

Faris Nakamura's Interview: Sequestered Spaces

Beverley Harrison:

First, I was wondering if we could deconstruct the components in your wall sculptures, to unfold your works multiplicity of meaning.

- Your works appear minimalistic, in that their exterior façade is made of abstracted forms in monochrome. These properties might suggest that your works are formal entities that have self-referential, in the case of minimalists like Frank Stella, who extended the picture frame into sculpture. However, your sculptural forms are also post-minimalistic, for they suggest organic bodily forms of humans and non-humans, underscoring physical and ecological commonalities of all life.
- In addition, when we look beyond the outer panels' abstracted forms' surface and colouristic properties, we notice edges and lines that cast shadows. As a result, we perceive an architectural space. We pour our imagination into this abstracted internal architectural space, observing a spatial familiarity to offices or homes, to places we visit and inhabit.
- Can you please tell me about these external and internal worlds, as well as about the import of their juxtaposition?

Faris Nakamura: My work's exterior appears composed, resolved, and impenetrable on the surface yet holds within it a far more layered, intimate, and unsettled reality. The external surfaces of my works are deliberately restrained: clean, sleek, minimal, and non-confrontational to the eye. They echo the visual language I grew up with in Singapore, a country meticulously curated and manicured, known for being green, clean, orderly and efficient. But this is only one register of truth.

Within the work, an internal world unfolds, which is fragmented, obscured, and deeply personal. These interiors hold traces of the spaces I have inhabited, both physically and emotionally. They are not immediately accessible. Instead, they require effort, negotiation, and a willingness to move differently. Viewers must shift their bodies, press their faces closer to the wall, bend at the waist, tiptoe, peer through apertures to gain entry. Access is partial, conditional, and never fully granted. This act of looking becomes a reenactment.

As a queer artist from a minority racial background in Singapore, my relationship to space has always been shaped by negotiation, by the subtle and overt limitations placed on who is allowed visibility, presence, and belonging. The internal worlds of my works do not simply depict this condition, they embody it. They ask the viewer to experience, however briefly, the friction of seeking access within structures that are not designed for you. Yet within this constraint, there is also tenderness and joy.

The interiors are not only sites of tension, but also of memory, intimacy, and quiet joy. They hold fragments of home, of adaptation, of becoming. In contrast to the controlled exterior, they are more fluid. These inner spaces suggest that even within systems of restriction, there are ways of carving out moments of presence and connection.

My works exist in this duality: between concealment and revelation, control and vulnerability, distance and closeness. They do not offer full visibility, but instead invite a slower, more deliberate encounter that asks what it means to look, to be allowed to look, and to find oneself within spaces that were never quite built for you.

BH - Can you please walk me through your creative process, step by step?

How do you physically construct the works?

Faris Nakamura: My process begins with drawing. I map out each form directly onto wood sheets, working from shapes I have carefully resolved beforehand and translating them into precise measurements. These outlines become the foundation for construction, where I cut each component by hand using electrical tools. Despite the machinery, the process remains deeply tactile and personal with every line, angle, and curve guided by my hand.

Each individual piece then undergoes a treatment process of puttying, sanding and priming to strengthen the material while removing the natural wood grain, allowing the forms to take on a smoother, almost synthetic sheen. This transformation is important to me as it shifts the material away from its raw, organic state into something more modern and architectural.

Precision is critical when assembling the work. Every cut is made with exacting attention so that joints align seamlessly. I spend a significant amount of time refining these joints, sealing them with wood putty until the joining disappear entirely. The goal is to create a continuous surface, where the object reads as a singular, unified form rather than an accumulation of parts.

Once the structure is resolved, I begin introducing subtle architectural details such as doorways, staircases, windows within the form. Compared to the earlier phases, which demand strict control and accuracy, this moment allows for more fun and spontaneity. These details emerge more fluidly, often guided by instinct, and they act as quiet entry points into the work, suggesting familiarity within otherwise abstract forms.

The final stage is painting. I apply a single, uniform coat of colour to the entire work. This unifies the surface and further dissolves any remaining traces of the material's origin. Ultimately, every step of my process is laborious and manual. It is slow, deliberate act of construction and transformation.

BH: How do you visualize and construct the external and internal layers?

FN: I bring together fragments of architectural shapes and details drawn from buildings that I have encountered and returned to over time. These are not necessarily grand or complex structures, but often quiet and overlooked: a corner, a ledge, a facade edge, a window proportion. They are familiar forms, embedded through repetition and memory. By recombining them, I create a new composite architecture that feels at once recognisable and displaced.

This process is intuitive but requires a careful sensitivity to balance. When disparate spatial elements are brought together, they must negotiate with one another—visually, structurally, and rhythmically.

The internal layers carry a different weight. These inner structures are driven less by physical reference and more by emotional resonance. I think about atmosphere, about the quiet narratives that spaces can hold. A vacant corridor with a closed window. A doorway partially suggested but obstructed by a fence or gate. Stairways that fold into themselves, leading somewhere uncertain or inaccessible. These are not literal depictions, but impressions or fragments of spatial memory shaped by feeling.

BH- As a viewer, I experience a shifting of perspective, physically in terms of the movement of my body and in terms of vantage points. These differing perspectives change the way I

experience and interpret the internal spaces. In turn, that shift of perspective changes how I interpret the exterior facades and the wall sculptures as a whole.

How do you conceptually envision the works subtle shifts in perspectives and themes?

FN: I envision these shifts in perspective as a form of an intentional quiet disruption of what initially feels fixed, resolved, and easily understood. At first encounter, the work offers a sense of clarity and control through its exterior: a composed, architectural surface that appears singular and simple in meaning. But that clarity is never stable. It is contingent on where you stand, how you move, and how willing you are to engage beyond the surface.

The shifts happen not through overt transformation, but through gradual revelation. By requiring the body to reposition, to lean in, to crouch, to circle, the work unfolds. No single viewpoint grants full access. Instead, meaning accumulates through partial glimpses, withheld information, and moments of discovery. These physical adjustments mirror conceptual ones. What seemed minimal becomes layered, what appeared closed begins to open, and what felt simple turns intimate.

What starts as a reading on architecture, shapes, colour, and geometry transitions into something more personal and complex that touches on memory, displacement, identity, and the negotiation of space. It reflects how lived experience, especially as someone navigating queerness and minority identity, is rarely singular or stable, but constantly shaped by context, access, and visibility.

These shifts are intentionally subtle because they echo the realities they stem from. They are not loud or declarative, but embedded, felt over time, and often only revealed through sustained attention. In this way, the work asks the viewer to slow down, to question their initial assumptions, and to recognise that what is most present is not always what is most visible. I see these shifts as a way to allow the work to exist simultaneously as surface and depth, control and intimacy, concealment and exposure, without resolving them into a single, fixed understanding.