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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
In Candidacy for the Degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

A Place of Origin

By

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May 2010

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INTRODUCTION

Using the home that I've grown up and lived in for my entire life, as the foundation for my art, the body of work represented in A Place of Origin, revolves around this connection that I have to the past and how this past affects my present, while also addressing how people and memories are represented in the objects that they leave behind. These reminiscent objects, this generational house, have been the physical representations of how, as people and things fade away, their presence and influence has the ability to fade as well, unless we continue to keep their memories and presence relevant.

History creates the foundation upon which we, as individuals, form our identities. Where we come from along with the knowledge that we possess, are all intrinsic elements that meld together to aid us in realizing our past and present. The old adage that, "history continually repeats itself", is evidenced by the choices that we continually make when creating ourselves into the people that we wish to be. Whether we realize it or not, our past plays an essential role in creating our present.

History has always held a certain draw for me, my own, and the history of others. There is much to be garnered from the study of that which has come before. I believe that learning about the past can have an integral role in the discovery of whom we are and the forming of whom we will become. I believe that the knowledge and presence of my family history while growing up has formed me into the person that I have become today as well as the artwork through which I am able to express my thoughts and emotions.

My family and their history have been an inspiration to me in how I act, as well as the motivation and justification for the work that I have created within my thesis. Our origins have the ability to guide us through to our future as well as back to our past. I have become

fascinated by the memories and the history, which have encompassed my entire life, whether they are my own experiences or those that have been handed down to me. As these objects are passed down from generation to generation they become a part of living history, aiding in the continued remembrance of times gone past while still existing as an important element in the space that they now occupy. These objects and the memories they evoke have become an inherent element in creating the person I have become, while also encouraging the creation of the artwork that I continue to make.

This thesis has resulted from the realization of how the significance that the constant presence and absence of the people, place, and things in my life, have profoundly affected me. Their importance in establishing the basis for life has led me to create a body of work that is both a retelling of that which I have learned while at the same time existing as an autobiographical message to the viewer, inviting them to inhabit both the present and the past that I exist in.

SECTION I: CONTEXT

To discuss my artwork, it is impossible not to delve into my history. In viewing the work, I am inviting the participant to enter into my personal environment, the home that I have inhabited for my entire life. Allowing the viewer to become privy to the memories and articles that have been a steadfast presence within my own life as well as those members of my family that have come before. My work exists as a personal narrative on how the experiences of my family have affected and morphed me into the person that I have become today.

When discussing my artwork, it is first essential to discuss the foundation, upon which the work is based, my family home. My sister and I are now the fourth generation of my family to live in my home, which was purchased, along with 72 acres of land, from Sam Archer in 1920. Growing up in this residence has been one of the most constant and stable things in my life. It's continued existence stands as a testament to those in my family that have come before me, and have resided within its walls. Though time has passed and society has changed, this structure has remained as an unchanged element within the evolution and passing of my family and its history. Growing up in this house I have been constantly surrounded by the objects that have been residing there for generations. Each object, ranging from old photographs of my mother and grandfather in their varying stages of maturation, to the pressed glass gold table dishes, to the various sideboards, chairs and tables, have remained as constants throughout four generations. I had always taken them for granted, never really seeing them as anything other than "antiques" that filled my home. It was upon moving back home, after I had graduated from my undergraduate education, that I

came to view my home in a very different way. I began to look at these objects, that I had seen my entire life, and saw them not just as antiques that anyone would have, but as remnants of my ancestors. My thoughts turned to what the original purpose that these objects had, who had bought them, what was their significance, both to me and to the family who had originally bought them. These heirlooms began to take on an entirely different meaning. They were not simply objects for decoration, and they were not solely items for use; these household possessions had become manifestations of the generations that had resided within this place of origin.

With the continual presence of the past, represented in the existence of family photographs and heirlooms, there is also the realization that the people that cherished these objects are now gone, their memory only aided by the commodities that remained. This is one of the themes that I address in my work, as the objects begin to deteriorate and fade, will their memory and existence fade as well? These possessions each hold a story or a memory of a time that has been passed down through generations. Grandmother's sterling silverware evokes the memory of setting the table for thanksgiving and Christmas dinners. Weeding the rock garden stirs recollections of the garden created by my mother and grandmother. Every year, our Christmas tree is adorned with ornaments that are three generations old, and my favorite teacup from a collection that my great aunt brought back from England piece by piece. Each item embodies an event, a tradition. The people that have come before have now become remembered through the objects that they have left behind. These articles have now been elevated to a higher purpose; they are the bearers of something infinitely more important than what their original purpose was.

Traditions are an essential part to the continuation of history, as well as to the way it changes. Living today in the twenty-first century, our world is surrounded by machine made

items that are mass-produced. When observing the tokens of my family that surround and inspire me within my environment, there is a sentimentality and preciousness facilitated by the fact that they are clearly hand made. Time and attention was paid to every aspect of their creation, by the hands of an individual and not from the cold recesses of an assembly line. While I do not disclaim the benefits that come from living in a modern society, often the craftsman is lost within this society. There is a history and an emotional connection that exists within the items and has continued to remain after my family members have gone. The handmade elements of these objects lend a complexity to these heirlooms that go beyond their initial appearance. It is fascinating to me to see the complexity and care that has gone into each of these objects, fashioned from the hand of one of my ancestors.

The artwork of the Chicana artist, Carmen Lomas Garza, represents a similar aesthetic towards the use of traditional methods and imagery in a contemporary world. Using memories from her childhood growing up in Texas, she creates paintings, prints and installations, utilizing traditional Mexican techniques, taught to her by her grandparents and the society and environment that she grew up in. This “passing” of traditions and craft is predominant, especially within Mexican folk culture. Garza uses traditional Mexican craft works such as papel picado, cut tinwork, folk painting and installations based upon Dia de Los Muertos, to represent her memories as well as the society that she continues to reside within. The use of the passed on traditions can be seen throughout Mexico, where history and the remembrance of ancestors is daily practice. As Garza learned these traditional practices from the family that surrounded her as she grew up, so I learned the sewing and embroidery that are represented throughout the pieces in A Place of Origin. This traditional craft of hand sewing and piecing together of various elements has been passed down

through my own family generations, learning from my mother as she learned from hers, the remnants of their work remaining in the house on Archer Road.

Influenced by my environment and the handmade remnants of my family, my artwork has embraced more traditional methods to give life to my visual narratives. Using time consuming and detail orientated drawing, sewing and printing techniques, my work gives definite references to the methods that my ancestors themselves used when creating the objects that fill my home, while at the same time expressing my views in a contemporary manner. This mentality is a direct reference to the aims that the Bauhaus school gave importance to following the aftermath of World War II. Focusing on the need to, “bring together the artist and craftsman and make no distinction between the two.”(Stevens, 1981), the Bauhaus encouraged artists to focus on the essential need for craftsmanship, while at the same time creating works of art that allowed the artist’s to express their own originality. Walter Gropius, the founder of the Bauhaus school, felt the need to develop a new teaching method, stating, “That the base for any art was to be found in handcraft.”(Bauhaus Archive/Museum of Design). There is a sensitivity and purpose that comes through in artwork that is hand made rather than if it is created by digital technology. This is especially visible in the textile and fiber work that was made within the Bauhaus School, as well as that done by many contemporary artists today.

Within the contemporary art world today there has been a growing usage and respect for fiber and textile arts. Using the traditions of old, many artists have begun shaping their artistic visions to include elements of weaving, quilting, and embroidery into their contemporary works. There has been a transformation, from thinking of the textile arts as “women’s work” or simply a “craft” to be completed in the home, into a respect for the beauty of design, color and the intricacy of the handmade element. An aspect given great

importance in the teaching of the Bauhaus, and found in many works being produced by artist's using fiber and textiles today, is that there is a joining and melding of techniques and methods, materials and designs, that utilize aspects from history as well as those of today. The knowledge and records that quilts and various textile works continue to pass on also establishes an intense connection between what we view textile works to be today and the information that we learn about life and values from the past. Throughout history, quilts and other textile objects have been used to create a narrative between the events of the time as well as creating a lasting voice of the past. Through various patterns employed by societies such as the Quakers and the Amish, traditional patterns, created for weddings births and the home, continue to speak through time, whereas, contemporary artist's such as Alicia Ross, use the "traditional" context of cross-stitching and quilting to challenge views on motherhood and sensuality. In her Blanket, Sampler and Motherboard series, Ross uses traditional sewing references and techniques such as appliqué, cross stitching and embroidery, to create her images, which are of provocative and seductive nature. In her work, she creates a world that is at odds, on one hand the domesticity and traditional context of the woman in the home, on the other hand, the seductive and challenging poses that her female figures evoke within the frame. Through this juxtaposition, the viewer is confronted with the conflicting roles that women are subject to, that of the mother and that of the sexual object. While my subject matter differs greatly from Ross', I understand and associate with her connection to the use of "women's craft" as a means of exploring a more intimate connection between the past and present. While she uses contemporary images within a traditional context, my work uses traditional methods to represent the transition between past and present. In an interview Ross explains the connection she feels to her work:

"Martina Stenina: What is your relationship to your work? The craft is time-consuming and the subjects

are seductive. They are exploited. They are powerful. Do you love them or hate them?

Alicia Ross: I don't love or hate the individual pieces themselves, though my emotion towards the pieces' subject matter is strongest during the design phase. Much like the content of the work, my roles of artist and seamstress are rather disjointed. The most laborious part for me is the design part—searching the Internet for the right images to appropriate, digitally manipulating the images, choosing thread colors, digitizing the pixels to stitch, etc. Most of the logistical questions are answered before I start sewing. The sewing stage is very time-consuming, but that is really more of an output phase for me. It's during this time where I can really tap into my own domestic compulsions.” (Stenina, 2009)

Within the creation of my pieces for, A Place of Origin, the planning and layout for the pieces was the most arduous, whereas the sewing was almost a meditative experience, a time when I could connect with my past as well as with the piece itself, going back to my roots if you will. This combination of, “complexity, structure, materials, process, form and content,” (McFadden, 2007) showcases how artists today are interpreting new meanings and uses for resources that have a common place within our world.

For every artist the material that she chooses to create with is an intrinsic part to reaching the conception and completion of a piece of work. In my own work the materials that I use, such as fabric and thread, are direct references to the conceptual basis of the work that I produce. When looking at the art of my contemporaries I am drawn to what they use as their material and how this plays a significant role within the piece itself. The choosing of the material not only lays the foundation for the work but also instructs the viewer as to how they should interpret the piece itself. The artist Lesley Dill (Images 1 and 2), utilizes a multitude of resources, materials and methods to create her works. Not content to have her work exist in any one type of category, Dill's installations, sculptures, drawings and prints meld together until they can only be described as “art”. Dill's work has been an inspiration

through the materials she uses as well as the care and emotion that come through in every one of her pieces. There is an intensive “handmade” element as well as a sensitivity to detail, a facet of her work that allows her audience to understand and associate with the delicate handling of her materials. Dill’s work consists of layers upon layers of details, materials, and meaning. Her pieces are incredibly complex while at the same time deceptively simple. Dill is able to create an amazing antithesis within her work, tempering monumental size and hard edged materials such as steel, iron and plaster, with monochromatic colors, delicate threads, and feminine attributes, imbuing her pieces with an ethereal quality that is at once apparent to the viewer. Dill’s work is mainly comprised from her love of language, much of which she appropriates from the poems of Emily Dickenson. Using text that is at once intensely personal, while at the same time, can transgress to a more universal emotion; Dill uses Dickenson’s words to stimulate both the intellectual aspects of her work and the visual. Through this use of words, Dill is able to connect with her viewers privately as well as collectively. Dickenson’s poems and words have been read by thousands of people around the world, however Dill’s interpretation of the text, along with her visual stimulus, allows the viewer access to her interpretation of the prose. Paired together, the text takes on a whole different meaning, allowing Dill to express her more personal feelings towards Dickenson’s work, while at the same time giving Dickenson’s words a contemporary bent. One of the aspects of Dill’s work that I am most inspired by is her ability to reshape and reform words and prose that were written decades ago. This use of historical contexts being applied in a contemporary world is an aspect of her work that I strongly identify with, especially in my own work. Utilizing methods and materials that have a traditional base, figures and images that are historically dated, she is able to meld these various historical, traditional aspects and create works of art that are relevant to today’s society. Her work speaks to the isolation of

the individual, both in society and within the home, the barriers and tangled web of language and communication; topics that are relevant as much today as they were centuries ago.



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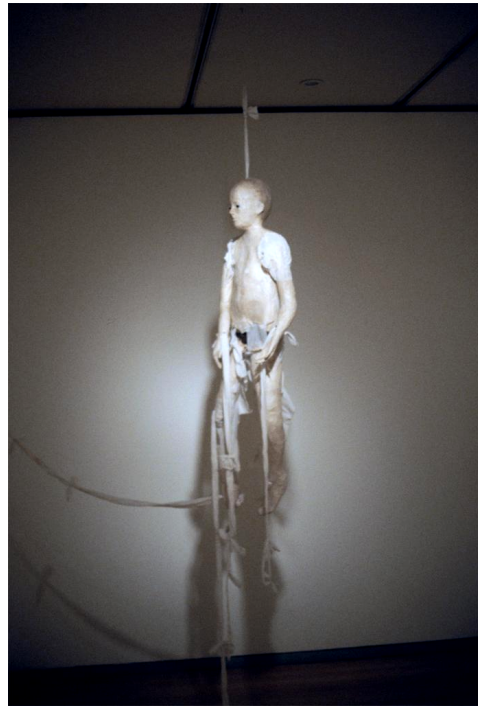
“Purity and simplicity of form often define the salient aspect of beauty in the world of created objects. However, there is another side to beauty, one that grows from complexity and the astonishment and awe that complexity can inspire in the viewer.” (McFadden, 2007). One of the aspects I most admire when contemplating the work of Lesley Dill is her ability to use complex layers and foundations of materials while still not overwhelming her audience. Dill’s work has a quiet presence, often belied by the size and intricacy of her pieces, encouraging her viewers to reflect and embrace the softer elements of her work. This influence can be seen especially in the piece, This is a Story..., where the layering of various fabrics, handwriting, and sewing, as well as the transition of color from light to dark, invites the viewer to reflect on the more intimate elements of the piece while also viewing it as a whole.

The art of Kiki Smith(Images 3 – 7) also shares this type of relationship with the viewer. Similar to Dill's work, Smith uses the breadth and range of her materials to it's fullest. From her sculptures to her works on paper, Smith has the ability to at once awe and disgust while at the same moment creating quiet introspective works of art that allow the audience access to her interests, methods, past and present. Known primarily for her sculpture, Smith is also a prominent mixed media artist, draftsman, printmaker and installation artist. Her ability to wend her way through a variety of different mediums shows not only her range as an artist but also how she doesn't allow the material to detain her from achieving her goal. Working with whatever material seems necessary for her creations, she explores it's potential to it's fullest, creating works that seam so perfectly together, her sculpture, drawings and prints live together as a cohesive whole. With her ability to meld various materials together, Smith allows her visual imagery to weave together to give her audience a glimpse into her interests and fears as well as her world. Using her experiences growing up as a jumping board, Smith's work explores her interest and investment in the importance of life, death and resurrection, themes that have been relevant since her Catholic upbringing. Her ability to draw on so many different experiences from her family and her upbringing, to her own domestic interpretations, has been an inspiration and source of reference to me for my own work. While my own work is very autobiographical and associated continuously with the environment that I have grown up in, Smith uses her background and upbringing in a more ambiguous way, using animals, mythology and anatomy to convey her results. However, as she creates these ambiguous atmospheres she also invades these spheres with intense, direct references to her own psyche and person. The use of nude images of her body, drawings of her lover, prints of her beloved pets, allow the viewer access to her thoughts and methodology, her world. As in Smith's work, the work represented in A Place of Origin, is

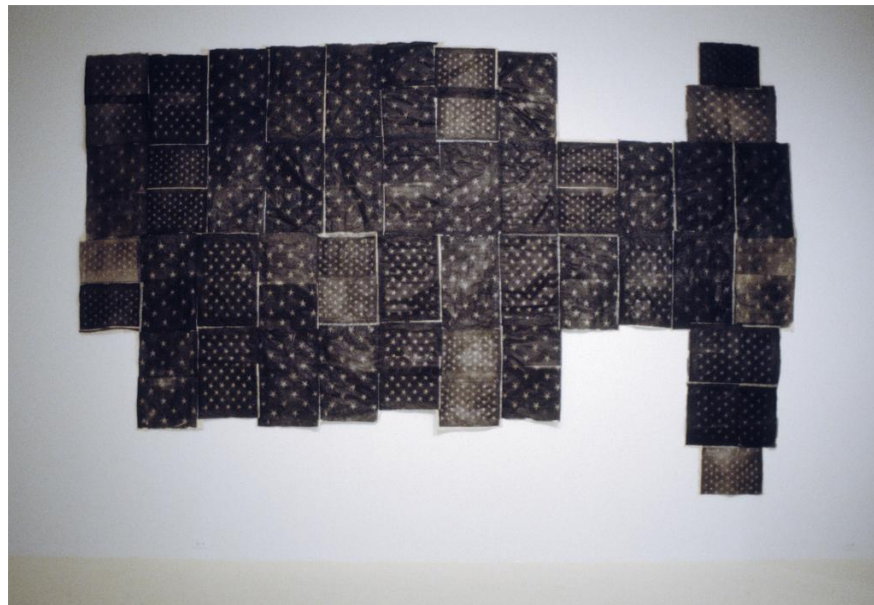
an opportunity to allow my audience the chance to understand how the influence of my home and its history have had a profound affect upon me.



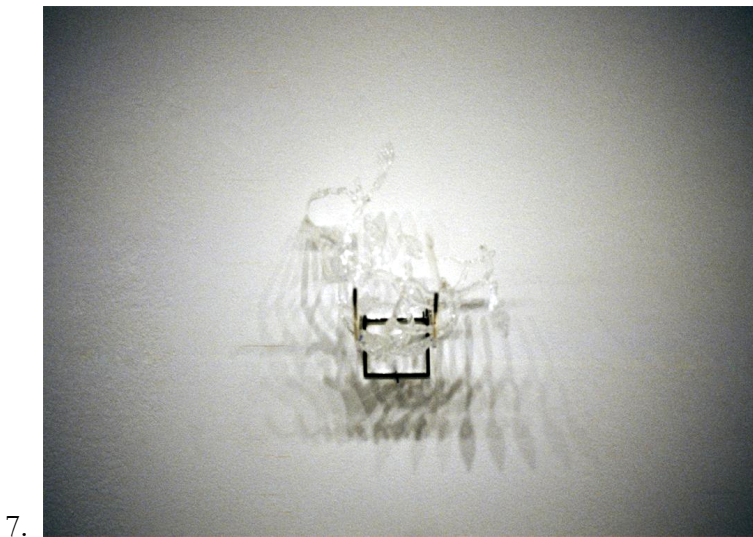
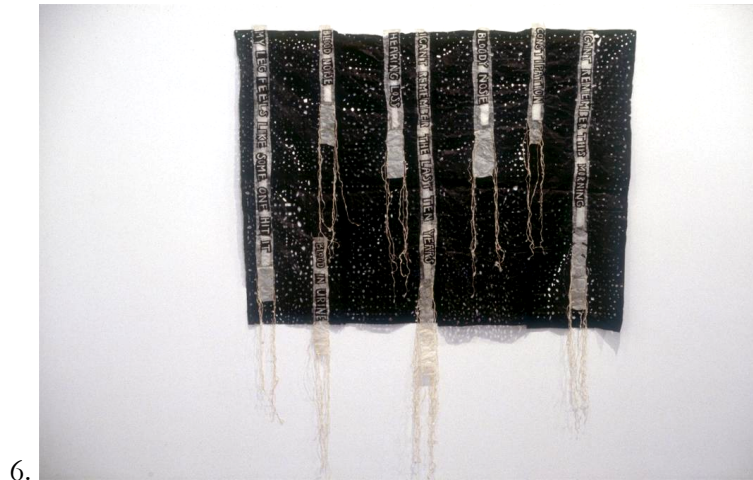
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As artists our identity, thoughts and beliefs are brought into direct contact with our audiences allowing us the ability to express not only ourselves, but also giving our viewers the opportunity to understand and identify with our work. In the work of Lesley Dill and Kiki Smith, the viewer is allowed access to their musings and inspirations, as well as their views on the idea of identity, albeit they convey these thoughts in very different ways. The idea of identity, where we come from, where we belong, is a very common concept with many artists' work. The artist Yinka Shonibare (Images 8 – 10) uses his identity and authenticity as the backdrop for his installations, sculpture and photography, inviting his audience to view his crosspollination of cultures. Born in England and raised in Nigeria,

Shonibare describes himself as “bi-cultural” and centers his work on this concept. Raised in two cultures that have an interconnected past and present, Shonibare uses the colonization of Africa by the European powers to address his views and thoughts on class, identity, authenticity and race. Using these themes as the basis for his pieces, Shonibare uses traditional Victorian dress, paintings and society as the materials and foundations for his sculpture. He strips his subjects of their wealth and property, altering their identities. He removes the heads and of his figures, repositions them in 18th Century settings, in aristocratic attire fashioned from traditional African fabric, then re-positions them. Shonibare plays with his “bi-culturalism”, the “African fabric” he uses, is actuality made by Dutch manufacturers, which he then buys in the Quincy Market in London. He takes this play of cultures and countries and how they all feed and influence one another and then creates his own interpretation of this mangled history. Through all of his installations, paintings, sculptures and photographs the element that remain constant is Shonibare’s attention to detail. He executes his creations with a craftsmanship that is unrivaled; which allows his audiences the ability to glean the underlying meaning from his installations. His work has been an inspiration in that he not only looks at how his own history has been affected by this combining of cultures, ideals and values, but also how it has affected nations and races. He uses his blurred allegiance to either nation and asks the viewer to make his or her own interpretation and answers as to what is authenticity. Through his work he examines the effect that a melting pot of cultures has had and continuously has on the world around us and how this affects not only himself, but us as well.



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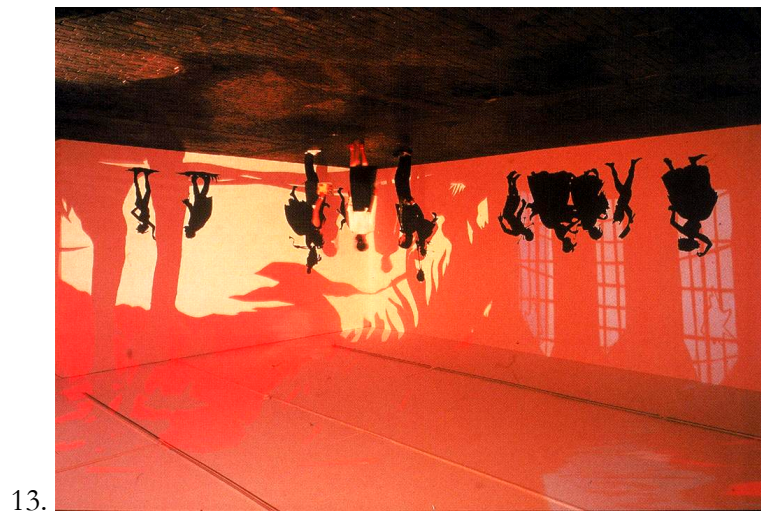
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As individuals we are affected by the environment that surrounds us, as well as by the historical properties that we have learned. These ideologies are clearly evident throughout Yinka Shonibare's work. He uses both his history and his present to ask, both himself and the viewer, what is your identity comprised of. I find this aspect of his artwork a powerful influence upon my own work. Whereas Shonibare uses his work to ask what our identity is formed from, I use my own history to showcase this direct correlation between how the past has indeed influenced the present.

Kara Walker's artwork (Images 11- 14) evokes a different sense of identity and authenticity. Instead of posing questions as Shonibare's work does, Walker's work challenges and confronts the viewer to confirm their identity. Using history as her source, Walker explores the associations and realities that slavery in the United States have had in our past as well as the relevance that it has today in our society. While Shonibare creates a more playful atmosphere, incorporating the colonization of Africa to question our views of identity, Kara Walker forces us, through her installations and drawings, to become a part of the visual identity she has created. Best known for her panoramic installations, cycloramas and vignettes, Walker incorporates silhouetted black paper figures depicting exaggerated truths and fictionalized events and reduces her figures to ambiguous entities with which the viewer must associate and interact with. Her interpretations of historical events and environment that has morphed her into the artist she is today are left to the viewer's interpretation. Weighty topics such as race, sexuality and human behavior are all subjected and simplified to the ambiguous silhouettes that Walker creates. With her charged atmospheres she allows no one to remain blameless even the viewer is held accountable while interacting with her installations. When discussing her use of the silhouette Walker states, "I was really searching for a format to sort of encapsulate, to simplify complicated

things...And some of it spoke to me as: 'it's a medium...historically, it's a craft...and it's very middle-class.' It spoke to me in the same way that the minstrel show does...it's middle class white people rendering themselves black, making themselves somewhat invisible, or taking on an alternate identity because of the anonymity ... and because the shadow also speaks about so much of our psyche. You can play out different roles when you're rendered black, or halfway invisible.” (Museum of Modern Art, 1999) Using history as her base Walker creates her anonymous figures and environments in a contemporary setting, allowing the viewer to see the relevance of these historical topics as much today as they were a century ago. While Walker’s artwork is much more politically charged than my own, I do identify with her use of the silhouette and it’s connection and importance in history throughout time. As she states above she was looking for a somewhat invisible identity, where her characters were rendered classless and raceless. I identified with the use of the silhouette in my own work as a way for me to mask over elements, to represent the loss or fading of memories through the passage of time. In a way, both Walker and myself are representing through the use of the silhouette, the masking over various instances, albeit in extremely different ways.





As an artist, I am driven to create by the objects, environment and history that surround me every day. Everything around us is an inspiration, be it objects that attract or repulse us

or inspire hope or fear. It is our environment that has the most powerful influence upon us and this is what I reveal in my work. Our history and where we come from combine to create and establish a strong sense of our identity as well as the lack there of. The concept of identity and history play a strong role continuously throughout my work just as they do with the group of artist's that have influenced me. The work of Lesley Dill, Kiki Smith, Yinka Shonibare and Kara Walker have had an immense influence upon the creating of my thesis work through their attention to detail both in the simple and complex, and through their search and questions of identity and environment

SECTION II: EVOLUTION

I use my artwork to give voice and presence to my thoughts, beliefs and feelings. As I evolve my work shifts and adjusts accordingly. I see this realignment as an extension of myself. My work is visual representation myself. My desire to explore the connection I feel to my history as and environment is embodied in A Place of Origin. that has stood as a firm reminder of my history, was one I needed to explore to it's fullest potential.

Much of the inspiration that creates the basis for my work comes from the connection I have between my history and the existence that I have now. My inspiration for the creation of my thesis work came primarily from the environment. I occupy, the house that has been my home and that of past generations. My house is a representation of the perseverance and lasting memories of my family and our history. Its walls are filled with memories and heirlooms that have resided within it for over a century. Each object that has remained, whether it be lace that my great grandmother hand crocheted or the quilts that my grandmother made from the fabric of old feed bags, the milk canisters and tools that my grandfather used when my home was a working farm, the hundred year old barn created of hand hewn logs, the hayloft that my mother played in when she was my age, or the photographs which document the passing years and generations held within this structure, stands as a lasting testament to the constant history which influences me on an everyday basis.

Growing up in this environment I had the opportunity to continually reminisce upon memories that these remaining tokens evoke. The continual awareness of my past history and the objects, which represent it have led me to have a strong respect and understanding for the past. Having my home encompassed by these remaining heirlooms, I began to see

these family pieces in a different light. Growing up in this house I have become accustomed to seeing these possessions on a daily basis; I understand their importance and history, but at the same time have become to take them for granted. However, upon moving back home after college, these objects began to take on an alternate meaning. It had become clear how they were representative of so much more than the fact that these were simply antique objects. They are symbolic of the history of the family members who resided within the same walls of this house. Understanding the original use of these objects has become a secondary objective when faced with the realization of how they represented so much more, the lives, the stories, and memories of my past family. As I adjusted again to this environment by helping my mother in the garden that she helped her mother and grandmother with, trimming the branches and stems of our apple tree and raspberry bushes that had been planted by my great grandmother, I realized how such simple things as plants or dishes or a quilt can aid generations in connecting with one another. However, there is an alternative side I considered when I looked at these items. As dishes, quilts or plants deteriorated or broke with time; would the memories, stories and presence of the people they represented fade as the objects themselves did? How much relied on the presence of these “things” when the absence of the people who originally owned them is so keenly felt? How could I hold onto my history as the objects and people that created them fade as time goes on?

As I began to understand the importance my environment played within my life, several themes began to make themselves present within my artwork. I experienced the connections between the presence and absence of objects and people. I perceived the relationship between our memories and the loss thereof. These themes are the foundation upon which my work is built. This idea of “fading” became a powerful motivator when creating my

work. I concentrated on how the memory of an individual is aided by the objects s/he leaves behind. I began to think of what I would leave behind when it was my turn; what would my future relatives hold dear in their memory of me? My artwork has become an exploration and realization of my family history. It is an inventory of my learning and the objects of worth that I may leave behind.

While concentrating upon these themes, I began to make work, which used the objects and items that reside within my home, in conjunction with various scavenger birds, such as vultures and crows. I began to associate myself with these scavenger birds and animals that take what is not theirs and create a home or nest with these found objects. As I continued to take the objects that had encompassed me for years and then cast them into various atmospheres within my artwork I came to see that I was, in all essentials, becoming a scavenger myself. I took the remnants of my history and created my own environment with them. As I continued to use these visual reminders of my history within my artwork, I began to think about the actual “making” processes of these items. Due to their age there is a hand made quality, which exists within all of them. They are not perfect, not exact, but there is a personal touch that is always present within the item. There is an especially powerful emotional sense when holding an object that has been made by a member of your family, who has lived decades before you, who had held the same object in the same way. Throughout my home there are a number of quilts hanging on the upstairs stair railing and quilting circles resting on my mothers dresser, that were made by the members of my family. I began to formulate an idea of taking these items from my environment and using my own methods to re-create them and form my own interpretation of my surroundings.

From this, my artwork began to become both a representation of my home while at the same time existing as a very essential commentary of my thoughts and emotions concerning

my environment. As I continued to create, I became increasingly interested in the idea of the presence and absence of people in the objects they have left behind. The idea that there are these remnants of people existing in these “things” began to formulate itself more clearly within my work. Through the use of fabric and other materials I attempted to represent how the nearness of someone long gone is felt through the objects that they have left behind. The use of a “ghost” or transparent presence became a prominent figure within my work. I accomplished this effect by using transparent papers and fabric figures layered over drawings to suggest the tentative presence of the people who at one time inhabited and owned the environment I now occupy. Through the increasing development of this concept of the absence and presence of people who remain in the objects, my artwork began to become more than just a representation of the environment I reside in; it became a part of the history, which I have given a voice to.

SECTION III: THE BODY OF WORK

Due to the autobiographical nature of my work, there is a deep emotive quality to each piece. While I believe it is essential to the work's creation that my historical knowledge is incorporated, I do not believe it is entirely necessary for the viewer to have the knowledge of my family history in order to understand and appreciate my work. I wish my audience to be able to feel a general emotional quality from my work, to understand the sentiments that were involved in the work's creation, while at the same time being able to associate themselves with the feelings these pieces project.

The concepts and themes of memory, memory-loss, the passage of time as well as the presence and absence of people and things are all relevant topics that are conveyed through my work. Using the objects and environment that have existed within my life and through my family for generations, I utilize their emotional effect upon me and attempt to impart these emotions to my audience. Through the use of my materials and the color choices I make, the viewer is able to glean the feelings I am trying to communicate through the work. Also, I hope my viewer will understand the significance the subject matter has to me on a personal level. Through its evolution my artwork has made direct connections to the environment that has influenced me, as well as the history that is a constant presence in my everyday life. Through this association I have been able to reflect and create pieces of work that express my respect and sensitivity to my past as well as the present that I exist in. While at the same time expressing my sadness of the reality I face as these things and people I cherish fade into memory and then beyond.

The artwork represented in A Place of Origin creates a direct connection between both the emotional and physical state I exist in everyday. The work I have created for my thesis is a dialogue between the present world that I occupy as well as with the past, which has a consistent influence within my life. Within this body of work, I use the objects and memories that have been established and nurtured within the house my family and I have called home for generations. The use of photographs, quilts, glassware and furniture, along with the memories and stories they give a voice to, represent the relationship between the past and the present which exists within this environment as well as within the minds of the people who live there. Through my use of materials and subject matter, the relationship between what remains and what has faded away, communicates with the viewer.

Having viewed the heirlooms left behind by my family, my work began to become heavily influenced by their presence. Not just the inspiration they have garnered, but also the forms, colors they are comprised of and the processes that went into making them; were all elements I utilized when creating my artwork. In the piece, This is a Story..., (Images 15 – 17); this appropriation of various items from my home can be most clearly seen. Using, as my initial inspiration, the quilts and quilting pieces that reside within my home, this work is an interpretation and result of the stories and history that are evident in these handmade textile pieces. While traditional quilt making was originally intended to be used primarily for practical means, there was also a tenacity and an incredible imaginative vision, possessed by craftswomen who used the creativity and resources available to them to create lasting works of art. Their quilts and designs have become the reminders, detailing the lives of those long past. Using whatever fabrics or materials were available to them quilts were made as gifts in celebration of births and weddings, each design represented the occasion it was intended for.

These handmade quilts were then passed down from generation to generation, continuing to provide a dialogue between the past and the present.

15.





16.

The quilts that remain in my home are the same. Through their presence I have learned and heard the stories they have generated, continuing to communicate the history they represent. Constructed from scraps of fabric and old feedbags, these were representations of their everyday life on the family farm. Through the use of these scraps the history of my family's lives, what they were, who they were, is represented in these handmade mementos that have remained. The piece, This is a Story..., is a direct result from my exposure to these family quilts. As my family has passed their time in my home, their memory is aided by the presence of these remaining objects. My objective when creating the "quilt" was to

form my own interpretation of the history I have been given, through the objects that continue to exist. It was also a way for me to be able to leave a piece of myself behind, an heirloom that my future relatives would see as a reflection of who I was and had been. The pieces, which comprise the quilt's overall design, are constructed of various objects that exist within my home, as well as, my own self, such as my hair, my baby teeth, etc. Through the use of this imagery I have created a link between the objects that represent my past and the representations of myself firmly planted in the present. By combining these elements together through the use of hand embroidery, I am exhibiting how the objects, stories and memories create the history that I live within, which has become an intrinsic element in creating the person that I am today. By using more traditional materials, colors and designs, the viewer is able to consider how, through the more traditional aspects of the piece, I am reflecting how the objects of my past family members have become an influential structure for the present environment that I now live within and the artwork that I now create. These elements allow my audience to feel and understand the emotional qualities that are expressed through the quilt, which is a result of the compilation of these artifacts, memories and stories; and at the same time conveys the story of my past, my present, and their coexistence within my life.





17a.

Growing up in this environment, I have developed both an understanding and a curiosity about the lives of the family that existed within the same walls as I do today. This house I have grown up in has served as the setting for my family's gatherings for generations. These congregations and assemblies are represented throughout my home through the photographs and letters that remain. I have incorporated these directly into my work. Through these taken images I am able to recognize and wonder about the lives and relationships of these people I am related to. Their clothing, postures, and expressions give glimpses into the lives they led, while their location remains constant. The pieces, You Move in and Out of my Memory and I Hear Your Voice as if Through a Fog (Figures 18 and 19), are both drawings created using photographs that are in my home representing my great aunt and her friends in the late 1920's. Within each drawing, there are figures represented some whom are more realized and some whom are erased or fading into the background. These "ghost" or fading figures represent the fading of our memories of these

people. As time continues to pass the memories and stories that keep these people present within our minds will eventually fade away taking their presence from our minds as well. This sensation is similar to how the figures represented in, You Move in and Out of my Memory and I Hear Your Voice as if Through a Fog, fade into the hazy backgrounds that they exist within, neither completely existing or fading away, they rely on our memories to hold them in place.





19.

With an environment that provides not only a subsequent history of the workings of my family, my home also provides a direct line between the lives of family who have lived there and the life that I live there today. This structure has remained a stable presence through the trials and tribulations as well as the joy and successes of my family for generations. While its external structure has remained virtually unchanged, this house has witnessed the changing of the environment of our society throughout the decades and the changing dynamics of the people who have lived within its walls. When contemplating the history I am a part of and the people I have come from, my house has been the uniting factor in how I relate to my ancestors. Using photographs of my house when it was first built; I used these images as the premise for the pieces, Provenance 1 and Provenance 2. (Images 20 and 21) Concentrating on using my home as the basis for my work, these large-scale drawings represent the

connection between the past, and how the presence of the people in these photographs can still be felt within my home today. Represented by the floating tulle figures, which float over the center of the drawings, these “ghost” figures create shadows upon the drawings, while still allowing the viewer to see through them to the drawing underneath. These figures give voice to the influence and remaining presence my previous family members still have upon me. Due to the transparent quality of the figures that float above the drawings, they neither mask the drawing from view nor do they entirely fade into the background, allowing the viewer to question where they truly exist. Existing within this in-between state, the viewer is able to understand how the influence of my family members is still felt and evidenced in the memories that are maintained.



20.



21.

Through my exploration of the influence and history of my family I have become increasingly fascinated by how we are able to remember the people who have come before us through the objects that remain. The memories and stories, which aid us in remembering

them, become represented through the absence and presence of these objects. Through the use of sheer fabric and embroidery I have created visual representations of this emotional pairing which can be felt through the remembrance of my ancestors. The figures embodied in the pieces, Remains 1.2.and 3 and Comprised of Past and Present, (Figures 22 – 27), create an indeterminate entity, existing as both a presence and absence within the same space. The sheerness of the tulle fabric makes the figures almost invisible to the viewer when lit, while the shadow cast by the figure exists as the more concrete image. The viewer is allowed access to the indeterminate relationship, the actual present figure and the appearance of the absent one. The ghostly sense of the figures gives attendance to those long past, while their eerie quality allows the viewer to create connections between those they have known and lost, similar to the family that I struggle to keep in the forefront of my memory. Through the use of delicate embroidery and the fragile quality of the fabric used, I convey to the viewer the tentative relationship I have with these remembered people from my past. By using traditional embroidery techniques done by hand, I am paying homage to the handmade objects that remain in my home as representations of the people who owned and cherished them.

My art works meld together to create a visual representation of the respect and understanding I have for the people and history that have, through time, comprised the person that I am today. Through my work, I have created an emotional and visual demonstration of how the people from my past are represented through the objects that have remained after they have gone, as well as the memories and stories that these artifacts generate.



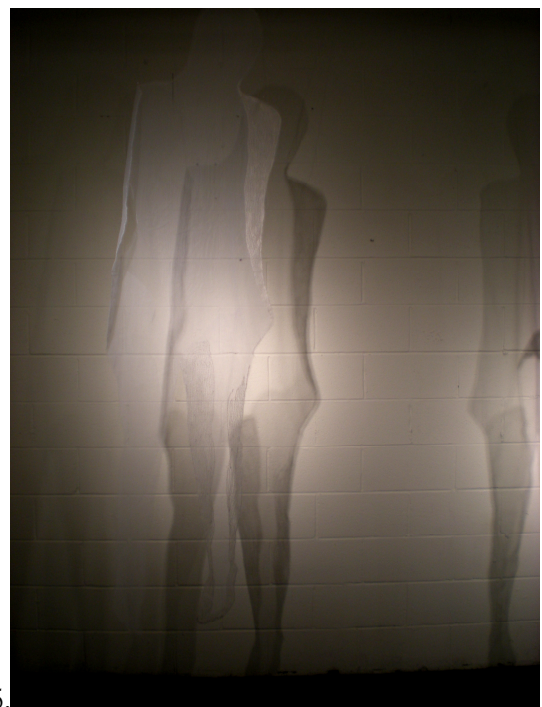
22.



23.



24.



25.



26.



27.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of my history and the family who created this history have been such an intrinsic element in understanding who I am as an individual while also being paramount in the conception and execution of the pieces represented within my thesis work. Upon contemplating the original goals of my thesis work, I believe the subsequent pieces represented in, A Place of Origin, displayed the sentimentality, investment and emotional weight that represent the major concepts: memory, the loss of memory, the passage of time and the presence and absence of people and the objects they surround themselves with. Through the use of various fabrics, hand embroidery, color choices and direct references to my historical home and the objects present within it, I have tried to convey to my audience the emotional and personal associations that exist within my work as well as within my life. Relying expressly on visual representations of the objects that inhabit my home, the viewer is allowed access into the world and history that are a part of my everyday life, while at the same time, through my color choices and the manipulation of various materials, such as charcoal, embroidery and fabrics, the pieces try to convey an emotional aspect that can be construed universally.

When displaying the pieces in, A Place of Origin, the environment in which they were shown was an essential part of the installation process. Strong spotlights, used to cast shadows from the pieces, were needed to evoke a nostalgic albeit eerie quality, feelings that I associate with the passing of time and the fading of people and things. These cast shadows were an essential part in creating the atmosphere I wanted, inviting the viewer to contemplate the entire space where these pieces resided. Through this interaction the

audience is able to recognize and become a part of the history and memories that continue to exist, while at the same time interacting and associating with the works on their own level.

Through my research, of both my own history as well as of those who have inspired and motivated me, I understand that works of art can be more than simply something, which sits on a wall to be looked at. The pieces within, A Place of Origin, attempt to influence and educate their audience, relying on the piece's environment and the powerful emotional qualities art can evoke when it invites the viewer to enter and become a part of the place it exists within. The exploration and renewed discovery of my family history and the memories and stories of the people who comprise it, have provided significant fodder for the development and conception of the works present within, A Place of Origin. Through this renewed discovery, I have had the opportunity to discover not only how affected I have been by the objects and memories which surround me, but also how people are aided in their remembrance by the various objects which are associated with those we want to remember.

Since the completion of my thesis work I have become increasingly fascinated with the objects and things that we give to others to aid them in the memory of us. While my family's memory is supported by the photographs and objects that remain, I thought about what I have given to others I've cared for to supplement their memory of me. The research and exploration that I have completed while creating the pieces within my thesis have encouraged me to consider how we, as people, are afraid of our memory being lost, and the ways that we go about ensuring that we leave something behind of ourselves to be remembered by. To list and enumerate the multitude of experiences that have influenced the work represented in my thesis would be to catalogue and entire life's worth of memories.

These items are now carriers of a history not necessarily their own; they hold the history of my family, their trials and tribulations, their existence within this place of origin.

As I continue with my artwork I hope to continue with the concept of memory as a basis for the pieces I will make. Whereas in the creation of A Place of Origin, I focused upon objects imbued with the memories from past individuals, I wish to focus now on articles that I have given to others to aid them in their memory of me. The idea of these modern tokens as well as the historical context brought about by certain objects, such as a lock of hair or a monogrammed handkerchief; evokes a powerful nostalgic and sentimental emotional quality. Through my future work I will explore the various ways people encourage their lasting memory, as well as the ways in which I myself have taken strides to ensure that I am not forgotten.

Throughout the conceptualization and execution of the pieces that exist within, A Place of Origin, I have come to understand the history and legacy of my family to a degree that I did not think possible, while also realizing the importance for me to learn and understand the connection that I have to my family and this place that has stood as a testament to their perseverance and memory. I have truly been established as a product of my environment, reveling in the memories, stories and objects that my family has left behind; articles that have shaped and molded me into the person that I have become today. Through this, my admiration and reverence have established themselves in my own form of heirloom, the visual retelling of my family's history; another connection to the past that will continue on for generations.

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14. Walker, Kara Elizabeth. Untitled. 1998, Gouache and Pencil on Paper, 58” x 101”. Exhibited at Brent Sikkema Gallery, Spring 1999. www.Artstor.org.ezproxy.rit.edu.
15. Foley, Jessica. This is a Story... 2007-2008, Mixed Media, 50” x 70”. Exhibited at Canal Street Gallery, March 2009. Copyright of Artist.
16. Foley, Jessica. This is a Story...(Detail). 2007-2008, Mixed Media, 50” x 70”. Exhibited at Canal Street Gallery, March 2009. Copyright of Artist.
17. Foley, Jessica. This is a Story...(Detail). 2007-2008, Mixed Media, 50” x 70”. Exhibited at Canal Street Gallery, March 2009. Copyright of Artist.
- 17a. Foley, Jessica. This is a Story...(Detail). 2007-2008, Mixed Media, 50” x 70”. Exhibited at Canal Street Gallery, March 2009. Copyright of Artist.

18. Foley, Jessica. You Move in and Out of My Memory. 2009, Charcoal on Paper, 52” x 46”. Exhibited at Canal Street Gallery, March 2009. Copyright of Artist.
19. Foley, Jessica. I Hear Your Voice as if Through a Fog. 2008 – 2009, Charcoal on Paper, 41” x 63”. Exhibited at Canal Street Gallery, March 2009. Copyright of Artist.
20. Foley, Jessica. Provenance #1. 2008 – 2009, Charcoal on Paper and Tulle, 48” x 90”. Exhibited at Canal Street Gallery, March 2009. Copyright of Artist.
21. Foley, Jessica. Provenance #2. 2008 – 2009, Charcoal on Paper and Tulle, 48” x 90”. Exhibited at Canal Street Gallery, March 2009. Copyright of Artist.
22. Foley, Jessica. Comprised of Past and Present. 2008, Embroidery Thread and Tulle. Exhibited at Canal Street Gallery, March 2009. Copyright of Artist.
23. Foley, Jessica. Remains #3. 2009, Embroidery Thread and Tulle. Exhibited at Canal Street Gallery, March 2009. Copyright of Artist.
24. Foley, Jessica. Remains #2. 2009, Embroidery Thread and Tulle. Exhibited at Canal Street Gallery, March 2009. Copyright of Artist.
25. Foley, Jessica. Remains #1. 2009, Embroidery Thread and Tulle. Exhibited at Canal Street Gallery, March 2009. Copyright of Artist.
26. Foley, Jessica. Remains #1, 2, 3 and Comprised of Past and Present (Installation View). Exhibited at Canal Street Gallery, March 2009. Copyright of Artist.
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