

Zalika Azim

Blood Memories (or a going to ground)



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Zalika Azim uses multiple forms — photography, sculpture, performance, printmaking and sound — to recontextualize established narratives surrounding Black movement and placemaking. Bringing together new and recent works made during residencies in New York, Austin, and Omaha, *Blood Memories (or a going to ground)* grapples with questions of belonging by proposing an examination of the spaces between departure and arrival. For Azim, these interstitial spaces are not simply physical gaps to be traversed; rather, they represent a speculative phenomenon that connects personal and collective histories across time.

Anchored by a series of works that examine movement as a form of embodied archiving, the exhibition considers gesture as an act of resistance against visible and invisible adversaries that enact Black erasure. In Azim's installation *Score I (Studies for Gravity)* (2022) as well as the multimedia installation for which this exhibition is named, *Blood Memories (or a going to ground)* (2023), bodies explore endurance, repetition, and slowness; they attempt to defy gravity's hold, forging a vocabulary for reimagining liberatory action. In her series *Photographs Not Taken* (2022–), Azim recounts histories of Black settlement and migration through text vignettes, demonstrating how oral tradition, memory, and embodied knowledge have served as a means to expand the constellation of Black histories and communicate narratives that follow intersecting and often conflicting timelines. *Blood Memories (or a going to ground)* also includes a

series of site-specific sculptures and photographs that connect histories of Black placemaking in Austin's freedmen towns to the contemporary conditions that reflect and inform Black life in Central Texas and throughout the United States. These newly commissioned works offer a local context for matters of displacement, legacy, and cultural imagination that inspire Azim's practice. Together, Azim's work proposes strategies to counter historical forces of dispossession and systemic attempts to erase Black communities, offering pathways for creating and reclaiming spaces of belonging.

Blood Memories (or a going to ground) represents Azim's first solo exhibition at a university arts center and is the culmination of two Visual Arts Center-sponsored artist residencies, the St. Elmo Arts Residency and the VAC Every Page Foundation Artist Residency.

October 23, 2025 – March 7, 2026

Visual Arts Center
University of Texas at Austin

Zalika Azim: *Blood Memories (or a going to ground)*
is organized by Max Fields, VAC Director.

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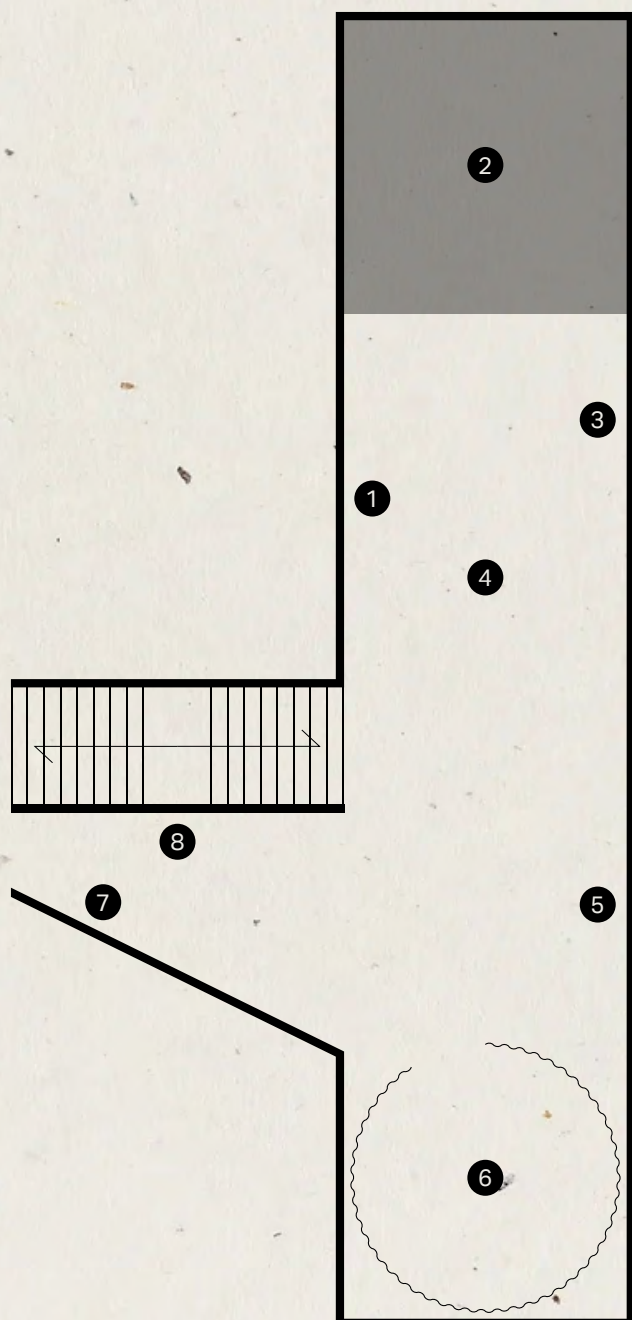
Visual Arts
Center

 The University of Texas at Austin
Department of Art and Art History
College of Fine Arts

COVER

After everything, and before somewhere else (detail), 2025.
Archival inkjet print. Courtesy of the artist.

Gallery Map



Score I (Studies for Gravity), 2022

1

Letterpress prints, ink, seven wooden shelves
Courtesy of the artist

In her work, Azim uses gravity's pull as a metaphor for historic and contemporary systemic forces that both constrain and enable the freedom of movement for Black communities in the U.S. Designed as a score for movement interpretation, *Score I (Studies for Gravity)* explores the potential to manipulate gravity. Azim transcribes basic movements associated with the jump (up and down) into short text prompts, exhausting the language of gravity-based direction to the point of describing movements that defy the physical limits of gravity entirely (up to go up to go). While movement in Azim's score is always tied to a departure point and anticipated destination, the direction of movement is constantly in flux. Azim asks the viewer to enact these movements until the departure point, direction, and destination are no longer clearly defined, wherein boundlessness and the endurance that movement requires, however fleeting, are achieved.

Photographs Not Taken (I–277), 2022

Engraved wood panel, wood finish, car oil
Courtesy of the artist

Resonance, 2025

Two-channel audio, speakers, subwoofer, mixer,
wood, carpet
59:59 minutes, looped
Courtesy of the artist

Sound Direction: Zalika Azim
Drums: David Hawkins
Bass: Dale Black
Piano: Salvador Becerra
Sound Engineering and Design: Darius Jamal Nelson
and Enzo Okumu

Recorded in 2024 at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts,
Omaha, NE. Edited and assembled in 2025 at the Visual Arts Center
in conjunction with the 2023–24 St. Elmo Arts Residency Fellowship
and the 2025 Every Page Foundation Artist Residency, Austin, TX

Between 2023 and 2025, Azim spent her time at the St. Elmo Artist Residency at UT Austin and the Artist-in-Residence Program at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts in Omaha researching and documenting freedmen's towns. Freedmen towns are historically self-sustaining Black communities established by formerly enslaved people. Since many of these early Black settlements no longer exist or lack physical markers indicating their locations, Azim relied on archival materials culled from historical repositories to navigate the altered contemporary landscapes where these towns once stood. At Bemis, Azim collaborated with musicians to explore these obscured sites of Black life through music. Together as a group, Azim and the artists recalled their personal experiences living in communities of color and sonically responded to the question, "What might be generated through an individual and collective reimagining of space, history, and land ownership?"

The resulting work by Azim combines archival audio sourced from the Austin Historical Society with recordings from the musicians' improvised jazz session. The convergence of methods and materials, between historical artifacts and improvised musical performance, transforms the spiritual weight of historical absence and personal memory into a resonant presence that connects disparate perspectives, multiple timescales, and cross-country geographies.

Notes for the omnidirectional #1–3, 2025

Graphite, soil, and charcoal on paper
Courtesy of the artist

Commissioned by the Visual Arts Center in conjunction
with the 2023–24 St. Elmo Arts Residency Fellowship and the
2025 Every Page Foundation Artist Residency, Austin, TX

Ascension Device III (for realities not yet constituted), 2025

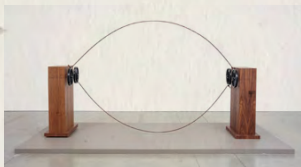
4

Wood, Teslin, archival inkjet print, trampoline springs
Courtesy of the artist

Photo: "Group of African American children swimming at the segregated Rosewood Park swimming pool," by Ellison Photo Company, Austin, TX, c. 1930. [PICA-24215], Austin History Center, Austin Public Library

Commissioned by the Visual Arts Center in conjunction with the 2023–24 St. Elmo Arts Residency Fellowship and the 2025 Every Page Foundation Artist Residency, Austin, TX

Ascension Device III (for realities not yet constituted) is a continuation of Azim's kinetic works, *Ascension Device I* (2022) and *Ascension Device II* (2024), which use gravity as a metaphor for the forces that limit movement, and propose jumping as a form of resistance and method of time travel. In this work, springs and trampoline mesh veil an image culled from the Austin History Center archives depicting Black children playing in the Rosewood Park swimming pool, a community space located just north of the Colorado River in the former freedmen town of Rosewood in East Austin. Azim's work envisions a speculative person using this trampoline device in order to jump through time and gain close proximity to the past encapsulated within the Rosewood Park image. Despite all efforts, the device's tension prevents jumpers from fully touching the past and instead propels them back into the present.



LEFT *Ascension Device I (for meditations on arrival)*, 2022. Wood, aluminum, polypropylene ropes, spoked wheels, electric gear motors. Courtesy of the artist.



RIGHT *Ascension Device II (actions for earth...or some other oscillation...a haptic and sonic engagement...a breath...or an architecture for gathering between space and time)*, 2024. Wood, aluminum, polypropylene ropes, spoked wheels, electric gear motors. Courtesy of the artist.

LEFT TO RIGHT

5

***Some things we know to be true...
or to arrive under and in (Webber's Prairie,
Austin, TX), 2025***

***To come with clouds descending
(Webber's Prairie, Austin, TX), 2025***

***For architectures old and new
(Littig, Austin, TX), 2025***

***A threefold truth tracked on the tongues
of thousands (Webber's Prairie, Austin, TX),
2025***

***A parting hymn for those cast in, and
cast out of the margin (Clarksville,
Austin, TX), 2025***

***After everything, and before somewhere
else, 2025***

***Memorial acclamations (Littig, Austin, TX),
2025***

Archival inkjet prints
Courtesy of the artist

Commissioned by the Visual Arts Center in conjunction with the 2023–24 St. Elmo Arts Residency Fellowship and the 2025 Every Page Foundation Artist Residency, Austin, TX

During the 2023–24 St. Elmo Arts Residency Fellowship at UT, Azim researched and photographed former freedman community sites in Austin and nearby cities. These freedmen towns, established by formerly enslaved people, were self-sustaining Black communities that endured well into the 20th century. Today, however, most of these communities in Austin and across Central Texas have been lost to gentrification, city planning, and private development. Because there is no official registry of these sites or their former residents, Azim turned to the Austin History Center archives, collecting historical documents, images, and maps to direct her travel through Central Texas to those sites. The resulting photographs memorialize these spaces as sacred sites of Black history, drawing attention to the ways the landscape, however transformed, serves as a material witness to Black life, community presence, and defiance in Texas.

Blood Memories (or a going to ground), 2023

Single-channel video (color, silent),
17:07 minutes, looped
Courtesy of the artist

In 2023, Azim collaborated with artist Jennifer Harge to examine forms of historical and ancestral knowledge carried within a Black person's body, or what Harge refers to as "blood memories." Using the question, "How might we arrive?" as their starting point, Azim and Harge examined how the refusal to depart towards any final, fixed destination can serve as a methodology that challenges traditional definitions of geography, which prioritize conquest and development within a confined space or border. In the film, Harge's improvised, often repetitive movements evoke a non-linear sense of time, where the inherited past and envisioned future coexist in the present, in opposition to notions of linear progress and colonial movement. *Blood Memories* suggests that bonds between Black peoples' bodies cannot be located within a single destination or endpoint, but rather in shared histories and the collective knowledge generated through continuous, relational motion.

We'll understand it better by and by (Clarksville, Austin, TX), 2025

Archival inkjet print
Courtesy of the artist

6

LEFT TO RIGHT

Photographs Not Taken (The tale of his arrival), 2021

Engraved wood panel, wood finish, car oil
Courtesy of the artist

Photographs Not Taken (To speak of a lush hot blooded land, to the dispossessed, too busy to visit), 2021

Engraved wood panel, wood finish, car oil
Courtesy of the artist

Azim's practice is grounded in her close engagement with photography and photographic archives. In her series *Photographs Not Taken*, Azim examines how representation in photography is shaped, performed, and recorded in familial and institutional archives. Azim inscribes brief narratives inspired by her family's migration from South Carolina to New York onto the wooden panels, as well as narratives from her recent experiences traveling through the American South. Written from the perspective of a revisited memory, each text moves fluidly through time, collapsing the past and present, encouraging the viewer to conjure multiple images and speculate on details left unwritten. This artist's call to speculation is intentional; it draws attention to the ways people evade documentation or are deliberately excluded from the photographer's frame, as well as the failure of photography to represent histories not confined to a single perspective or point in time.

8

7

