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### The Foundlings

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**ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences  
School of Art

In Candidacy for the Degree of

**MASTER OF FINE ARTS**

*The Foundlings*  
by  
Nadia Adams  
December 15, 2014

## Thesis Approval

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Thank you.

## **ABSTRACT**

*The Foundlings* is an exploration of memory and absence through the use of found objects and photographs. In this thesis, memory is understood through the use of the domestic space and the objects found within. The relationship of photography to memory is an integral part of this work. Specifically in the use of found and constructed imagery as related to the family album. *The Foundlings* uses sculpture, painting, photography, and projection to understand the place of the individual in both a contemporary and historical context.

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## INTRODUCTION:

*In drawing a picture, the child seems to project a desire or, perhaps, an attempt to possess the object; if not actually having it, at least having an image of it...Claude Levi Strauss writes that art is based on the illusion of being able to not only communicate with the being but also to possess it through the medium of the image.<sup>1</sup>*

*Objects are what matter. Only they carry the evidence that throughout the centuries, something really happened among human beings.<sup>2</sup>*

The desire to possess the intangible, a moment or an emotion, is what attracted me to photography. The photograph gives the illusion that somehow, what has left us can be maintained. It is the conduit through which the viewer is connected to both the past and the present. The photograph acts as a window or a door through which we can experience the past while still being in the present. In thinking of the photograph I am drawn to the object, the photograph that was carried in a wallet, held and admired, with worn corners and the handwritten inscription on the reverse side. This in many ways exemplifies my perception of the relationship we have with objects. The subject of the photograph is not literally contained within the photograph, but the idea of it, its essence remains. It can be held, admired, thought upon, touched, through the paper photograph. Over time the meaning of the photograph may change but the image remains, a remnant of a moment.

Though the moment can never truly exist again, the photograph is rooted in a reality that did exist. The subject was once present; the landscape, or objects are known to the viewer as having been actual or true. The truthfulness of a photograph may be debated to some degree but for the sake of this discussion the focus is on the elements that can be perceived as true. This aspect of photography has historically led to the association with terms such as evidence and proof, and in turn was the focus of the investigation from which *The Foundlings* arose.

*The Foundlings* approaches memory and absence through the context of found imagery and objects. At the beginning of this journey I found myself asking many questions rooted in the same source.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph H. Di Leo, "4: Mostly Affect: The Child Draws a House," in *Interpreting Children's Drawings* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1983), 40.

<sup>2</sup> Marc Allum, "Mythical Objects," in *The Antiques Magpie: A Compendium of Absorbing History, Stories and Facts from the World of Antiques* (London: Icon Books, 2013).

Can the absence of lost loved ones be found in the empty spaces that remain? Are these spaces presences in themselves – is absence something rather than nothing? Can this feeling of presence be recreated and seen outside of us? And ultimately is it possible to take that presence with us? This exploration started with the photograph and led to other types of objects and materials. I was especially concerned with the relationship between those who interact with the object when the original owner is no longer in possession of it. What remains after we are gone? What proof is left behind to substantiate that I, or anyone else, was once a presence, rather than an absence.

*The Foundlings* is an installation piece designed to explore this idea of absence and presence. It is a fictional room, implying a domestic space, created from found objects and materials. The objects have a presence of their own but they also have the history of their previous owners. It seemed appropriate to use these to explore both memory and absence. The contents of the installation space were collected to reference my personal experience but also to serve as a reminder of the value of the experiences of others.

#### **CONTEXT PAST/before and after:**

In attempting to understand my work, it is impossible not to mention the artist Christian Boltanski (1944-). He is a self-taught French, artist whose work centers on the use of both objects and photography.<sup>3</sup> He has worked in a variety of media, however, his thoughts and work with photography resonate greatly with my own. He has worked with lost objects that range from metal tins, to photographs, to clothing.<sup>4</sup> His work memorializes the everyday object, with particular emphasis on objects that speak to the presence of an individual.

Photographs of people have this terrible quality, they say this person existed but they tell us nothing about them...we just know that they were someone...For a long time I tried to preserve what I call intimate memory, this means that someone is someone because he knows for example where to buy a good quiche in Paris, he knows two or three jokes, he knew what love was and he could talk about it. And then all this which makes up a person very quickly vanishes.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Contacts: Vol. 3 - Christian Boltanski* (France: Arte Video, 2004)

<sup>4</sup> Christian Boltanski, "Studio: Christian Boltanski," Tate, December 1, 2002, accessed December 8, 2014, <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/studio-christian-boltanski>.

<sup>5</sup> *Contacts: Vol. 3 - Christian Boltanski* (France: Arte Video, 2004).



In *The Foundlings* the desire was to find, in the mundane, the aspect of intimate memory that I felt was missing. This element translated to a desire to create a sense of presence, but because the “intimate memory” of the other was lost to me, I had to reference my own. On one hand this exploration references found photographs and objects as an effort to recreate my own ‘intimate memory’ through the lives of others. On the other hand, it is also an act of preservation. “Someone said you die twice, you die when you die and you die a second time when someone picks up a photo and no one knows who you are.”<sup>6</sup> This observation by Boltanski has stayed with me over the years. And though I may not know the identity of the images or objects I reference in *The Foundlings*, I would like to believe that some of the presence of the person remains and that they are not truly forgotten.

It is because of Christian Boltanski’s work with photography and his ability to articulate his process that I am able to find greater understanding in my own artistic explorations. My process of working is a cycle of layering and unearthing. As much as my personal history is a factor in building the foundation for this work, Boltanski’s thoughts on his own work have been a continuous undercurrent. Though I can interpret my work through my own history and aesthetic decisions, a great deal of my work is built on the memories and thoughts of others. It is through understanding the experience of the other that I can better understand myself.

...In fact, we don't learn anything about this particular family, we learn about ourselves. When we see the little child on the beach, for example, we already know this photo. We remember our first time on the beach or the photo of our little brother. We learn images very early and thereafter we have plenty of images in our head.<sup>7</sup>

There are key experiences in my life referenced in this work. These events are categorized as points that create an awareness of a between before and after. I was raised as a first generation/second generation American of Ukrainian descent. My cultural identity until the age of 18 was developed and defined by the customs of the Ukrainian-American community in which I was raised. This was a nearly complete immersion that included not only schooling and after school activities, but religious or spiritual customs as well. A great deal of my upbringing can be attributed to my maternal grandparents, whose

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

stories built the foundation of my childhood. This is where I learned the distinction between before and after. There were stories from before World War II of family members who only survived in photographs, of places that survived only through their vivid descriptions at the kitchen table. There were photo albums of handsome, smiling relatives who will only exist for me in photographs, their entire lives encapsulated into one moment, which may be (only slightly) further informed by an inscription on the back. These stories existed before me, before the war, before I was even concerned about such matters.

To this day those photographs are sentimental for me, even though I no longer remember the stories. They prove that my grandparents were young once, that there was a world where they belonged outside of the category of "immigrant" or "survivor." The photo album contained photographs my grandfather had taken himself. The album contained all of those who had not made it to my grandmother's kitchen table – proof that my grandmother had so many siblings they would not have all fit. Out of the dozen siblings between my grandmother and grandfather, less than half even made it to America. I was lucky, they said, meant for something, because my grandparents should not have made it either. My childhood was filled with ghosts and photographs.

Around the age of 18 I became estranged from my family, my culture and sense of self. I was surrounded by a sense of exile and I was adrift. This was another key moment, the turning point of before and after. I had no sense of who I was without my culture, I had no sense of how one starts over entirely. When I arrived in New Orleans I was afraid and thankfully not completely alone. I was truly in the care of many strangers who had no reason to be as good to me as they were. The city itself is astonishing in its preservation of history and time. The tenacity and dedication of those who live there, in a place that should not exist (it is below sea level), has always been astonishing to me. I worked to build a new life there and after a few years and much struggle, eventually arrived on the west coast, and then back to the east coast to finish my undergraduate education.

During this time hurricane Katrina hit and I was startled to find that many of the places I had lived and people I had known, had been irreparably altered or destroyed. Amongst many feelings, I did not know how it would be possible to return to my home if it had simply vanished. This made me realize that memory is not simply a photograph, a story, or some other intangible presence, but also a place. I needed

that place, the wood, the stone, the tangible texture within, to ground myself. Photographs and memories are important to me, but the grounding that comes from the actual object is equally necessary.

Perhaps it is a product of getting older or having experience. Places appear as before and after to me. New Orleans now is layered over Katrina New Orleans, which is layered over my New Orleans at 19 years old. I see it and the memories appear to creep up behind me and startle me, the way I worried my relatives from the photographs would during my childhood. I can no longer simply see a familiar landmark, I see before and after and all the memories compiled into one single image.

*I want to put my life in a box to preserve it and keep hold of everything...But this is an illusion, because we preserve things, but at the same time we do not preserve anything.<sup>8</sup>*

#### **CONTEXT PRESENT/undergraduate work:**

In the beginning of my photographic work as an undergraduate, the layering of images was integral to my process. I started by photographing existing spaces through windows and reflections to create a layered effect. I started layering images digitally on the computer, and through this realized that the interaction with the tangible object was integral to me. The act of layering gave the image a ground, rather than cutting out pieces and creating something entirely new. The image felt more 'truthful'. Through working in this method I began to become curious about what exists in absent spaces in photographs. If photographs represented proof, then what is unseen or hidden? What occurs when the subject of the image is removed and only the "unimportant" part of the photograph remains? I turned to the family photographs I had and started putting together the empty spaces. (Plates 01-03)

These images were an exercise in the re-arrangement and dissection of family photographs, in finding meaning in absence. I had noticed that there was a very large visual space that remained in my own family photographs, where the subjects were not present. I removed the subjects and reassembled the empty spaces to see if anything existed in the absent space that remained. Essentially this became an exercise in investigating what remains in a family photograph without the family element. I desperately wanted some sort of visual proof of the unseen aspects of my life, the photographs I did not have. Socially

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<sup>8</sup> Tea Romanello-Hillereau, "Christian Boltanski: A Cheerful Conversation," *DROME Magazine*, accessed November 11, 2014, <http://www.dromemagazine.com/christian-boltanski/>.

we are conditioned to take Kodak moments at important events. We all know them and have them. They abide by a code and are interchangeable.<sup>9</sup> Despite this knowledge I desired them still. The interchangeable quality of the family photograph suggested that perhaps my own absent memories could be filled in through the memories of others.

#### **CONTEXT PRESENT/graduate work:**

After many stages of my undergraduate work I arrived at a family album full of empty spaces. I had spent so much time contemplating absence that it seemed a natural progression to create something that resembles the presence or memories I feel in my life. This development was the basis for *The Foundlings* (Plates 04-07). I had reasoned that if I could not find the proper photographic “truth” in my family photographs, that perhaps I could create it. I was curious if, with the advent of portable projection equipment, I could finally manifest my ghosts. The original intention was to create an image outside of myself that could be seen in a lifelike manner in real space. Substituting a person into the flat photograph was not sufficient as it did not allow for me, as the viewer, to get the true feeling of presence. The next step was to make this presence more natural—that it could be realized in daylight, for example, rather than in a dark room as would be necessitated by a projection.

It was at this point that I began to turn to using “found” photographs as my source material. Found photographs are images that have been lost or discarded. The found photographs were chosen based on my own aesthetic interest and the tone or expression in the figures or the situation presented in the original image. Often the photographs feature children or young adults. This is based partially on the idea that, as children, our families dictate our worldview that constitutes much of our understanding. The age range centers approximately around the age of reason, or seven years old.<sup>10</sup>

Because the figures were the central focal point of my exploration, it was important to take them out of their original context. The goal was to integrate them into my own contemporary space. The images were then projected into a variety of environments. The projection, layered over the surrounding

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<sup>9</sup> *Contacts: Vol. 3 - Christian Boltanski*. France: Arte Video, 2004. Film

<sup>10</sup> “The Age of Reason,” *The Free Dictionary*. January 1, 2008, accessed December 11, 2014, <http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Age of Reason>.

space, was then re-photographed. This created the final image. The process created an externalization of the figure that had once been tied to a two-dimensional photographic object. It came as a surprise that the projections, whether it was their luminosity or their dimensionality, had a life of their own. They did not appear as I had anticipated and they became something other than what had been present in the original photograph. The original goal had been to bring the past into a current context, but they took on a "life" of their own. In my investigation I had been attempting to achieve a solution to a problem. I had not taken into account the startling moment of having a figure look back at me. Despite the fact that the subjects were unknown to me, and I had no association with them, I found myself truly startled by seeing the photograph translate from object to subject.

The question ultimately became how to best treat the presentation of *The Foundlings*. The experience of interacting with the figures was lost when they lost their luminosity. Television screens became too contained. Large prints had presence but no luminosity. The solution to this appeared to lie in bringing both the images and the environment to the viewer.

**CONTEXT PRESENT/turning point:**

The major turning point in this work came with the issue of how the images should be presented. This question forced me to have to work outside my normal parameters. Until this point I had been working in printed media. To think about creating an entire space was a new perspective. At the time there had been a recurring theme of the house in my work. The house appeared in many incarnations (Plates 08-13). The house imagery, reminiscent of a child's drawing, was the first. This can be seen in the piece *High Water* (Plate 08). The imagery quickly developed into the representation of a skeletal "shotgun" house. The "shotgun" house is a key feature of the New Orleans landscape. The term shotgun refers to the layout of the house. A shotgun house has no hallways.<sup>11</sup> This was to avoid higher property taxes. The rooms are built in a line with each room adjacent to the next, connected by a straight path of doorways. The benefit to this was that when both the back and front door of the house are opened, there is an effective path for ventilation. The term shotgun, referred to this line of sight—suggesting that

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<sup>11</sup> Personal interview by author, 09/23/2014.

someone could shoot a gun from the front door and the bullet would travel through the entire house and out the back door. There are variations on the shotgun house, but generally they were designed to fit limited city space and offer much ventilation at the expense of privacy.<sup>12</sup> The shotgun house appeared in paintings and drawings, and on my studio wall. There were paper versions and burned versions, some were soaked in water with ink. I had gone through so many destructive processes and layers but had not actually applied this theme in a creative process. This led to the thought about what parameters were integral to the creation of this space.

The revelation came from a memory of an installation piece by Michael McMillen, *The Central Meridian (aka The Garage)*.<sup>13</sup> The entrance, a hinged door, was the sole portion of the piece visible in the gallery space. The room itself was unseen as it was set back behind the gallery wall. The effect was interesting as there was no indication that the door should be opened. This created a feeling of wonder and hesitation. The door was old and textured, it creaked; the room was completely furnished to look like a place from another time. The experience was meticulous in detail, and truly affected all the senses. The moment that remained with me was the action of moving from the gallery space through the doorway. It was unexpected and allowed me as the viewer to have the time to explore with a sense of intimacy and privacy. This private space is reminiscent of the intimacy with which a photograph is held and contemplated. It is the place in which family photographs are taken, the place for contemplation and memories and curiosity. He discusses *The Central Meridian*, saying, "It's best when you're there by yourself. It creates a spell and lets you revel in your memory."<sup>14</sup> This feeling is what I desired to recreate for *The Foundlings*.

Michael McMillen is a California-based artist who uses many found or repurposed objects in his work. References to history and time are important factors in his work. McMillen also speaks to the use of objects with history behind them. "We all have so much that we owe to the past, to the people before

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<sup>12</sup> Malcolm Heard and Scott Bernhard, "1. Types of French Quarter Houses," In *French Quarter Manual: An Architectural Guide to New Orleans' Vieux Carré*, (New Orleans: Tulane School of Architecture, 1997), 40.

<sup>13</sup> "The Central Meridian (aka The Garage)." LACMA Collections, accessed October 27, 2014, <http://collections.lacma.org/node/172448>.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Whittaker, "A Conversation with Michael C. McMillen: The Alchemy of Things," *Works & Conversations*, May 27, 2002, accessed November 5, 2014, <http://www.conversations.org/story.php?sid=61>.

us, to the culture....”<sup>15</sup> “I always try to depict my objects with some indication of their own mortality. Often the buildings are depicted in some state of having a history behind them. I like the idea of things having a history of their existence prior to when we encounter them.”<sup>16</sup> This relationship with objects is similar to Christian Boltanski's thoughts on the photograph, as well as the identity of the subjects of the photographs. It speaks to a desire to preserve the 'intimate memory' of a person or an object. While Boltanski uses the object to speak to the history of a person or a human event, McMillen speaks to, and creates the places where the history and the events occurred.

McMillen’s work speaks to a love of the found object, which is one that I also share. Until this point, the found objects and the found photographic works, had not been combined. The goal for *The Foundlings* became to create a unified space, a house, to give a place and purpose to the found objects. The desire was to have this space speak not only to my personal experience but also for it to resonate with others as well. As much as photographs speak to a subject, objects do as well. They have a presence of their own, but often they speak to the absence of the wearer, or user.

*In fact for a long time I regarded dead bodies, photographs and clothes in the same light. They are objects that are related to the subjects that are absent When you have a photo of somebody you can pick it up – it's an object – but it's in relation to an absent subject. If you have a used coat, it's also an object in relation to an absent subject.*<sup>17</sup>

There are many contemporary artists who work with found or personal objects. Tracey Emin is best known for her 1999 Turner prize entry *My Bed*.<sup>18</sup> This work featured her actual bed littered with vodka bottles, cigarettes etc. It was representative of a difficult time in her life.<sup>19</sup> This way of expressing the personal, intimate experience of her life touches on similar domestic ideas as my own work but in a different respect. Putting the domestic or personal experience so directly into artwork is an interesting idea. It speaks to the notion that life and art are not far removed from each other. In *The Foundlings*, many of the materials would otherwise be discarded or not seen as valuable. In that sense, a

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Maerkle, "Memory, Too, Fails at Such Excess," *Art It*, July 23, 2010, accessed December 3, 2014, [http://www.art-it.asia/u/admin\\_ed\\_itv\\_e/ZBH3nMP8O7gGve9tlQAc](http://www.art-it.asia/u/admin_ed_itv_e/ZBH3nMP8O7gGve9tlQAc).

<sup>18</sup> Roslyn Sulcas, "Tracey Emin's 'My Bed' Headed to the Tate," *New York Times*, July 29, 2014, accessed December 9, 2014, <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com//2014/07/29/tracey-emins-my-bed-headed-to-the-tate/>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

contemporary work like *My Bed* is similar to my own work. The difference lies in the historical context. Though Emin's work and my own speak to personal difficulty, the materials that I am drawn to using represent a historical time period beyond that of my experience. It is important for me to work with historical objects as it brings them into a contemporary light and gives them value that may have been lost. In using historical and found objects I endeavor to highlight that there is meaning in what has been lost. An object may have a different context temporarily but it is still relevant. We exist in the world as individuals but also as a group. Similarly, by referencing the experiences of others, *The Foundlings* reflects that we are beings in time, always connected to our past and our future.<sup>20</sup> My mirror is the experience of the other. Rather than showing my own history simply as it is, my understanding comes from the observation of those around me. Using a historical object gives me the necessary distance from my own experience to have an objective perspective. Using found historical objects allows for the application of my own meaning to something that has history but may have lost the original context.

#### **The Installation:**

With these ideas in mind I decided to create an installation piece for my thesis exhibition. Through the installation I could create a unified space where all of the components came together. The creation of a domestic space, gives a context, and a sense of intimacy. The space suggests the presence of domesticity but also speaks to something that did not exist. The intention was not to create a replica of a truth or historical event but a possibility. The truthfulness came from the found pieces collected for the materials in the installation. Their choices made in the repurposing of the objects speak to my own experiences. The visitors to the installation bring their own experience and impressions. The space needed to encourage these thoughts and curiosities.

The placement of the installation in the gallery space was important to me. The intention was to create as much of a hidden presence as possible. The area was approximately 12'x10' and hidden under an overhang in the back left portion of the gallery. From many points in the gallery the entrance could be seen, however the interior could not be discerned. The space was introduced by an open door of large

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Wolin, "Being and Time," Encyclopedia Britannica Online, accessed December 10, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/259513/Martin-Heidegger/284478/Being-and-Time>.



scale, which created a proportional contrast to the child sized objects and height of the interior space.

(Plate 19)

The interior space is unified by a few consistent visual elements. The wallpaper, which was used throughout the installation, and the trim, which hangs across the upper portion of the room, and the repetition of empty picture album frames. The wallpaper speaks directly to my own Eastern European heritage. It features a landscape of houses and cathedrals from the former Soviet Union. The wallpaper was commonly found in apartments in the Soviet Union in the 1970s.<sup>21</sup> The determined placement height of the wallpaper was twofold. Firstly, it was based on my own experience in returning to New Orleans. Though it was well after the time of Hurricane Katrina, marks of the damage still were quite visible. The height is reflective of the standing watermarks that were still visible on the buildings and surrounding areas. The other reasoning was to create a reminder of childhood through scale. The house symbols and shapes that repeat through the installation are similar to children's drawings, as are many of the objects. The height of the wallpaper is tall for someone of childlike stature but would appear uncomfortably low or "off" to an adult.

The second unifying element is the trim. The trim serves as a form of crown molding. It is made from vintage wooden floorboards. The floorboards are often overlooked, though they are integral to a house. By taking the floorboards and elevating them, what can be considered mundane can be displayed as valuable. There is also the metaphor of turning the room upside down, or turning the world on its head.

The trim features the recurring theme of empty photographic album frames. The empty photograph appears as the most consistent theme in *The Foundlings*. It speaks to a search for a sense of self and an understanding of absence. The absent image is the key to my personal search for proof. It speaks to an inherent need for a subject and for an unattainable relationship. It represents a missing link. The use of historical photographic references, the photographs themselves, as well as vintage frames, negatives and photographic technology, directly speaks to time and the passage of time. Photographs

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<sup>21</sup> Personal interview by author, 02/25/14.

directly symbolize memory for me, and the absence of the photograph points to the search or loss of valued time.

The interior as a timeline :

The interior space can also be read from left to right as a personal chronology. The left wall is bookended by two images, *Luminare*, who is missing her center and *Brother's Keeper*, which features two siblings. The window shape that is centrally missing from the figure in *Luminare*, appears in the background of *Brother's Keeper*. Together these figures act as guardians for the wooden chest between them. The chest, covered in a traditional Ukrainian linen towel, contains children's wooden blocks made in house shapes. These blocks are half buried in the dirt contained within the chest, signifying an unearthing or something hidden. The presence of the figures alternates with the empty clothes that are on either side of the fireplace. The transition also shifts from individual to the group image and from personal experience to a more communal one. The left wall speaks directly to my own background and experience. As the room transitions from the central area to the right wall it speaks to the events of hurricane Katrina. The group photograph on the right wall speaks to an innocence that precedes the hurricane. The hurricane lantern remains as the only break in the molding around the room. As the space continues down the right wall, the images fall away and only a few pieces and objects remain. The final piece is an empty rope swing. The swing appears as a plaything, but is non functional. It serves only as a step to the rope, which serves as a way out and over the wall.

The interior as a space of divided energy:

The interior space could be read as two distinct spaces divided (or joined) by a central line of focus. The left side having the appearance of a more ordered domestic space versus the right side as a more destroyed or chaotic space. One participant had commented that the space was reminiscent of the duality of creation and destruction, citing that a clear line could be drawn down the center of the room. This duality was evident even in small details, such as the placement of the hammer and paintbrush.<sup>22</sup> (Plates 33-34) The wallpaper is also presented as neat and orderly on the left side of the room, and damaged and destroyed on the right side. The objects on the left side of the room are intact whereas

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<sup>22</sup> Personal interview by author, 04/2014.

many of the objects on the right are broken or not functional. The color palette also shifts from light to dark from one side of the room to the other suggesting an association with light and creation or dark with destruction. A contrast can be seen between the left side of the room appearing as feminine in gender and the right side more alluding to a male presence. The incorporation of dresses on the left side of the room and a small child's coat on the right side gives credence to the perception of a gender-based division.

The unifying component to both readings of this space is the fireplace, chairs and magic lantern.<sup>23</sup> The central scene is static amongst the swirl of activity around it. The traditional symbol of gathering around a fireplace is combined with the contemporary symbol of gathering to watch television or film. In this case the image projected was a static image rather than a moving one. (Plates 32-33) The figures in the image are out of focus and unidentifiable. They are vague enough to recognize as figures but their features and disposition are unrecognizable. They are known and yet ambiguous. The mantle features a painting of a house that, too, is distorted. Though the area is clearly for gathering, the chairs are too small for most to actually use, and one is broken. The theme of a domestic space is present, but it is illusory as it cannot fulfill its purpose. (Plate 33)

## **CONCLUSION :**

The actual installation process of *The Foundlings* taught me a great deal about trusting my intuition. Because there was a difference between the studio space, in which I had been working, and the space for the showing; I had to make many last minute decisions. When I completed the final arrangement I was surprised to see that many of the themes I had in mind when I started work on this project were very evident in the final result.

The response to the work was interesting. Many of the visitors to the space started telling stories of what the objects and the space itself reminded them of. People from all different cultural backgrounds were finding things that resonated with them. This provoked discussions and interactions. I had opted to not post an artist statement because I wanted viewers to have their own experience and this proved to be

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<sup>23</sup> "Magic Lantern," Merriam-Webster, accessed December 11, 2014, [http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/magic lantern](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/magic%20lantern).

successful. I had also included a book for visitors to draw or write their own idea of home in. I feel I should have left a description or suggestion with the book as some people commented they wanted to participate in the book but did not feel comfortable without structure.

Some of the changes I would have included in the final presentation would have been to have a darker environment with more lighting. Originally I had considered lighting the photographic image pieces to create an experience akin to the original projections. This may have kept the pieces from falling into the background. Projection was used for the opening of the reception, and this drew much curiosity. In the future I would like to work further with incorporating the projected elements, potentially as a stand-alone piece. In retrospect I can see where my choices regarding what pieces to put in the installation became bolder and I became more comfortable responding to the space as the installation process continued. I feel that if I were to recreate it now, it would be much different from what was shown, as this seems to a process that continues to evolve.

Overall, the challenges that arose throughout this process and the necessity of addressing them, has made me more confident in trusting my own responses to the work as it continues. Having the ability to work on *The Foundlings* taught me a great deal about why I choose to work with the materials I do as well as gave me the opportunity to create a space that not only resonated with me, but with others as well. I would not have understood why I need to create the work I do without this experience. It taught me more than I have words for.

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## 6. Appendix 1

### Original Proposal

The intention of this thesis is to explore the idea of memory through the use of the photograph. Photography has a personal resonance for me as an artist but it is also tied to a larger contextual idea of time and memory. The question of how to create a memory for events that should have occurred, but did not, was what originally inspired this journey. After using my own personal family photographs in my work I became curious as to how others share their memories. It is because of this that I became interested in “found” photographic images. During the past year I experimented with projecting images of children cut from old, found photographs into a variety of places and spaces. I, then, photographed these composite images and displayed the results on monitors. This process succeeded in creating a new context for the lost children but I was left feeling that something was still missing – a home.

What creates a home, both in my personal experience and in my understanding of the experiences I see in the lives of others, has become integral to this work. The people in the photographs I have been working with need a context. The home is representative of so many things, foremost of the self, as well as of shared space and a sense of place. This grounding, that comes from having a place to exist, is necessary not only for the lost images that have been collected for this thesis but also for the process of understanding memory.

This exploration is a personal one, but it also has its place in the context of a greater community. I would now like to create a space that can be entered into that goes beyond the static photographic image. I see the photograph as a conduit that links the past and the present. It holds within it a moment and because of that it can never exist beyond that moment unless it is brought into another context. Because I am using the memories of others, and their images, this process shows that the individual experience is interwoven with the experience of the community.

There are many artists who work with found imagery and the use of imagery to bring the historical into contemporary context. Christian Boltanski has used found imagery in a large number of his works. Shimon Attie created fascinating works combining historical imagery with their contemporary architectural counterparts. My work differs from those because I am removing imagery from its historical context and placing it into my own memories.

The result I am endeavoring to achieve is to take my photographic work into an installation context. I would like to create an actual space that incorporates my sculptural, projected and printed work. I am interested in creating a grounded space, where these lost images, and my lost memories, can exist together.



**Appendix 2**  
Plates



Disjointed Series

(Plate 01)



Disjointed Series

(Plate 02)



Disjointed Series

(Plate 03)



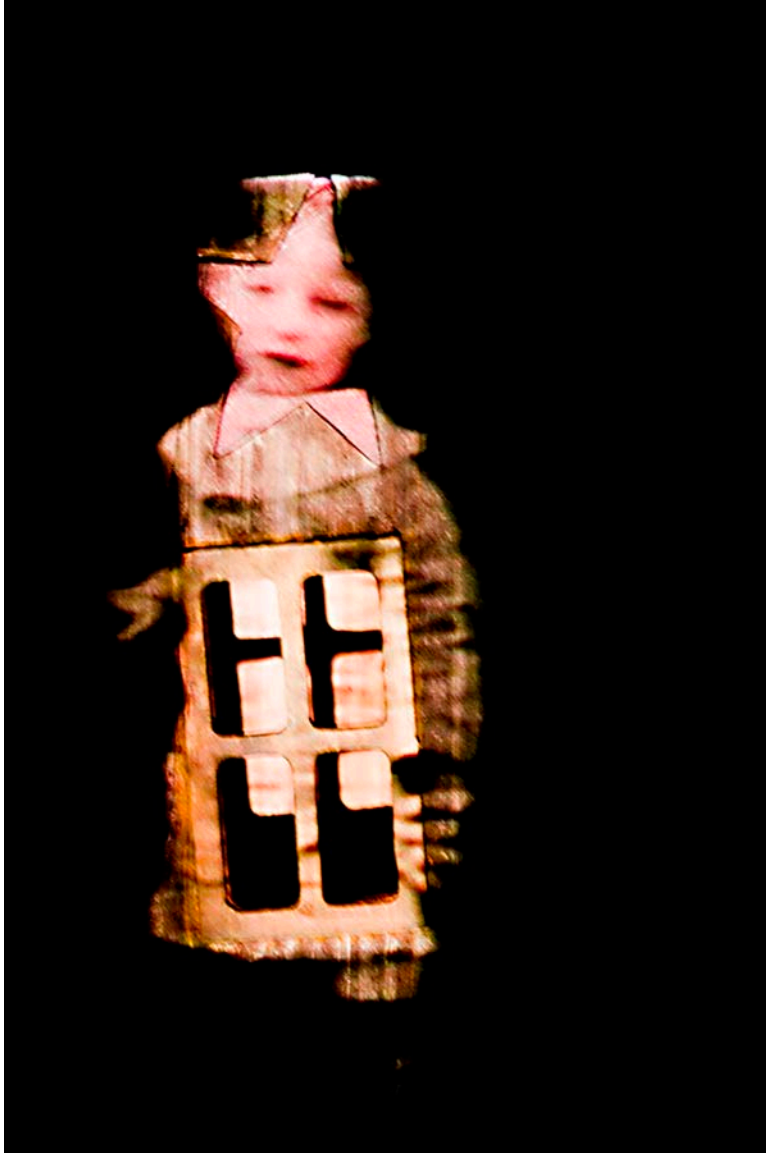
*Wax and Wane*

(Plate 04)



*Brother's Keeper*

(Plate 05)



*Luminare*

(Plate 06)



*The Foundlings*

(Plate 07)



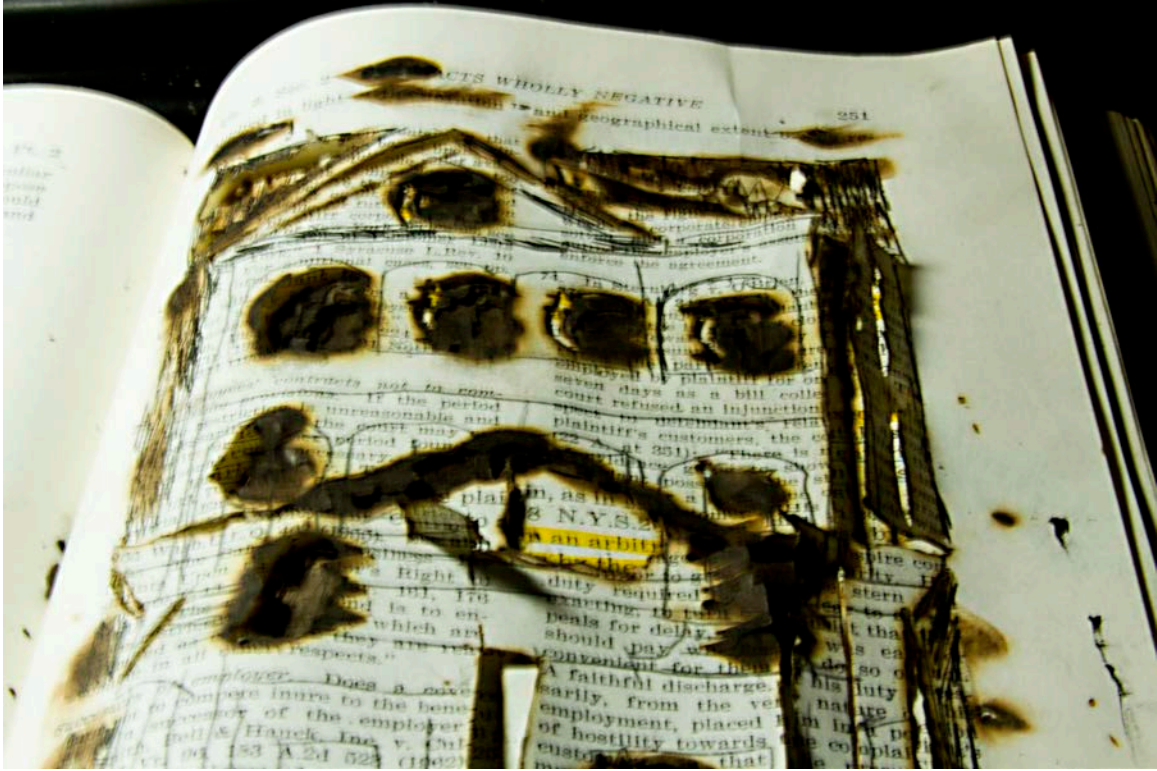
*High Water*

(Plate 08)

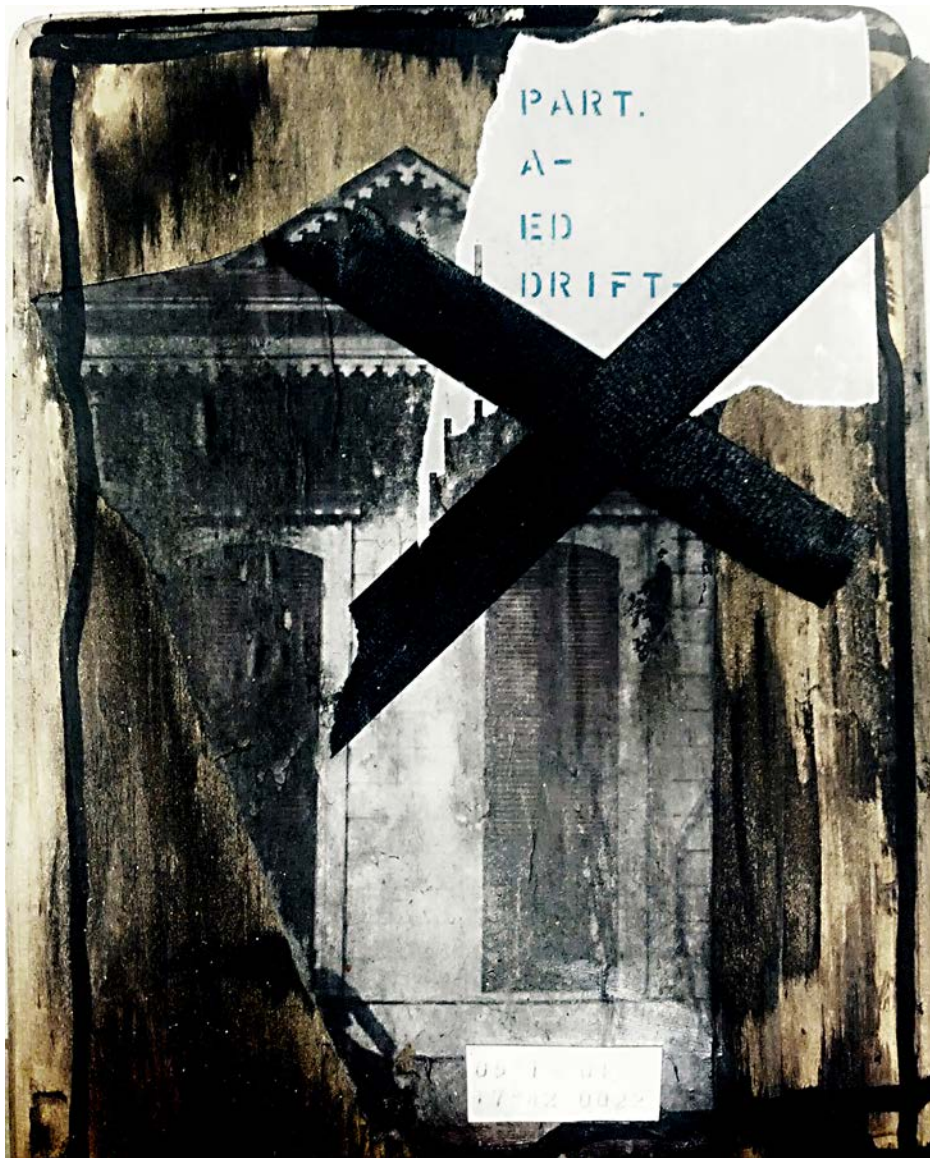




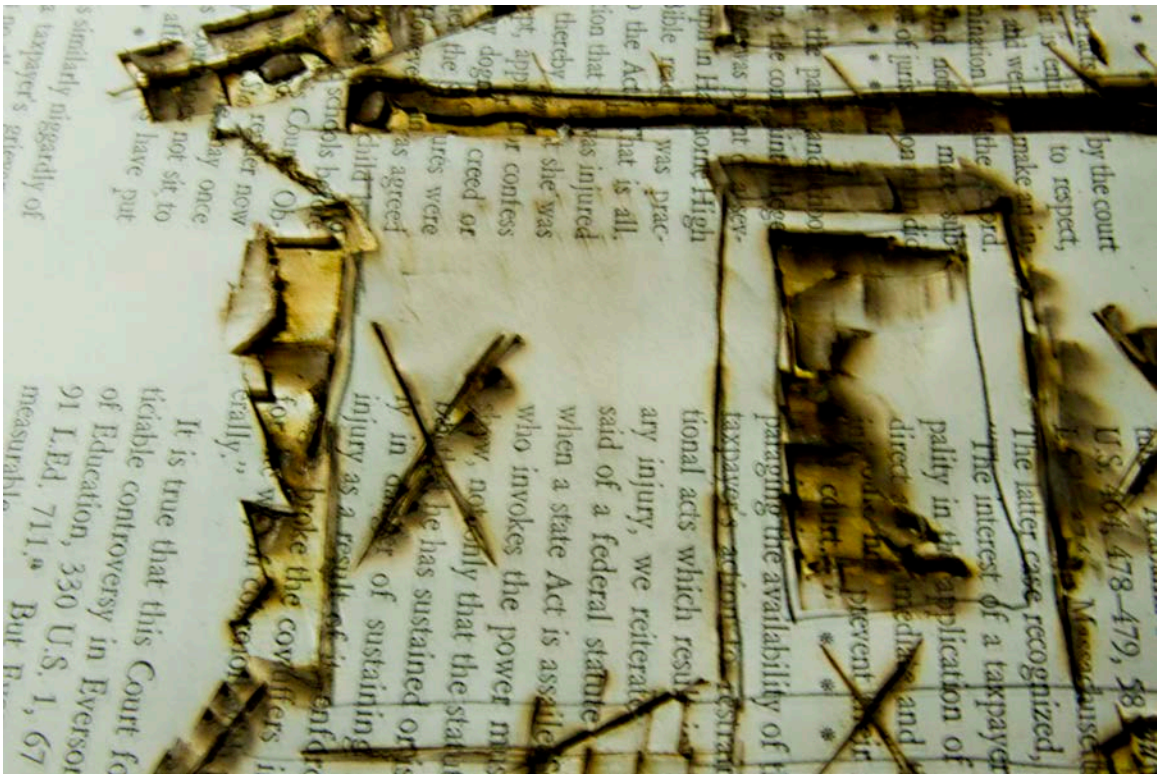
(Plate 09)



(Plate 10)



(Plate 11)



(Plate 12)



(Plate 13)



(Plate 14)



(Plate 15)



(Plate 16)





(Plate 17)



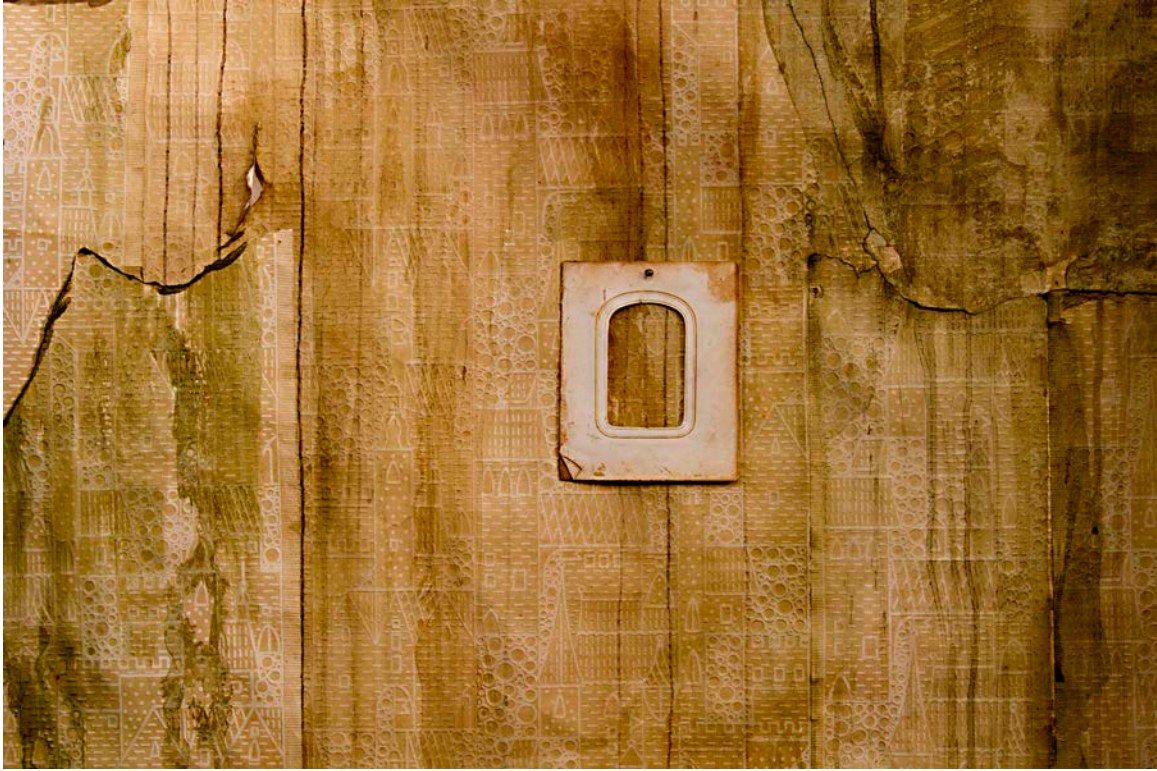
(Plate 18)



(Plate 19)



(Plate 20)



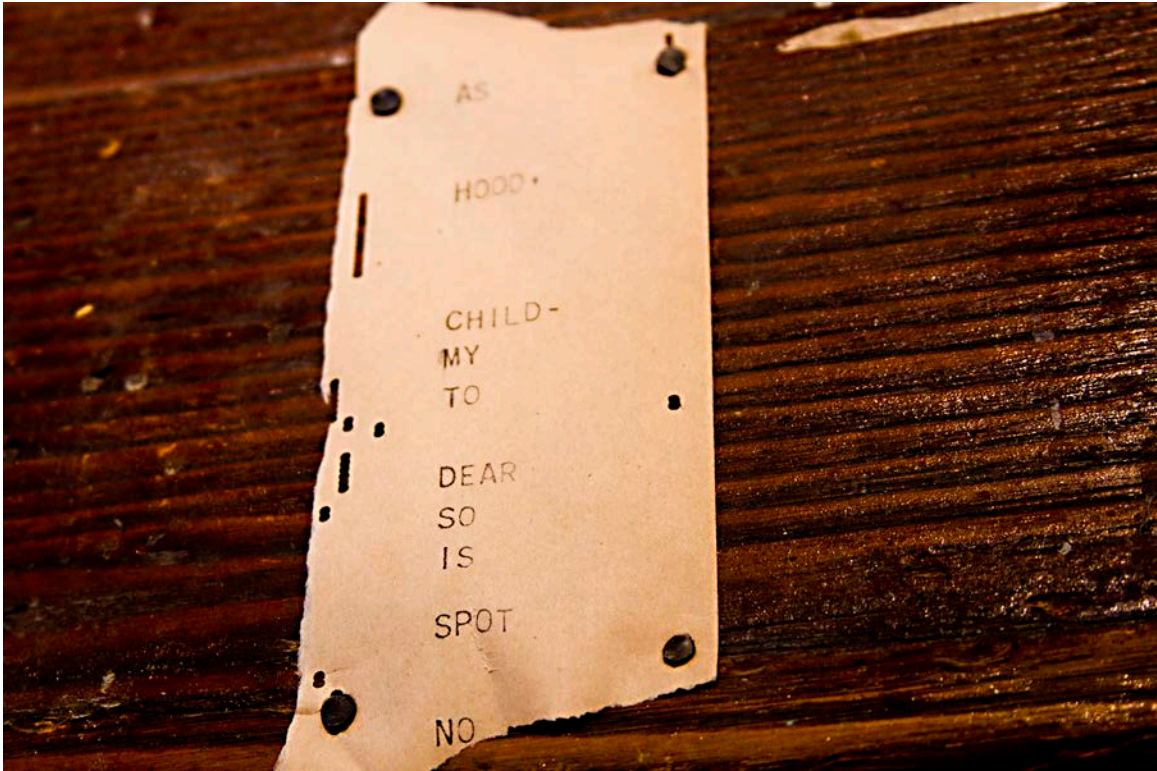
(Plate 21)



(Plate 22)



(Plate 23)

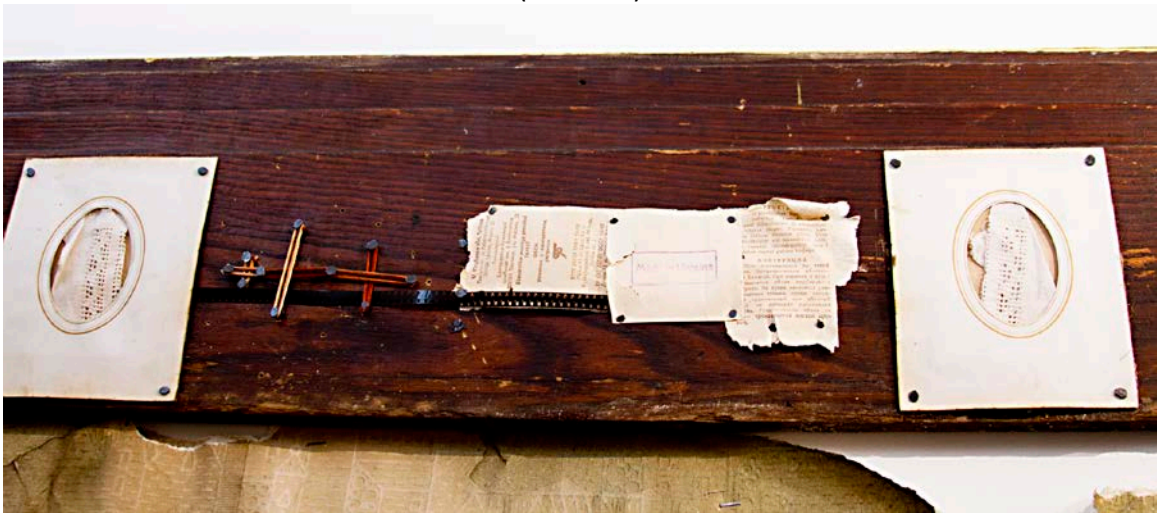


(Plate 24)





(Plate 25)



(Plate 26)



(Plate 27)



(Plate 28)



(Plate 29)



(Plate 30)



(Plate 31)



(Plate 32)



(Plate 33)



(Plate 34)



(Plate 35)





(Plate 36)



(Plate 37)



(Plate 38)



(Plate 39)



(Plate 40)



(Plate 41)



(Plate 42)



(Plate 43)





(Plate 44)



(Plate 45)



(Plate 46)



(Plate 47)



(Plate 48)



(Plate 49)



(Plate 50)



(Plate 51)





(Plate 52)



(Plate 53)