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Betwixt and Between: an Exploration of Dream Imagery as a Means to Self-Discovery

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BETWIXT AND BETWEEN: AN EXPLORATION OF DREAM IMAGERY
AS A MEANS TO SELF-DISCOVERY

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty
Of the
College of Visual and Performing Arts
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the
Requirements for the Degree
Of
Master of Fine Arts
In Studio Art
Winthrop University

May, 2018

By

Anastasia Netrobine

ABSTRACT

This body of work is an investigation of the memories and experiences of displacement. As a foreigner, I often find myself in a strange space between the familiar and the unfamiliar. I use various three-dimensional media to explore and depict these experiences, as well as dreams and memories related to Jungian archetypes, especially as they relate to my personal history. I overlap these dreams and memories, varying the media and shifting scale, so that the line between reality and dreams gets blurred and one becomes both a viewer and a part of the installation simultaneously. Through my manipulation of different materials and media, including wood structures, metalsmithing, drawing, and ceramic objects, I explore my experiences related to displacement and the human psyche. I see thematic and visual connections with my work and the work of Louise Bourgeois, Thomas Schütte, Chiharu Shiota and Do Ho Suh, as discussed in my thesis statement. The title of the thesis exhibition, *Almost Familiar*, is a reference to the tension between the recognizable and the unfamiliar. Each piece represents a memory or a dream sequence that I have experienced. Tension is created when the lines between the two blur, through scale shift and unexpected details. Each sculpture is a vital part of the puzzle, containing a bit of familiarity, suspension, and mystery – mirroring the complex nature of the human experience and psyche. Parts of the sculptures are left unfinished as a reminder that this person, myself, is incomplete and that the story continues.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	v
EPIGRAPH: C. G. JUNG	vi
THESIS	1-24
DESCRIPTIONS OF ILLUSTRATIONS	25-27
ILLUSTRATIONS	28-47
BIBLIOGRAPHY	48-49
IMAGE CITATIONS	50

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure		Page
Figure 1	<i>Almost Familiar – MFA Thesis Exhibition 2018</i> (installation view)	28
Figure 2	<i>Untitled I (Pool Surgery)</i>	29
Figure 2a	<i>Untitled I (Pool Surgery)</i> (detail)	30
Figure 2b	<i>Untitled I (Pool Surgery)</i> (detail)	30
Figure 2c	<i>Untitled I (Pool Surgery)</i> (detail)	31
Figure 3	<i>Untitled II (Storm Table)</i>	32
Figure 3a	<i>Untitled II (Storm Table)</i> (detail)	33
Figure 3b	<i>Untitled II (Storm Table)</i> (detail)	33
Figure 3c	<i>Untitled II (Storm Table)</i> (detail)	34
Figure 3d	<i>Untitled II (Storm Table)</i> (detail)	34
Figure 4	<i>Untitled III (Burnt House)</i>	35
Figure 4a	<i>Untitled III (Burnt House)</i> (detail)	36
Figure 4b	<i>Untitled III (Burnt House)</i> (detail)	36
Figure 4c	<i>Untitled III (Burnt House)</i> (detail)	37
Figure 4d	<i>Untitled III (Burnt House)</i> (detail)	37
Figure 5	<i>Untitled IV (A Lone White Bison)</i>	38
Figure 5a	<i>Untitled IV (A Lone White Bison)</i> (detail)	39
Figure 5b	<i>Untitled IV (A Lone White Bison)</i> (detail)	39
Figure 6	Louise Bourgeois – <i>Femme Maison</i>	40
Figure 7	Louise Bourgeois – <i>Cell (You Better Grow Up)</i> , <i>Structures of Existence: The Cells</i>	40
Figure 7a	Louise Bourgeois – <i>Cell (You Better Grow Up)</i> , <i>Structures of Existence: The Cells</i> (detail)	41
Figure 8	Thomas Schütte – <i>Big Buildings</i>	41
Figure 9	Thomas Schütte – <i>One Man House III</i>	42
Figure 10	Thomas Schütte – <i>Basement II</i>	42
Figure 11	<i>Control Series II – Perfectionism</i>	43
Figure 12	<i>Control Series IV – Manipulation</i>	43
Figure 13	<i>Control Series I – Religion</i>	44
Figure 14	<i>Control Series III – Information</i>	44
Figure 15	Chiharu Shiota – <i>Try And Go Home</i>	45
Figure 16	Chiharu Shiota – <i>Sleeping Is Like Death</i>	45
Figure 17	Chiharu Shiota – <i>The Key In The Hand</i>	46
Figure 18	<i>First Draft</i>	46
Figure 19	Do Ho Suh – <i>Home Within Home</i>	47
Figure 20	Do Ho Suh – <i>Specimen Series – Stove</i>	47

I must learn the dregs of my thought, my dreams, are the speech of my soul. I must carry them in my heart and go back and forth over them in my mind, like the words of the person dearest to me. Dreams are the guiding words of the soul. Why should I henceforth not love my dreams and not make their riddling images into objects of my daily consideration? You think that the dream is foolish and ungainly. What is beautiful? What is ungainly? What is clever? What is foolish? The spirit of this time is your measure, but the spirit of the depths surpasses it at both ends.

–C. G. Jung (Shamdasani et al., 2009)

BETWIXT AND BETWEEN: AN EXPLORATION OF DREAM IMAGERY AS A MEANS TO SELF-DISCOVERY

I am an interdisciplinary visual artist born in Helsinki, Finland. My work focuses on themes of time, memory, and human experience. I draw inspiration from my personal history and observations, and in my current work, I am combining several of my many interests. I earned my Bachelor's degree in art from the Saimaa University of Applied Sciences in Finland in 2013. I first came to Winthrop as an exchange student in 2011, and after deciding to fully commit to being an artist, I returned to Winthrop to pursue a Masters in Fine Arts degree.

This body of work is an investigation of the memories and experiences of displacement. As a foreigner, I often find myself in a strange space between the familiar and the unfamiliar. People, cultures, environments and places may seem familiar, but are not. It can feel disorienting and confusing at times. I use various three-dimensional media to explore and depict these experiences, as well as dreams and memories, especially as they relate to my personal history. I overlap these dreams and memories, varying the media and shifting scale, so that the line between reality and dreams gets blurred and one becomes both a viewer and a part of the installation simultaneously. Through my manipulation of different materials and media, including wood structures, metalsmithing, drawing, and ceramic objects, I explore my experiences related to displacement and the human psyche.

The process of creating the artwork evolves from the act of disrupting normalcy. By creating seemingly ordinary scenes and disrupting them with strange details, I am

inviting the viewer to peer into my mind. What they find might not be what they expect and will leave them questioning the meaning of the symbols I use. I have deliberately excluded the human figure from the work, because my intention is not to create a doll house. Instead, I have left clues or evidence of recent human presence in the form of found objects or subtle references to the body, like porcelain shoulders, as I will discuss later in this statement. The absence of figures is intended to increase the eeriness and make the experience immersive.

The title of the thesis exhibition, *Almost Familiar*, is a reference to the balance between the recognizable and the unfamiliar. Each piece represents a memory or a dream sequence that I have experienced. I have chosen a particular memory or a dream as a point of departure for each sculpture, and then added elements and materials to them to increase visual and compositional interest. Tension is created when the lines between the reality and dream world blurs, through scale shift and unexpected details. Each sculpture is a vital part of the puzzle, containing familiarity, suspension, and mystery – mirroring the complex nature of the human experience and psyche. Parts of the sculptures are left unfinished as a reminder that this person, myself, is incomplete and that the story continues.

DISPLACEMENT

Looking back at the bodies of work I have created in the past, although seemingly different, I can identify certain underlying themes that keep re-emerging. Some of these

themes are the relationship between time and space, memories, and experiences of displacement which I have experienced on many different levels.

Since I was a child, I have felt different – as though I navigate the world on a completely different level from the rest of the planet. I do not mean that I am somehow superior to others, but rather simply different. Most noticeably, this profound feeling made it difficult to make friends as I was growing up. I spent most of my time in my room or in the small wooded area near my childhood home or at the summer cottage. My grandmother told me she would go into the garden and hear people having a conversation. She found me sitting in an empty fountain, talking to myself using different voices. I suspect others might have had similar experiences, as if their concepts and thoughts are not appreciated or fully understood. This feeling has continued to follow me through high school and college and to this day as well. I have since made friends, of course, but I have not found many with whom I connect on a deeper, meaningful level .

Another example of experiencing displacement is perhaps more universal: being a foreigner in another country. Even in a country whose culture is not that far from my own, there is an inexplicable sense in the back of my mind that something is not quite right. When you are in a situation where you are not entirely comfortable, such as when you first learn how to ride a bicycle. In this situation your brain goes back to the so-called default settings, desperately grasping at anything familiar. In my artwork, this happens when I draw. I do not particularly enjoy drawing; it is uncomfortable, unfamiliar and discomfoting. Therefore, I intuitively draw what I know: abstracted snow-filled landscapes. I think being lost in the snow can be very discomfoting and disorienting.

Everything looks the same, but you cannot be sure of which direction you came from and where you should go. That is how I sometimes feel when I am in another country. I do not belong to where I come from, and I do not belong to where I am currently. I exist somewhere in-between.

In my work, I am attempting to create something that will leave the viewer wondering, confused, and disoriented – in other words, displaced. The shoulder table stands well above an average person's head, providing the viewer the opportunity to feel small, as if they were a child again hiding under a table. Instead of providing safety, however, the single table leg standing on a pile of pillows creates a feeling of uneasiness. Is the table leg strong enough to hold the weight of the table? The medical equipment inside the concrete pool is another example. The two elements are recognizable, but never have the two been combined in this way. The floating house may look like a normal house, but upon closer investigation, the viewer can see that the walls are not straight and the smell of burnt wood gives you a little hint of what may be inside. The devastation of the burned interior space again leaves the viewer feeling uneasy, if not disturbed. The fourth sculpture is less menacing and anxiety inducing. The white bison is standing alone on a mountain top, that also happens to be a roof, and in front of it there is a single small tree. Though the bison is alone, it is not lonely. For he is resilient, hopeful, and has left behind a bucket full of emotion below the staircase that the mountain top stands on.

LIMINAL SPACE

Victor Turner uses the term “liminality” in his essay *Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage*. As the title suggests, Turner explores different non-Western and other rites of passage, and in particular “the liminal or transitional phase” that ensues (Turner, 1967). The “liminal phase” is a period of time that occurs between two stages in life. For example, adolescence can be viewed as a transitional period between childhood and adulthood. In my case, liminal space relates to my personal experiences of displacement, referred to earlier. My work expresses this in the splicing of the dream world, the memories, and reality. It can be found in the house that may look like an ordinary house at the first glance. The tilted, slightly blackened walls provide the viewer with a small clue of what they are looking at but does not prepare one for the horrors that wait behind the exterior walls. Finally, the liminal space is also evident in the table that is standing on a single leg that transforms into a tree limb, resting on a mountain of pillows.

Lately, I have been struggling with crippling anxiety. It was not until about two years ago that my therapist pointed it out to me and it suddenly made sense why I had felt so terrible all these years in art school. Eventually, the anxiety became so overwhelming that I did not want to leave my apartment, and it would take me several hours to finally leave my room and go about my daily activities. I was discussing this problem with my therapist, and she calmly said, “You seem to have a great deal of anxiety over ordinary things.” Suddenly it made perfect sense, and I had a light bulb moment: I was suffering

from anxiety and needed to address this issue as soon as possible in order to become more productive in my life and creative work.

Distinguishing the difference between what is a healthy amount of pressure and the point where my mind goes overboard is very tricky. At first, I experimented with natural remedies and meditation, and these did help a little. I realized, however, that it would take years of hard work to combat anxiety this way, burdened by an unnecessary weight in addition to the normal pressure of school. Eventually I decided to try medication. The first two or three prescriptions were not suitable for me. I did not feel anxious, but I felt complacent, unmotivated, and indifferent. I soon understood that these feelings of complacency were not going to work if I wanted to continue making art. My head felt cloudy and thoughts seemed to move at a glacial pace. In addition, I started having intense and vivid dreams. These dreams were unlike any I had encountered before. They were complicated, sometimes disturbing, and often very real. I started keeping a dream journal. I also began consulting another therapist who specializes in dream interpretation and the psychology of dreams. With his help, I began to understand the hidden meanings of the dreams and what they were trying to tell me.

At the same time, an idea for my creative work began to form in my head. I wanted to make work about my life experiences, and how this process of dream interpretation was beginning to open up parts of my inner self of which I had been previously unaware. I wanted to get to the bottom of this anxiety and find out where it was coming from. I started doing an exercise called early childhood recollection. This

involves trying to remember your earliest childhood memories, selecting the most significant ones, and then dissecting them with the help of the therapist.

The quest to interpret dreams was interesting, because the messages were not always clear. They were often jumbled, with mysterious and encrypted sets of symbols that did not seem to make any sense at first. As the early childhood recollections and dream analysis process continued, it became quite clear to me that the project I had undertaken was a great deal more complicated than I had initially anticipated. But as a result of this intensive process of personal reflection, an idea for a thesis began to form: I was going to make work about myself and my past life experiences.

The initial concept for my project started out as a miniature house. This house was meant to be a representation of me. I have wanted to build a house for a long time, and I thought it would be interesting to build a structure that would serve as a metaphor, a self-portrait. In art and dream interpretations, the house can be seen as the self, and I am very intrigued by this concept. Withheld in the structure; there are secrets contained in the house, just like people carry secrets that they do not want to reveal to everyone. In my work, parts may remain unfinished, damaged, or under construction to mirror this concept. The house would have several floors and multiple rooms that would feature scenes from my dreams. This concept evolved and I began to incorporate my childhood memories into the structure. I wanted to build this miniature house as if I were building an actual house. So, I built walls with tiny two by fours and started constructing a three-story house from scratch. Later in the process, I even made a base for my house by pouring a layer of concrete into a wooden frame upon which the construction was placed.

PROCESS

Moving from the initial idea of a single construction to four components, allowed me to use the individual sculptures to depict different ideas within the installation. For my thesis project, I created four sculptures that directly tap into my dream analysis work. Each one consists of either a house, or part of a house. There are typical house-like qualities and elements, but there is something slightly off-kilter in all of them. The walls are a little crooked, and the furniture is upside down – too small or too large. The strange and unusual elements that I have chosen include things that do not normally go together, such as a swimming pool with a medical operation room located at its bottom. As I mentioned previously, I have intentionally excluded people from this work. There is evidence of their presence, but I did not feel it was appropriate to incorporate figures into the work, as it would interfere with the illusion. My house is not a doll house, but an environment where dreams, memories, and reality collide, intentionally leaving the viewer disoriented. By hiding and revealing parts of my conscious and subconscious, as symbolized by the house, I am attempting to create an experience for the viewer that implicates them in to the work.

I created this work because I wanted to depict and express some of the experiences that I have had in the hopes of getting to the root of my problem with anxiety and understanding it better. Having constant debilitating anxiety is an awful way to live, but numbness on the other end of the spectrum is not any better. This current work relates to my previous work in the sense that I have previously explored and experimented with space, though on a different scale. I can also utilize the broad range of skills that I have

learned from all my various areas of interest. I am incorporating some of the materials that I have previously experimented with, as well as and tying this work to my previous art work in new and meaningful ways.

I have been suffering from an inexplicable pain in my shoulder for the past three years and it has been a true impediment to my work process. The cause of this pain is a mystery to me and the numerous doctors, physical therapists and other healers I have consulted. I have discussed it with my therapists and have begun to suspect that it might be a psychosomatic pain, caused by a psychological issue rather than an actual physical injury. The pain has changed the way I work. I have had to think increasingly about my limits, and what I can and cannot do. The miniature format seems like a useful way to scale back on the size of my installations, while still providing a framework for the expression of my ideas. As is often the case, things do not always go as planned, and I find myself gradually increasing the size and complexity of the installation.

The limited range of motion in my right arm has forced me to scale down and use different forms of problem solving. In earlier studies of space and immersive environments, the lack of space led me to focus on small scale models of installations. This allowed me to work through ideas fairly quickly without worrying about wasting materials and time. I made eight little cubes out of particle board and worked on several different ideas simultaneously. This way I could figure out some of the problems and possibilities before committing to one idea and translating that into full-size installation.

This work, like me, is a work in progress. Building this house “from scratch” was very important to me. The tedious process of making each little tile (in the swimming

pool) and hand painting them one by one satisfies my need for repetitive labor-intensive activities. The project has since evolved over the course of time, from being a single building, to a series of fragments that give an impression of a house. I believe this emphasizes the dreamlike quality of each part of the installation, as dreams are often fragmented.

I see this series eventually evolving into a long-term project that will provide me with material to work with for years. This thesis exhibit is only the beginning. I have edited my ideas for sculptures down to include the four pieces that I feel best represent the core themes of my current body of work. In the future, these four sculptures will be just a fraction of a larger body of work I hope to continue working on in the future.

DREAM ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH

Dreams pave the way for life, and they determine you without you understanding the language. One would like to learn this language, but who can teach and learn it? (Jung, 2009)

Sonu Shamdasani, the editor of Jung's book *Dreams*, describes how Jung used a process he called "active imagination" as part of a self-experimentation he conducted and kept a detailed record of. This process involved letting his imagination and "fantasy thinking" soar, and then writing about it later (Shamdasani, ii). Similarly, I have used my

“active imagination” in my thesis project. In addition to recording my dreams, I am translating them into sculptures and writing about the process in this thesis statement.

I started keeping a dream diary in the hopes of finding answers to some questions I had about myself. I had heard that dreams can reveal things about our subconscious, and I wanted to see if I could interpret some of the strange symbols in those dreams and perhaps find out what they were trying to tell me. With the help of a therapist who specializes in Jungian psychology and dream interpretation, I started to study some of the mysterious messages that my unconscious was sending me. It can sometimes be very difficult, because the messages are not always clear. Their language is cryptic and it takes a lot of reflection and contemplation to understand the meanings specific to you (personal communications, Dr. Kwabena Sankofa, Ph.D., Winthrop University 2017-18).

For example, in my dream about the lone bison standing by a tree on a snow-covered mountaintop, there are three key symbols that can be identified as archetypes according to Jung’s theory. Those elements are the Bison, the Snow, and the Tree. The Bison can be interpreted as resilience, heritage and masculine energy. The Snow can mean frigid or frozen emotions, the color white means purity, and the tree represents nourishment and growth. With the help of my therapist and a lot of self-reflection, I have been able to identify these interpretations in my personal history. To me, the Bison means resilience and overcoming of difficulties. The snow means that there are unresolved emotions connected to these difficulties. Finally, the Tree represents personal growth that is the result of resilience (Ibid).

In the foreword of the book, *Home as a Mirror of Self*, by Clare Cooper Marcus, James Yandell talks about Jung's desire to express his "innermost thoughts and the knowledge [he] had acquired". These innermost thoughts manifested themselves in the form of a house Jung built over the course of two decades. He would add to it periodically whenever the inspiration struck, but it was not until the house was built that he recognized the significance of the construction. Each addition to the house represented a "development of himself" in the "self-realization of the unconscious" and together they formed "a symbol of psychic wholeness" (Marcus, xv-xvii). I feel that the house imagery in my work mirrors these concepts described in each addition to Jung's house, in a number of ways. For example, I am adding and editing my house as I move forward with the project, and each time I do, I learn something new about myself, especially when I write about it. Trying to explain my decision making to others helps me understand it better as well.

Furthermore, as I am constructing these sculptures, it seems as if they are revealing things to me about myself and my past that I had not previously been conscious of. These sculptures are metaphors for larger concepts from my past life. For example, my memories of my grandmother and her house have had a significant enough impact on me that a decade and a half later; I am now making work about those experiences. Experiences of discomfort, fears and worries, unresolved emotions, constant physical pain, and resilience. Through the work, I feel the need to purify myself of these psychological and physical burdens that are weighing me down. This the underlying theme of much of the work in my thesis exhibition.

WORKS OF ART

Untitled I (Pool Surgery) 2017

This sculpture is based on a dream I had last summer. On the outside this structure looks like a concrete block, similar to the basement level of a house. Upon closer examination, the viewer will notice that one of the walls is not actually a wall, but rather a window. Inside this concrete basement is a swimming pool. The pool is filled with water. The walls and floor are made out of over two hundred small handmade ceramic tiles. Most of them are white, but there are three dark blue lines of tiles that run from one end of the pool to the other. However, despite its appearance, this is no ordinary pool. On the bottom of the pool there are three objects. There is a small gurney, a lamp, and a small table for surgical instruments. (Figures 1, 2, 2a, 2b and 2c)

In the dream, I am a guest at a very wealthy family's house. The house is massive and has multiple floors. I start to wander around the house and find my way to the basement. The entire basement is one big swimming pool filled with water. On the surface of the water there are pieces of furniture and other debris floating around. I see a light coming from below the surface and dive in. Beneath the surface, on the bottom of the pool, I see a surgical theater with a gurney, a tool tray, and a lamp. As I reach the bottom of the pool, I wake up.

Untitled II (Storm Table) 2018

This object is standing in the middle of the room, balancing on a single tall leg. The leg is holding up what appears to be a table top. Underneath the tabletop there are

white shapes hanging down, forming clouds. These clouds are actually porcelain casts of shoulders. The shoulder clouds light up sporadically and resemble a thunder storm. The table leg looks like an ordinary table leg at the top, but further down it transforms into an upside-down tree that looks like it is standing on a pile of pillows. (Figures 1, 3, 3a, 3b, 3c and 3d)

The table is actually a fragment from a larger table, and that is why it only has one leg. The significance of the table relates to the memories of my childhood years, when during thunderstorms, my brother and I would hide under my grandmother's massive dining table because the cabin was not grounded. We were terrified of the lightning hitting and setting the whole cottage on fire, especially because it was built on a hill. We would take pillows and blankets and playing cards and sit under the table until the storm passed. If the table looks more intimidating than comforting, it is because my grandmother is an intimidating character. I do not have many warm memories of her. Everything in her house was massive, heavy, and dark. Therefore, this sculpture is a metaphor for both her physical impact on our lives, as well as the means by which we would cope with our childhood fears.

Untitled III (Burnt House) 2018

From the ceiling hangs an object that resembles a house. The shape of its architecture, however, is unusual. Instead of four walls in a rectangular shape, this house has six walls and they are all leaning slightly one way or another. There are several flickering lights attached to the outside walls of the house. These walls hide a secret. The

viewer can peer in through one of the windows. Inside, there is a dark living room turned upside down, and all you can see is a blue light shining through a cracked door. In this faint blue light there is a fireplace. A video of a hand lighting a fire is projected onto the fireplace. (Figures 1, 4, 4a, 4b, 4c and 4d)

I cherish the memories of my childhood summers spent at my grandmother's cottage, even though she was not the warmest person. My brother and I would swim, pick berries, fish, sunbathe, look for frogs, ride bicycles, tinker in the wood shed, and play in the garden. This is about all I wanted to do, but my grandmother had other plans. We also had to clean, gather pine cones, cut wood, and be generally useful. As she got older and more scared of the dark, my grandmother became more and more lonely, and decided to move from the woods to the city. She sold the house that she had built together with her husband, and where my mother and her sisters had grown up. Less than a year later, the man who had bought the house accidentally set the house on fire and also died in that fire. This was obviously very traumatic for my grandmother and by extension to me and my brother and mother as well.

Untitled IV (A Lone White Bison) 2018

On the floor, there is a galvanized steel bucket. The bucket is filled with lake water. From the bucket rises a wooden staircase. The steps lead to a small sauna made out of little logs. The roof of the sauna is larger than it normally would be in a sauna of that size. The roof is upside down, and on top of it, in what appears to be snow, stands a single white bison. The bison is standing on the roof alone. His fur, hooves, horns, and

eyes are white. Next to the bison on the roof is a white spool of thread that connects to the ghost house floating close to the ceiling. (Figures 1, 5, 5a and 5b)

This dream is one of the earlier ones I experienced, and it left a strong impression in my mind. In this dream, I am standing on a snow-covered mountaintop, only the top looks more like a valley. I am standing next to a small leafless tree and see something moving towards me. The figure comes closer and closer, and finally I recognize the figure as a gigantic lone white bison. I can hear the low grunts as it is breathing, and the snow crunching under its hoofs as he is approaching me. At first, the bison seems aggressive. I have had my hands in my pockets and I pull out a bunch of grass and give it to the bison. This is where I wake up.

INSTALLATION ART

Interpreting installations requires work. The artist is asking the viewer to look closely, pay attention and think. Compared to a painting on a wall, the viewer is asked to not only look at, but to step into the art work and allow it to surround them and take them on a journey. By disrupting or transforming the space, the artist is creating an immersive experience beyond the limitations of the traditional picture plane.

According to Nicolas de Oliveira, installation is a “generic term that covers a large area of practice and enquiry within contemporary art”. It is a hybrid discipline with connections to Performance Art, and architecture with activation of space and artistic intervention as its premise. It represents the artist’s desire to extend the area of practice from the studio to the public space (De Oliveira, 7). This is also my intention in my

installation; I have prepared the pieces of each sculpture beforehand, but it will all come together on the site. I have learned that before the opening night, nothing is set in stone and to leave room for – sometimes quite drastic – changes.

SURREALISM

Surrealism began as a literary philosophy that grew out of Dada and evolved into an influential art historical movement. Both Dada and Surrealism were anti-rationalist and sought to revolutionize art and life. André Breton, a French theoretician and writer, was an original member of the Dada movement and founder of the subsequent Surrealist movement. Surrealists expressed their concerns about the violent political atmosphere and unstable state of the post-World War I world through their art. Heavily influenced by psychoanalysis, Surrealists believed the conscious mind was repressing the imagination. Breton proposed that the way to access the unconscious was to bypass reason and rationality using techniques such as “automatic writing” and “automatism”, introducing processes related to chance in to their practice. Artists used dream imagery to uncover unconscious anxieties and created works using fantastical symbols in a variety of media (Surrealism, The Art Story).

ARTIST REFERENCES

One artist that has greatly inspired my work is Louise Bourgeois. Louise Bourgeois was born in 1911 in Paris, where she received her early education among such artists like Brancusi, Giacometti and Léger. She created an extraordinary body of work over the course of her career that spanned over four decades. In 1938 she moved to New

York where she became friends with Surrealists and early Abstract Expressionists. Throughout her long career, Bourgeois never compromised her unique and independent vision. She created highly personal work with themes including anxiety, alienation, freedom of expression and identity, sex, and death. Although she was influenced by movements such as minimalism, Abstract Expressionism and Process Art, she never fully subscribed to any of them. Instead, she chose the solitary path of marching to the beat of her own drum, making work with deeply autobiographical content, involving the unconscious, sexual desire and the body (The Art Story).

Bourgeois started out as a painter, but soon discovered the powerful cathartic expression that sculpture could provide in her work. She mastered numerous techniques and materials, such as carving, casting, modeling, assembling, latex, bronze, and found objects bending them to her will and using them to express her innermost thoughts and feelings.

I find connections between Bourgeois' work and mine on multiple levels. Themes, imagery, and methods of working are the most obvious similarities between our creative processes. Both of us use our work to fuse the rational and the intuitive. Common themes include anxiety, isolation and alienation, the subconscious, and familial relationships. Common imagery relating to domesticity, childhood memories, and trauma also connect our work. Like me, Bourgeois used scale as a way of emphasizing the traumatic experiences from her past. In terms of physical symbols, the form of a house was a symbol often referenced in Bourgeois' work (Figure 6). This may be due to its close associations with memory and lived experiences. As Charlotte Kotik states, the

house is in fact a major catalyst for memory. It is a site where the most complex and primary feelings and relationships take place, as Kotik argues in her essay *The Locus of Memory: Introduction to the Work of Louise Bourgeois*. Another quality that I feel I share with Bourgeois is our similar ability to navigate between two continents and cultures. This can be an advantage, but at times, it can be very isolating (Kotik, 1994). Bourgeois paved her own solitary path and must have felt very lonely at times. I can relate to that. I too use multiple methods and media in my work, as I find choosing just one not only difficult, but limiting.

Bourgeois has said “self-knowledge makes better artists”. Similar to Bourgeois’ way of using sculpture to “give tangible expression to the traumatizing experiences in her life, in an attempt to exorcise them”, I find similar catharsis and profound healing power in art making (Kotik, 1994). Bourgeois’ work is based on memories, like mine. They are deeply personal in nature, and the house and its contents can “either provide a protective refuge or a trap” (Ibid). (Figures 7 and 7a)

To reminisce and woolgather is negative. You have to differentiate between memories. Are you going to them or are they coming to you. If you are going to them, you are wasting time. Nostalgia is not productive. If they come to you, they are seeds for sculpture. (Kotik et al. 1994)

One artist that I find connected to in a more formal way is Thomas Schütte. Schütte is a contemporary German multi-media artist who working in printmaking,

watercolor, installation art, ceramics, and sculpture. He is best known for his figurative sculptures but starting in the 1980s as his work began to address social concerns, he created a series of modest architectural models (Figures 8 and 9). The houses are not just an exercise in form and volume but can be viewed as devices of representation with high symbolic value – commentary on the contemporary condition (Art Net). Some of the constructions have an intentionally unfinished look to them (Figure 10), and although some may include more elaborate details, they are not meant to look like professional model constructions, as is the case in my house. Schütte is more concerned with following particular ideas and personal preferences employing the constructions as a strategy, adapted to specific subjects (Heynen, 1998).

While Schütte's houses provide more of a social commentary on contemporary life, mine offer a narrative of personal history and trauma. I would not consider my house a model necessarily, but rather a reconstructed memory. Similarly, to Schütte's work, in my installation, the construction itself is a strategy and it does not need to be perfect. Several of Schütte's models have been realized in large scale as actual buildings; for instance, he has built himself a private museum. My house is constructed on a smaller scale, and based on past experiences and dream imagery. In contrast to Schütte's work, my house reflects imagery from the past, and not so much the present or future.

Another artist whose work has served as inspiration for me is Chiharu Shiota. She is a prolific Japanese multi-media artist who creates large scale installations and sculptures utilizing thread and found objects. Her immersive, poetic and sometimes dark installations are captivating and memorable even on film or photographs. Before

graduating from Kyoto Seika University, she spent a year at the Canberra School of Art in Australia. While abroad, she experienced a personal trauma, and due to this experience, her work took a darker direction. After graduation, Shiota moved to Berlin where she studied under performance artist Marina Abramovic. This had a profound effect on her way of working as she immersed herself in performance art (Bloomberg, 2017 and Chan, 2015). When I was in college, I, too, had an experience that had a profound effect on me. As a result, I created a series of work, dealing with emotional defense mechanisms (Figures 11-14). The project was very cathartic. I think my quest for self-knowledge began back then.

One of Shiota's early pieces from the time she studied with Abramovic, *Try and Go Home* (Figure 15), is a performance piece that involved fasting for four days. After the fast she dug a hole in the woods and proceeded to climb in and out of it for hours. This piece was one of the first where she began exploring themes like displacement and belonging. Having lived in Germany for three years at that point, she found herself missing her home country. However, during a return visit home, she did not feel like she belonged there either (Bloomberg, 2017 and Chan, 2015). *Try and Go Home* is about identity and those experiences of dislocation: you cannot truly go home, no matter how hard you try (Bloomberg, 2017).

I think this is precisely what I mean by experiencing displacement. I have often thought what it might be like to go back home after living abroad for three years. I suspect there is a period of shock and adjustment. In my head, time back home has

stopped and everything will pick up where I left it. But of course, this is not true. Things have changed, my friends have gotten older, and time has moved forward.

Common themes in Shiota's work are time, a sense of belonging, displacement, transience, human relationships, and life and death. Some of these themes are similar to those I deal with in my work. In viewing a video of her work, I was surprised to see how similar our processes and themes were. The way Shiota described her work and talked about her experiences was also very similar to the way I describe my experiences of displacement. Her signature medium is thread, and she uses it in almost all of her work, from installations to sculptures. She started using thread because it felt like she could extend her lines into space, thus transforming her paintings into three dimensional compositions (Bloomberg, 2017). In Figure 16, her use of black thread represents universal truths, and the external world. It is the color of ink. Her use of red thread has associations with blood and internal world of the body (Figure 17). It also symbolizes human relationships, and like thread, they can sometimes get tangled (Chan, 2015). Interestingly enough, in the first installation I made in graduate school I used thread to extend my drawings into space as seen in Figure 18. The themes in Shiota's work are very similar to mine, she has had traumatic experiences in her life and although she does not necessarily use dream imagery as a source for her work, her installations have very much a dreamlike quality.

Another artist whose creates work that expresses similar themes with my work is Do-Ho Suh. He is a Korean artist known for his monumental site-specific installations recreating homes that he has previously lived in. For instance, he created a replica of his

childhood home and suspended it inside a replica of his first New York apartment (Figure 19). He constructs his installations out of stainless steel and translucent polyester fabric to bring attention to “the ‘invisible memory’ of our daily experiences at home.” Some of his life-size replicas are challenging to build and he has to rely on technology to ensure the correct measurements. Suh has also created a series of fabric sculptures called *Specimen* consisting of domestic objects he has encapsulated in glass (Figure 20). Although Suh’s work is different from mine in that it explores the relationship between individuals and the general public, it is based on personal memories of architectural space and the notion of home and in that sense relates back to my work. Suh says that he is interested in transient parts of the spaces, like staircases and doorways. He sees his life as moving through these spaces and homes he has lived in. Experiences of displacement led him to working with fabric so he could carry a piece of home with him on his journeys. Suh has said that he is interested in the physical space, but also in an intangible, metaphorical, and psychological one (Artnet and Shaw, 2015 and Tate, 2011).

I created this body of work to express some of the feelings and experiences I have had in a visual form, to learn about myself and who I am as a person and an artist. The outcomes of this research may have been unexpected and some of the things I uncovered on this journey were unpleasant – but that is the nature of life and art in my view. All of it is valuable, and through the development of my thesis work, I feel as though I have accomplished the goals that I had set out to reach. I have grown as a person and an artist. More specifically, I have learned that writing about my work while in the process of making it can be a very useful tool for communicating my ideas and reflecting on why I

make the art that I do. Researching Jungian symbolism has inspired a great deal of ideas for future work and writing. This body of work marks the end of an important period in my life, but it is also the beginning of a new chapter. I am at a threshold of the unknown, in a liminal space of my own making, between the old and new, past and future. As I leave graduate school and step into the future, I will take experiences and memories with me, and they will shape me and undoubtedly manifest in my future work in some shape or form.

DESCRIPTIONS OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Figure 1 *Almost Familiar – MFA Thesis Exhibition 2018* (installation view)
Elizabeth Dunlap Patrick Gallery at Winthrop University
From left to right: *Untitled IV (A Lone White Bison)*,
Untitled III (Burnt House), *Untitled II (Storm Table)*
and *Untitled I (Pool Surgery)* photo by Alexis Howard
- Figure 2 *Untitled I (Pool Surgery)* 2017-2018
29” x 22” x 26” (dimensions variable), photos by Alexis Howard
Wood, brick, concrete, ceramic tiles, brass, steel, powder coating,
LED-lights, water, grass
Figure 2a (detail) [grass swing]
Figure 2b (detail) [under stairs closet]
Figure 2c (detail) [underwater surgery]
- Figure 3 *Untitled II (Storm Table)* 2018
Dimensions variable, photos by Alexis Howard
Wood, pillows, porcelain shoulders, surgical sutures, LED lights,
thunder machine, sound player
Figure 3a (detail) [shoulder clouds]
Figure 3b (detail) [close up, lit clouds]
Figure 3c (detail) [top of table leg]
Figure 3d (detail) [bottom of table leg]
- Figure 4 *Untitled IV (Burnt House)* 2018
38” x 28” x 26” (dimensions variable), photos by Alexis Howard
Wood, ceramic fireplace, brass, steel, chiffon, LED lights,
sound player, lamp
Figure 4a (detail) [outside of house]
Figure 4b (detail) [chandelier]
Figure 4c (detail) [inside of house]
Figure 4d (detail) [ghost house]
- Figure 5 *Untitled III (A Lone White Bison)* 2018
Dimensions variable, photos by Alexis Howard
Wood, ceramic bison, steel bucket, water
Figure 5a (detail) [bison, sauna]
Figure 5b (detail) [bucket]
- Figure 6 Louise Bourgeois – *Femme Maison* 1964-67
Canvas: 36” x 14”, ink on linen (reproduction)

- Figure 7 Louise Bourgeois – *Cell (You Better Grow Up)*,
Structures of Existence: The Cells 1993
210.8 x 208.3 x 212.1 cm
Steel, glass, marble, ceramic, wood, mirror
Figure 7a (detail)
- Figure 8 Thomas Schütte – *Big Buildings* 1989
Installation view, 11 parts, dimensions variable
Cardboard, plywood
- Figure 9 Thomas Schütte – *One Man House III* 2005
283.21 x 123.51 x 187.96 cm
Wood, mixed media
- Figure 10 Thomas Schütte – *Basement II* 1993
102 x 150 x 205 cm
Wood
- Figure 11 *Control Series – Perfectionism* 2012
Photograph of a performance, dimensions variable
Body, steel nail marks on skin
- Figure 12 *Control Series – Manipulation* 2012
Photograph of a performance, dimensions variable
Body, Sharpie marker on skin
- Figure 13 *Control Series – Religion* 2012
Photograph of a performance, dimensions variable
Body, Molasses, sugar on skin
- Figure 14 *Control Series – Information* 2012
Photograph of a performance, dimensions variable
Body, silk ribbon, walnut pedestal, steel nails
- Figure 15 Chiharu Shiota – *Try And Go Home* 1997
Still image from a performance
- Figure 16 Chiharu Shiota – *Sleeping is Like Death* 2015
Installation view, dimensions variable
Black wool, beds, performers

- Figure 17 Chiharu Shiota – *The Key in the Hand* 2015
Installation view, dimensions variable
Red wool, old boats, old keys
- Figure 18 *First Draft* 2015 (detail)
Installation view, 12' x 12' room
Wool, graphite powder, LED lights
- Figure 19 Do Ho Suh – *Home Within Home* 2013
Installation view, two 1:1 architectural replicas, dimensions variable
Steel, polyester fabric
- Figure 20 Do Ho Suh – *Specimen Series - Stove, Apartment A, 348 West 22nd Street, New York, NY 10011, USA* 2013
Installation view
Steel, polyester fabric, display case with LED lighting

ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1, *Almost Familiar* – MFA Thesis Exhibition 2018 (installation view)



Figure 2, *Untitled I (Pool Surgery)* 2017-2018



Figure 2a, *Untitled I (Pool Surgery)* 2017-2018 (detail)



Figure 2b, *Untitled I (Pool Surgery)* 2017-2018 (detail)



Figure 2c, *Untitled I (Pool Surgery)* 2017-2018 (detail)



Figure 3, *Untitled II (Storm Table)* 2018



Figure 3a, *Untitled II (Storm Table)* 2018 (detail)



Figure 3b, *Untitled II (Storm Table)* 2018 (detail)



Figure 3c, *Untitled II (Storm Table)* 2018 (detail)



Figure 3d, *Untitled II (Storm Table)* 2018 (detail)



Figure 4, *Untitled III (Burnt House)* 2018



Figure 4a, *Untitled III (Burnt House)* 2018 (detail)



Figure 4b, *Untitled III (Burnt House)* 2018 (detail)

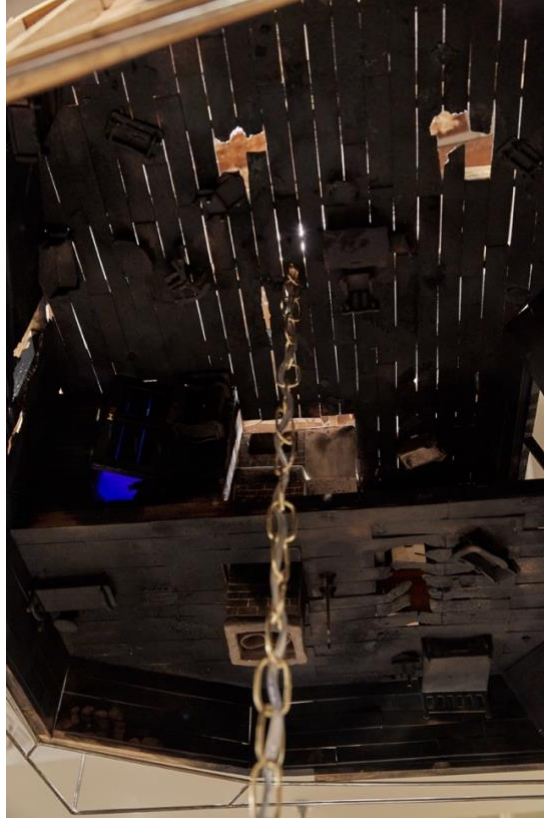


Figure 4c, *Untitled III (Burnt House)* 2018 (detail)



Figure 4d, *Untitled III (Burnt House)* 2018 (detail)



Figure 5, *Untitled IV (A Lone White Bison)* 2018



Figure 5a, *Untitled IV (A Lone White Bison)* 2018 (detail)



Figure 5b, *Untitled IV (A Lone White Bison)* 2018 (detail)

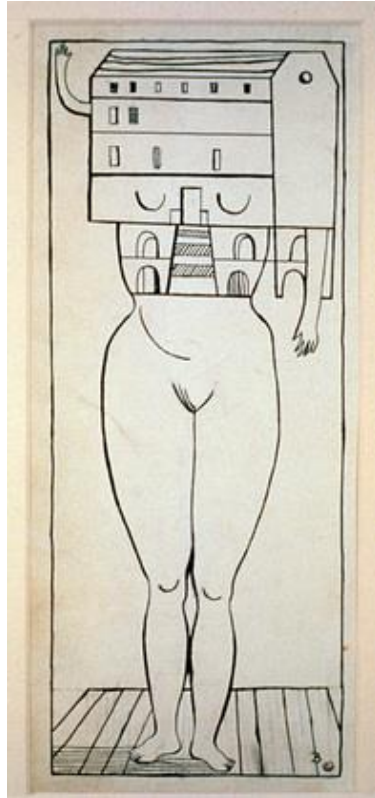


Figure 6, Louise Bourgeois – *Femme Maison* 1964-67



Figure 7, Louise Bourgeois – *Cell (You Better Grow Up)*, *Structures of Existence: The Cells* 1993



Figure 7a, Louise Bourgeois – *Cell (You Better Grow Up)*, *Structures of Existence: The Cells* 1993 (detail)



Figure 8, Thomas Schütte – *Big Buildings* 1989 (installation view)



Figure 9, Thomas Schütte – *One Man House III* 2005 (installation view)

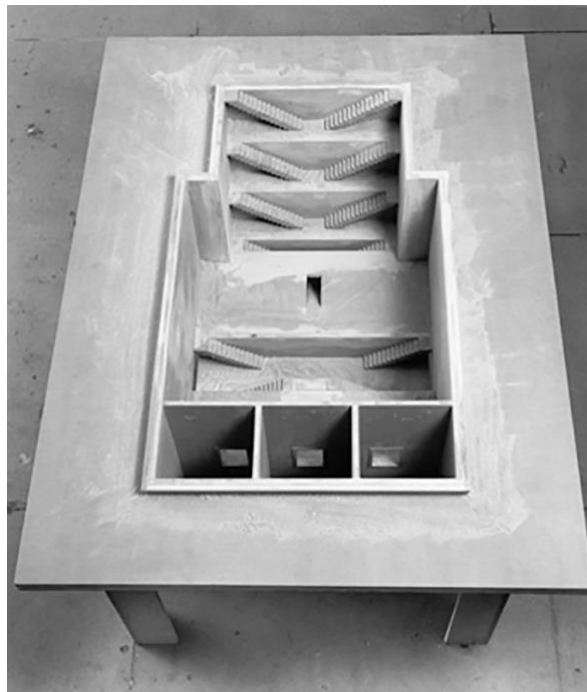


Figure 10, Thomas Schütte – *Basement II* 1993



Figure 11, *Control Series II – Perfectionism* 2012 (photograph)



Figure 12, *Control Series IV – Manipulation* 2012 (photograph)



Figure 13, *Control Series I – Religion* 2012 (photograph)



Figure 14, *Control Series III – Information* 2012 (photograph)



Figure 15, Chiharu Shiota – *Try And Go Home* 1997 (still image from a performance)



Figure 16, Chiharu Shiota – *Sleeping is Like Death* 2015 (installation view)



Figure 17, Chiharu Shiota – *The Key in the Hand* 2015 (installation view)



Figure 18, *First Draft* 2015 (detail)



Figure 19, Do Ho Suh – *Home Within Home* 2013 (installation view)



Figure 20, Do Ho Suh – *Specimen Series – Stove*, Apartment A, 348 West 22nd Street, New York, NY 10011, USA, 2013 (installation view)

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Chiharu Shiota, *The Key in the Hand*, [The 56th International Art Exhibition - la Biennale di Venezia, Venice / Italy] photo by Sunhi Mang
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Chiharu Shiota, *Sleeping Is Like Death*, [Galerie Daniel Templon, Brussel] photo by José Huedo.
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Control Series – I – III, photos by Raegan Dixon

Control Series – IV Manipulation, photo by Jim Stratakos

Do Ho Suh, *Home Within Home* [Aesthetica Magazine] photo courtesy of the artist.
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Louise Bourgeois, *Cell (You Better Grow Up)* [The Warehouse] Art © The Easton Foundation/, New York, NY
http://thewarehousedallas.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/warehouse_install2_bourgeois_0-1024x787.jpg

Louise Bourgeois, *Cell (You Better Grow Up)* (detail), [The Rachofsky Collection, Dallas] photo by Peter Bellamy © The Easton Foundation by VG Bild-kunst
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Louise Bourgeois, *Femme Maison*, © 2018 The Easton Foundation/ VAGA, NY
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Thomas Schütte, *Basement II*, [Artist Website] photo by Michael Goodman www.thomas-schuetzte.de/ajax.php#/2.01.13.006

Thomas Schütte, *Big Buildings*, [Artist Website] photo by Peter Cox www.thomas-schuetzte.de/ajax.php#/2.01.09.001

Thomas Schütte, *One Man House III*, [Marian Goodman Gallery] photo by Michael Goodman
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