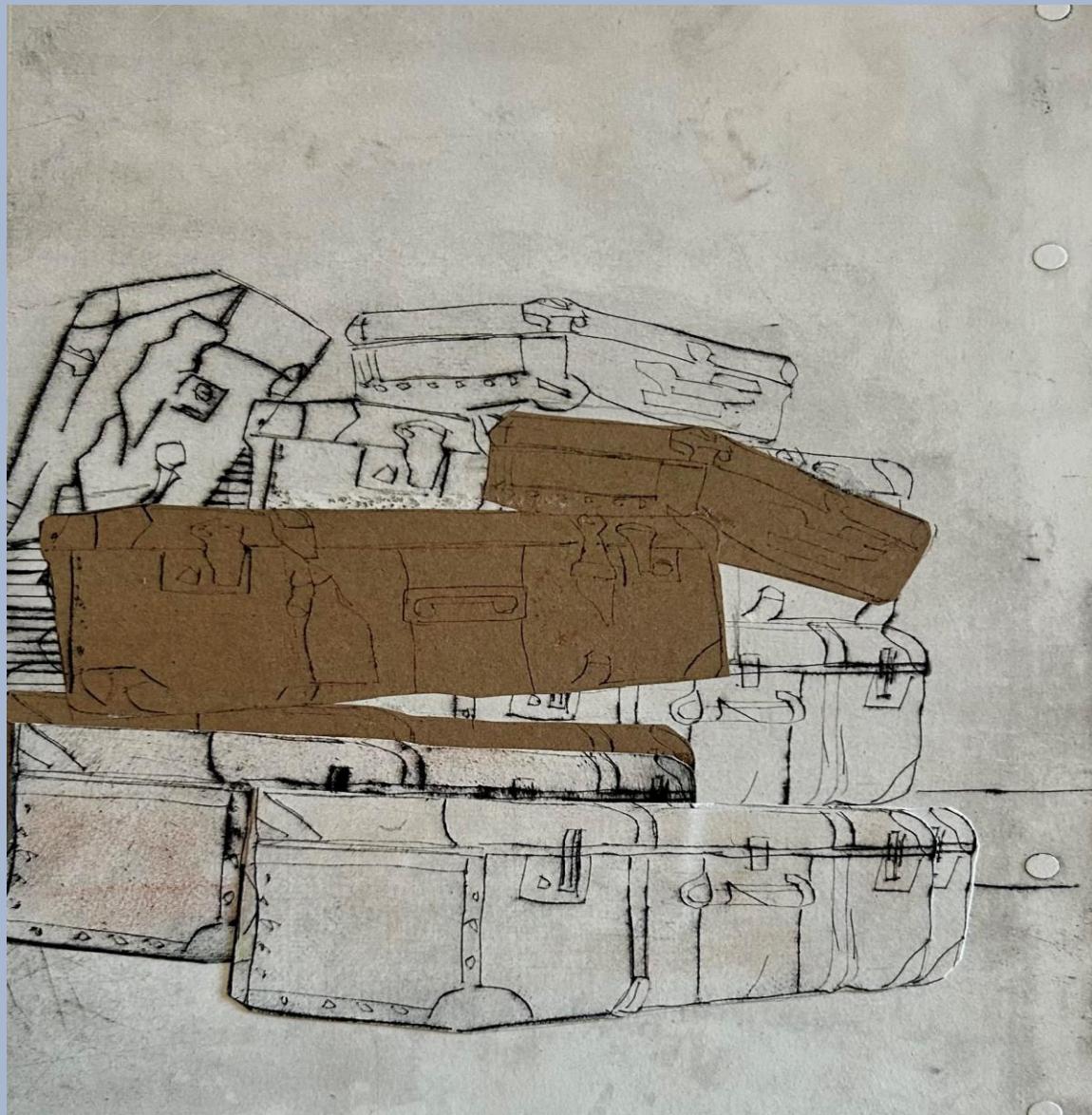
I.M., immigrant



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

Nancy Marks

Deportation Letter
Drypoint 11" x 15 "



Packed

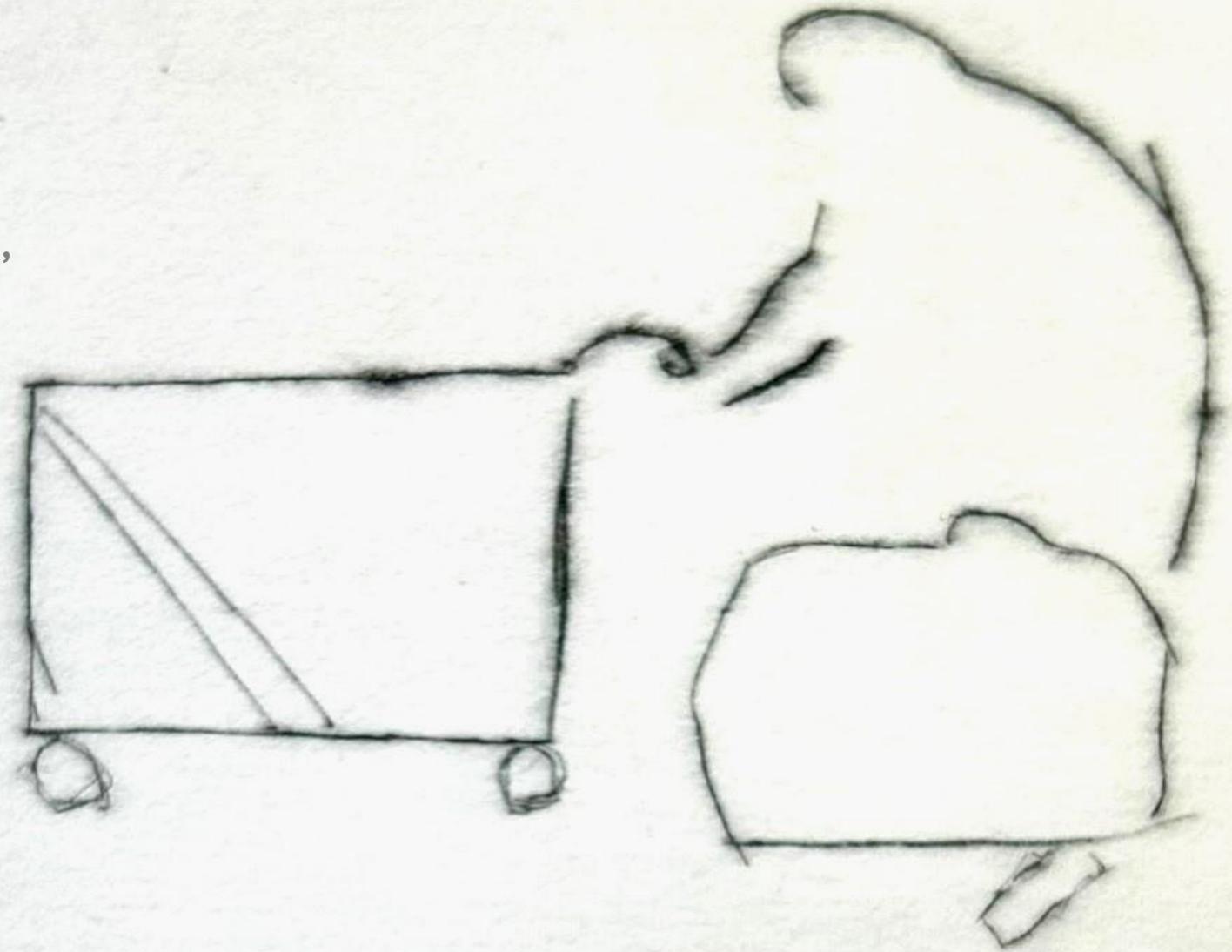
Drypoint and collage 8" x 15"

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

Lina Marks

**“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

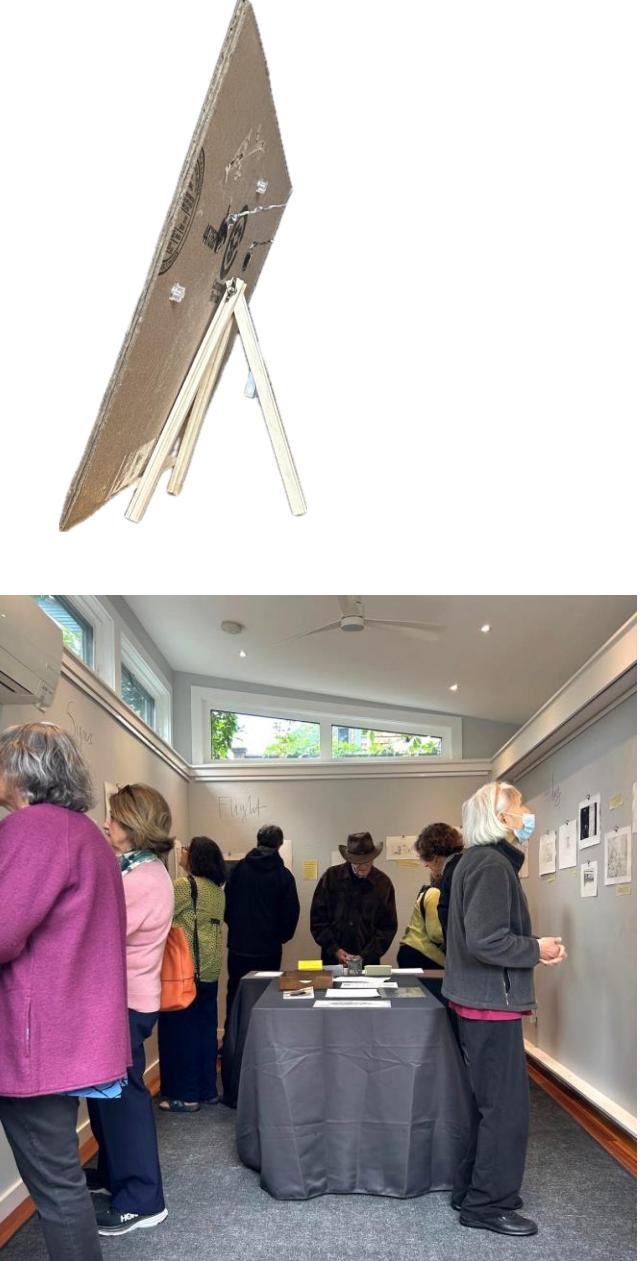


Trudge
Drypoint
11" x 15" unframed



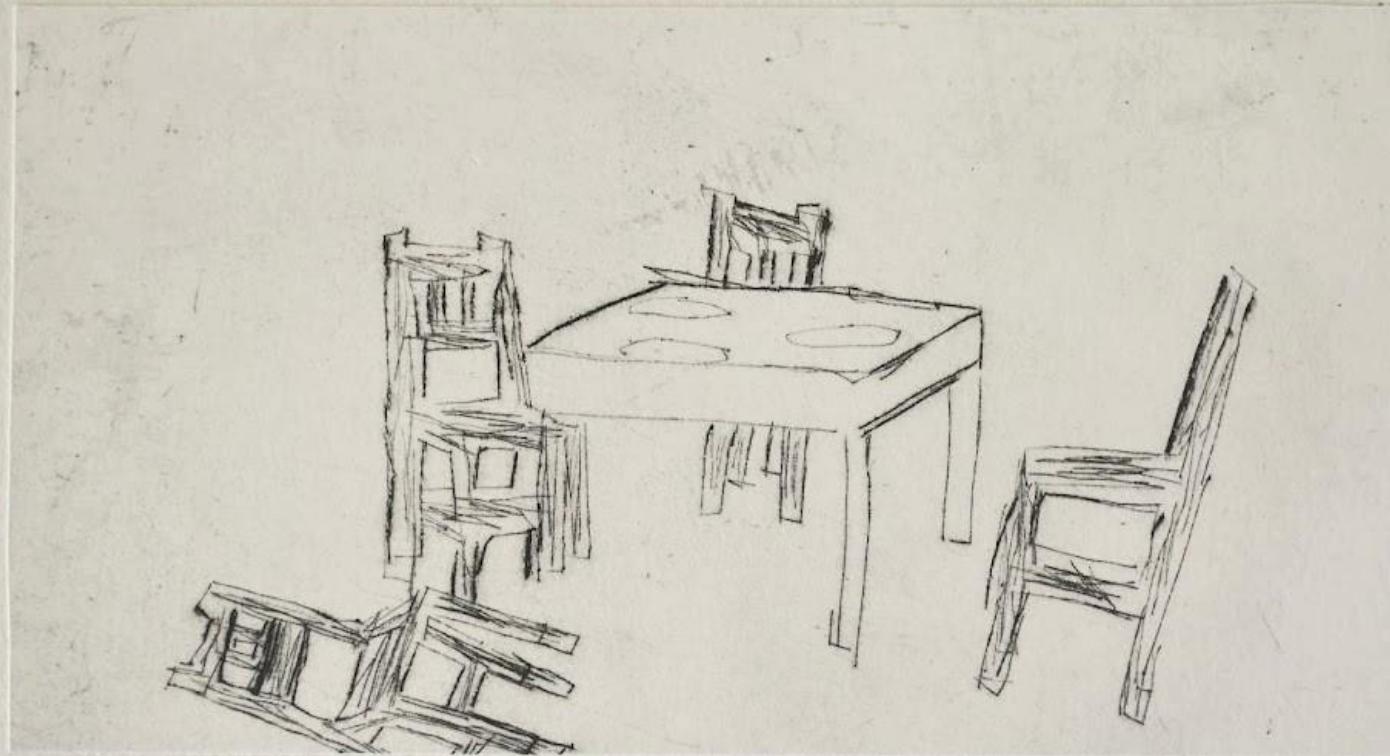
Material Witness has been shown in galleries, on college campuses, in the community, etc. either hanging or on small easels. Together, the art, poetry, and quotes from my mother's memoir and immigrants shed light on what happened then and what is happening now.

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"



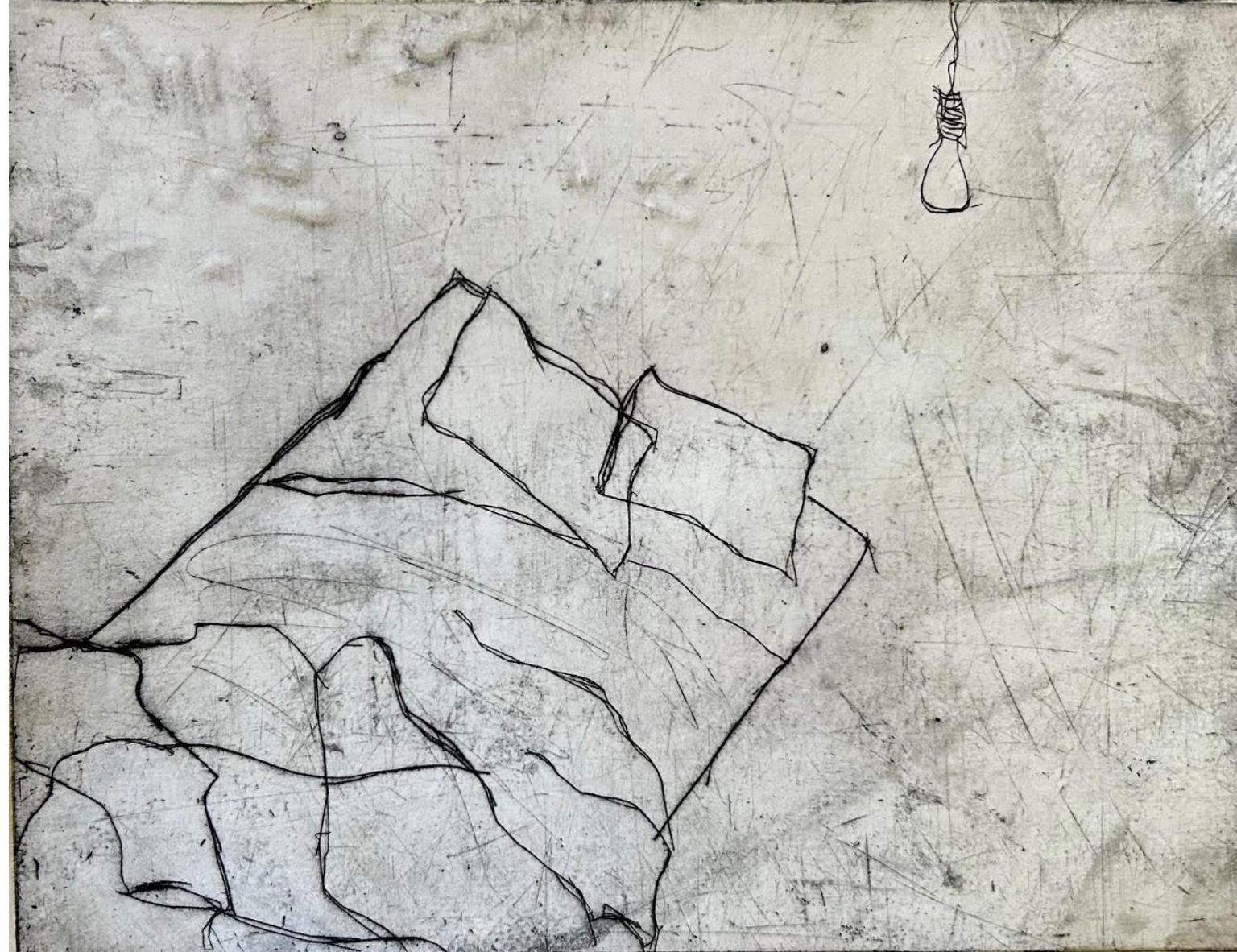
Girl Hiding
Drypoint 11" x 15"

It happened then. It's happening now.

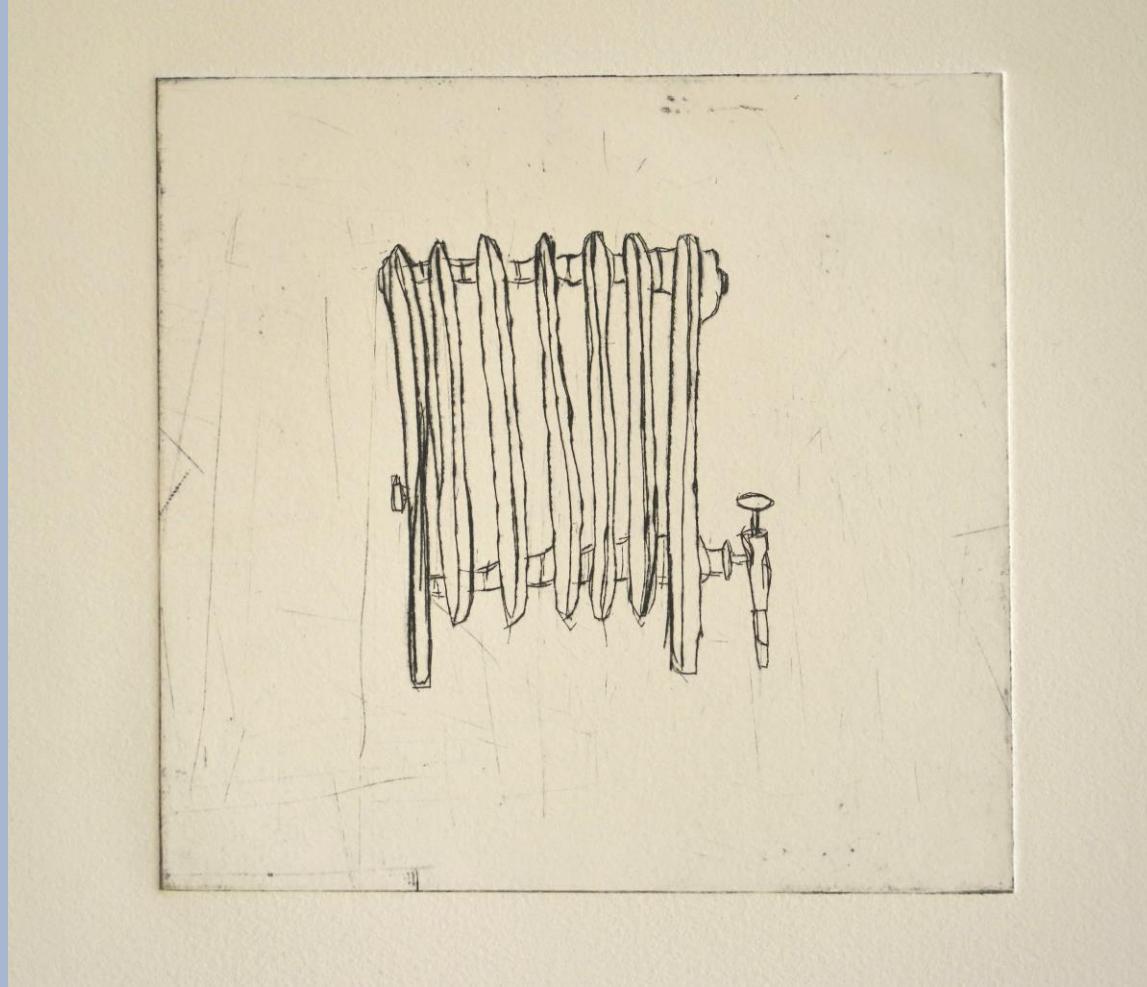
Nancy Marks

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

Lina Marks



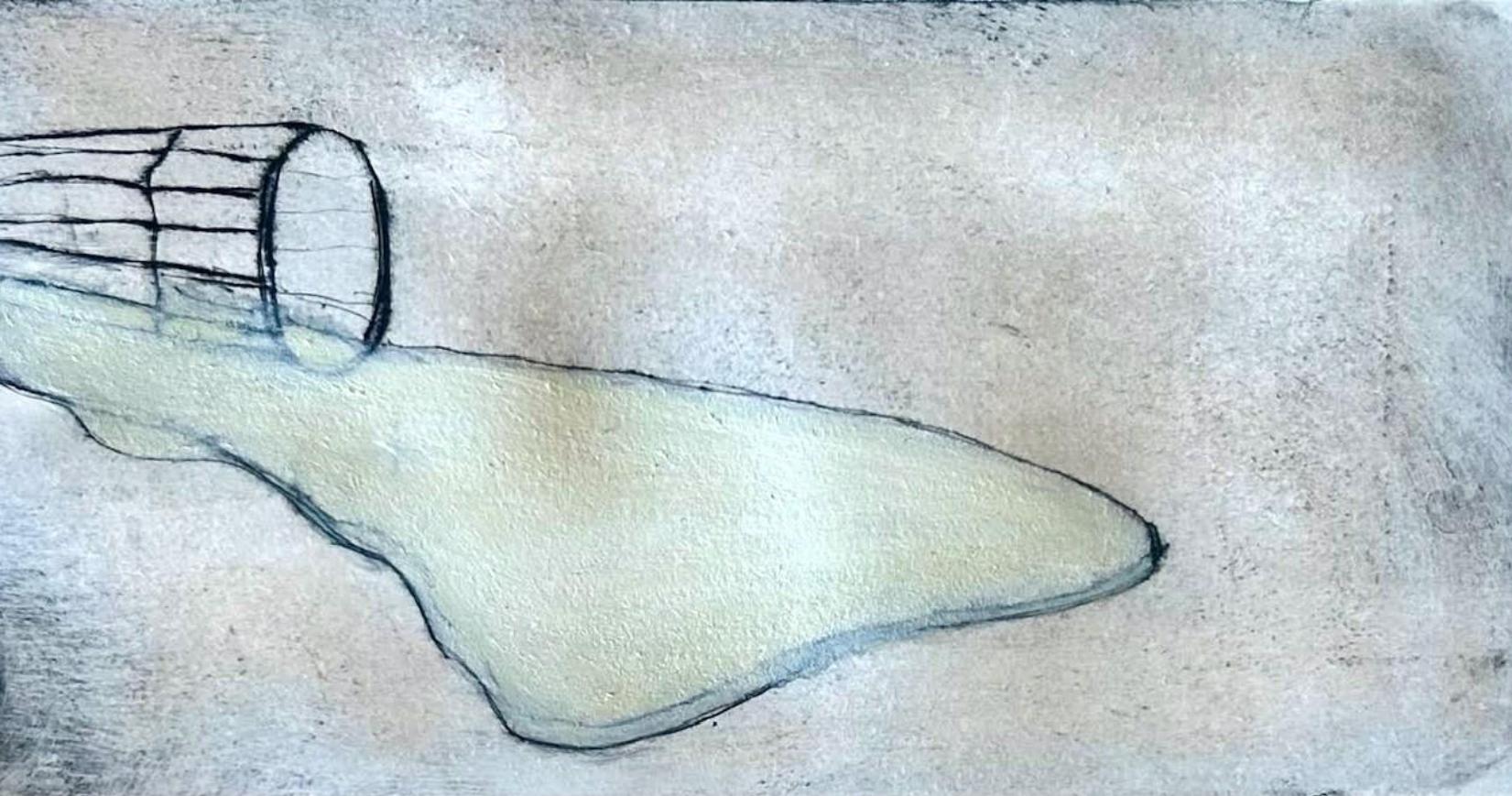
Empty Bed
Drypoint 11" x 15"



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?**

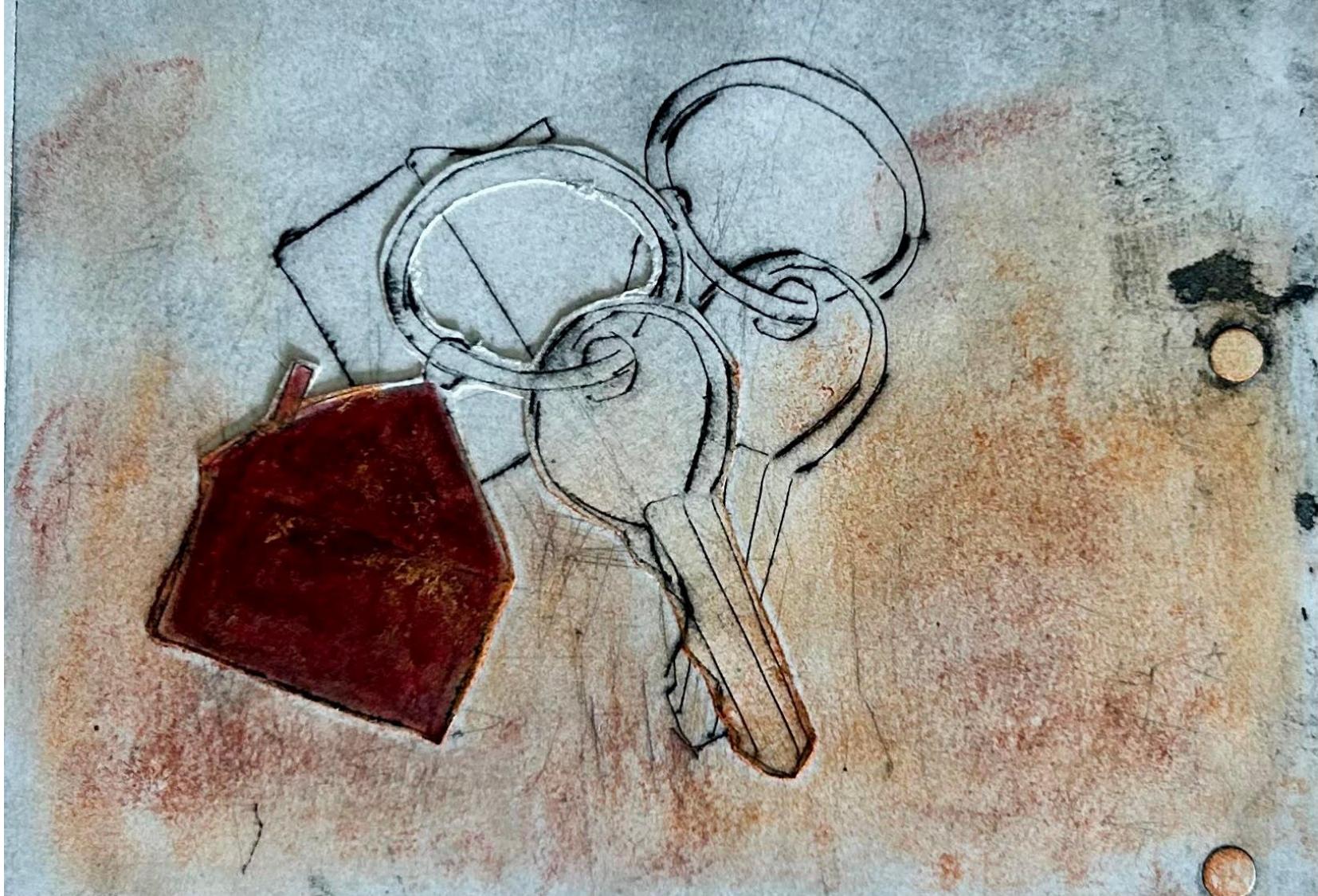
**I know of piles:
eyeglasses, teeth, shoes, souls—
the weight of war.**

**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



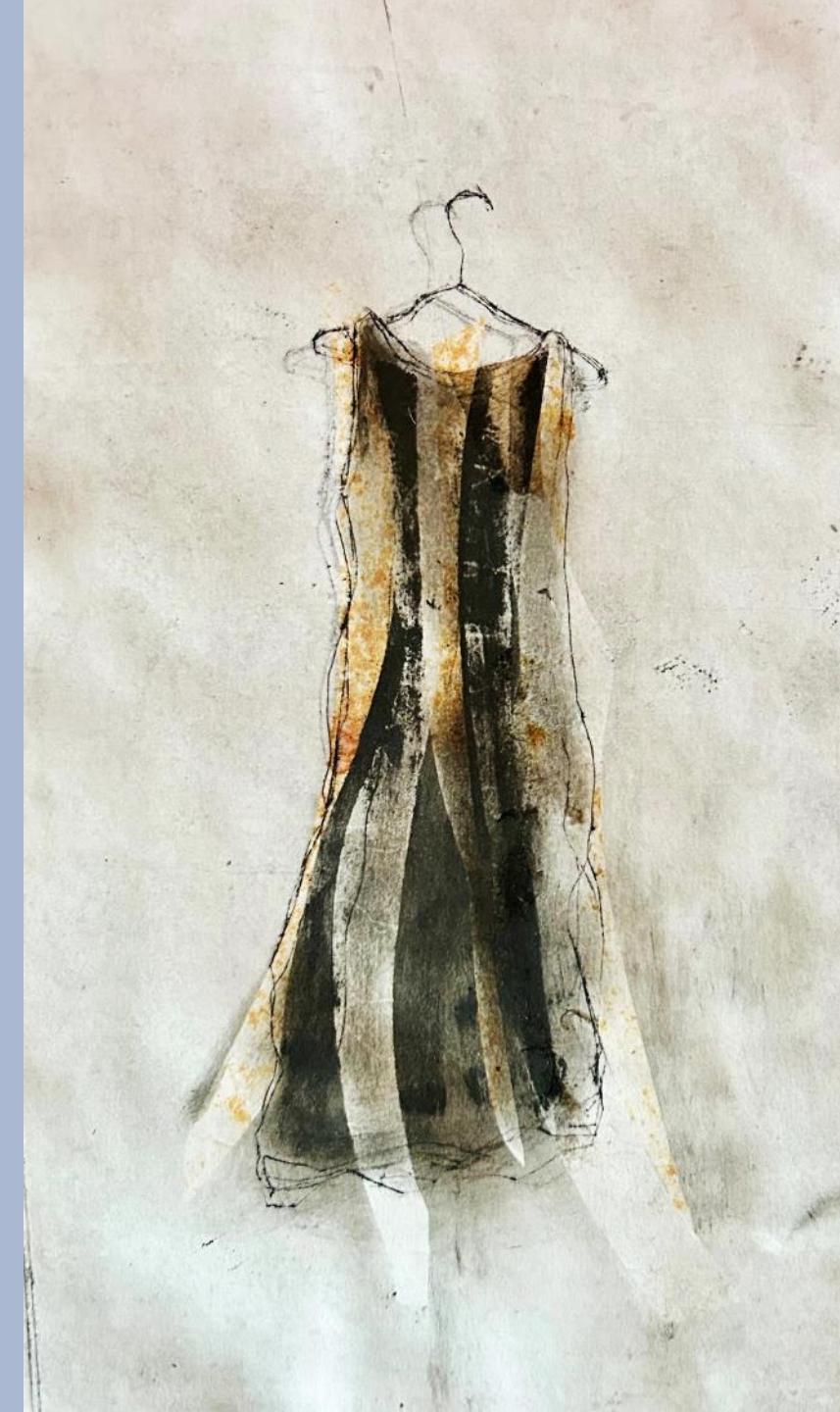
House Keys
Drypoint and collage 8" x 10"



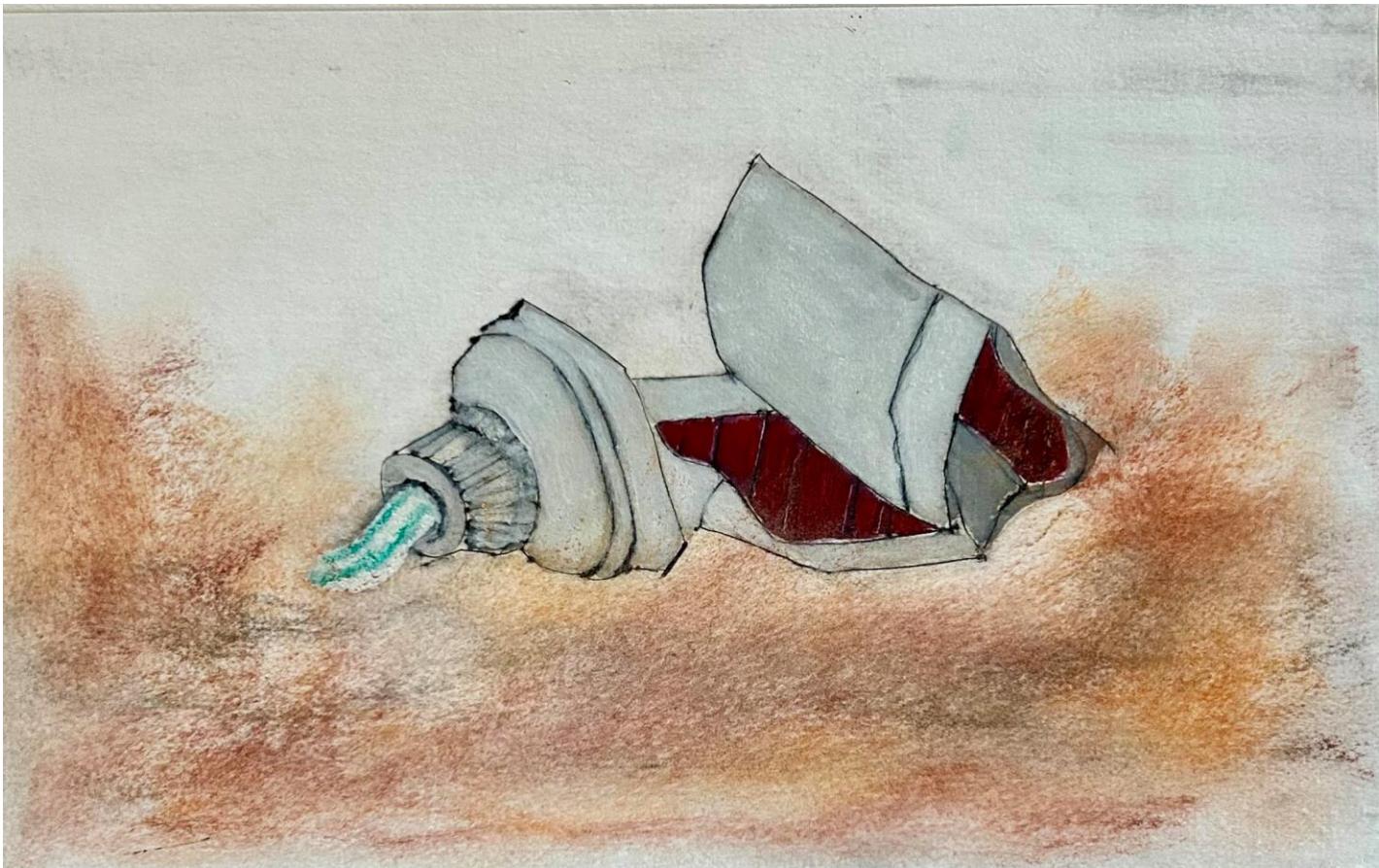
Found: Child's Hat
Drypoint 8" x 16"

**“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



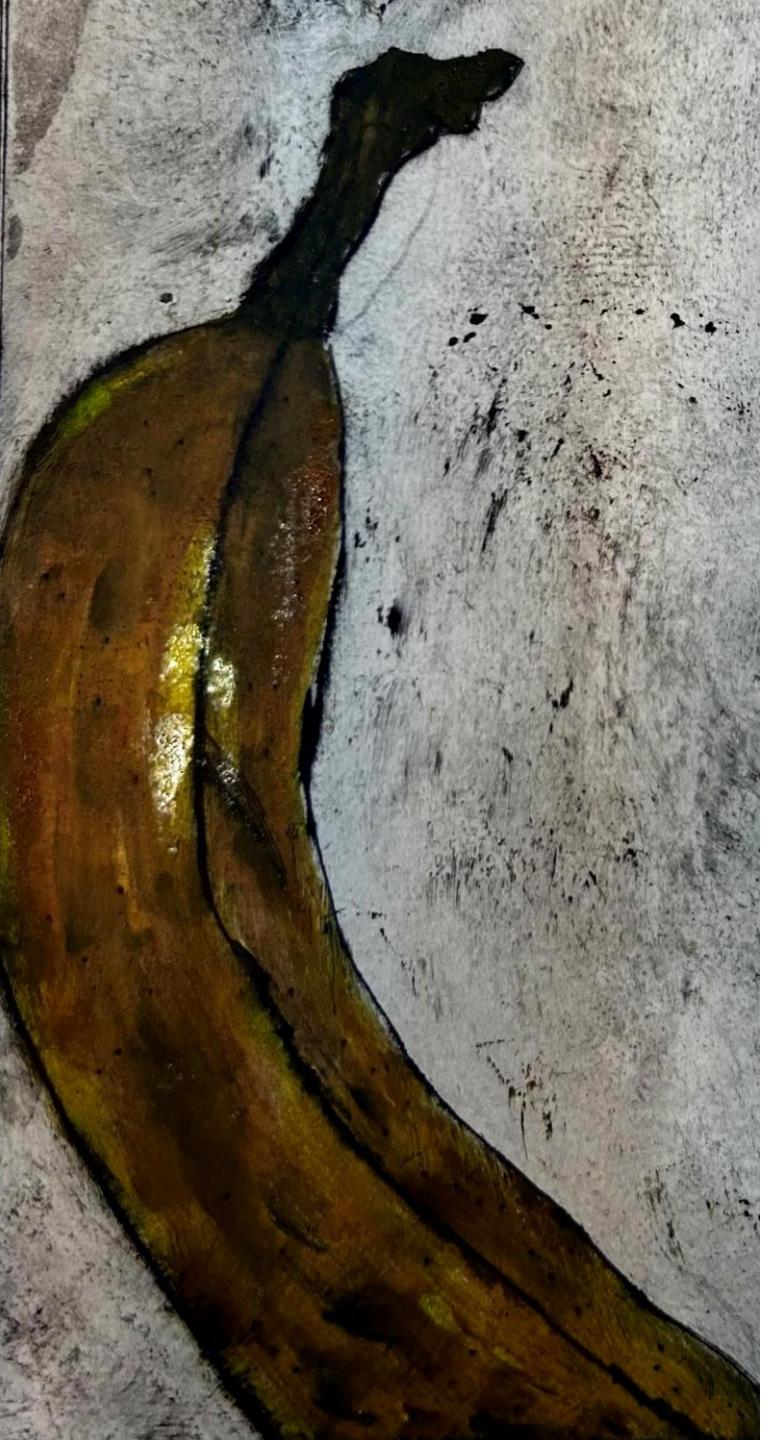
The Dress
Drypoint 12 " x 16"



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



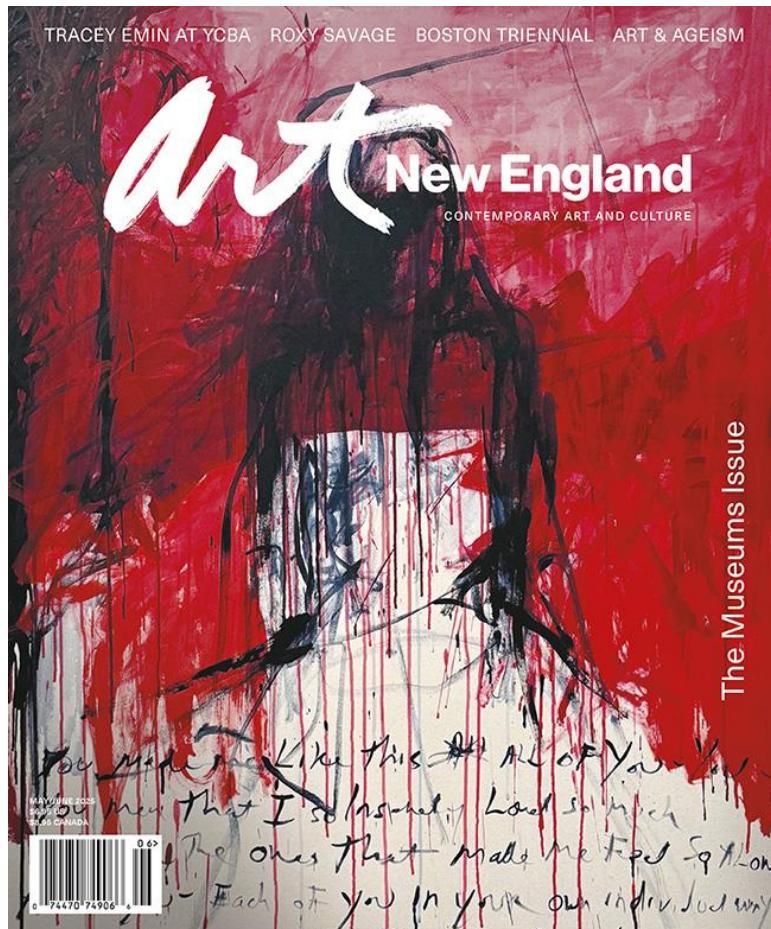
We eat everything
Drypoint 14" x 8"

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

Nancy Marks

REVIEW FROM ART NEW ENGLAND

May/June 2025



REVIEW: MASSACHUSETTS

Material Witness: A Haunting Reflection on Persecution

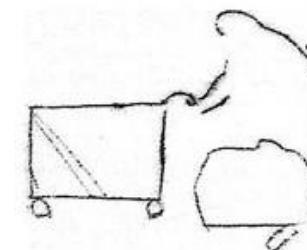
Studio 53 Gallery and Art Space, Roslindale, MA • nancymarksartist.com • Through June, 13 2025

What 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*

About Nancy Marks

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.

nancymarks31@gmail.com

nancymarksartist.com

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.