

RECOLLECTION

by

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December, 2019

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The purpose of this written report of my thesis is to discuss the visual installation presented in partial fulfillment of my Master of Fine Arts degree. The components of the visual work explore the role and impact of domestic relationships through metaphoric material use. Domestic connections are some of the most impressionable we make. It is scientifically proven that our relationships affect our mental, physical, and emotional health. My work uses a collection of clothing and furniture combined with the transformative properties of ceramics and glass. Through these tactile and visual components, my installation creates a space for recollection on the preciousness of domestic relationships.

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A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the School of Art and Design

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my family and my son, Fender L. Caldwell. Thank you all for giving me the encouragement and opportunity to be the very best version of myself. I love you all so much.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my committee, my peers, and my family for their continuous support, without which this would not have been possible. Thank You.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	vii
LIST OF PLATES	viii
INTERPERSONAL WEALTH	1
PETALS AND RELATIONSHIPS	2
MATERIAL RESONANCE AND INTERPERSONAL EXCHANGE.....	3
Collecting as Connecting	3
Quilts: Domestic Recollection	7
Furniture, Communal Domesticity	9
ARCHIVAL TRANSFORMATION, METAPHORIC METAMORPHOSIS.....	11
Fabric and Clay, Lasting Impressions.....	12
Glass, Water, and Moral Integrity.....	18
INSTALLATION: CREATING COMMUNAL SPACE.....	21
CONCLUSION: GATHERING THROUGH RECOLLECTION.....	29
RESOURCES	30

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: <i>Osmia avosetta</i> nests	2
Figure 2: <i>Every Journey Begins Where You Are</i>	3
Figure 3: <i>Shadowbox memorial for my grandparent's relationship</i>	5
Figure 4: <i>Shadowbox memorial for my sister and her children's relationship</i>	6
Figure 5: <i>1870-1886 Margaret Tormey's Crazy-patched Quilt Top</i>	7
Figure 6: <i>Log Cabin Quilt Example</i>	7
Figure 7: <i>Area Rug</i>	8
Figure 8: <i>Couch with patch worked seat</i>	9
Figure 9: <i>Found table with in-process ceramic tile additions</i>	10
Figure 10: <i>Cabinet of Marine Debris, Mark Dion, 2014</i>	11
Figure 11: <i>Moor, Janine Antoni, 2001-current</i>	12
Figure 12: <i>Previous quilt-like sculpture with repurposed fabric</i>	13
Figure 13: <i>Previous sculptures with repurposed fabric</i>	13
Figure 14: <i>Ceramic soda fired fabric petals</i>	15
Figure 15: <i>Hand-built wares on the dining table</i>	16
Figure 16: <i>Cabinets for Important Things, Kelly O'Briant</i>	17
Figure 17: <i>Detail of broken ceramic wall tile</i>	18
Figure 18: <i>Detail of broken and twice mended ceramic tiles on the dining table</i>	18
Figure 19: <i>End table with a ceramic nest, teacup, and small ceramic and glass lamp</i>	20

LIST OF PLATES

Plate A: <i>Recollection</i>	21
Plate B: <i>Ceramic and glass nests on bookshelf and wall ceramic and glass petals</i>	23
Plate C: <i>Memorial wall in living room</i>	24
Plate D: <i>Heritage memorial</i>	25
Plate E: <i>Dining table, a family of four</i>	26
Plate F: <i>Living room, place for guests</i>	27
Plate G: <i>Coffee table and area rug</i>	28

INTERPERSONAL WEALTH

Collecting is a learned behavior, passed on from generation to generation. In the act of collecting material possessions experiences are also gathered. Through our lives our collection grows reflecting our memories and relationships. Material possessions can nostalgically mark the personal development we acquire in the process of our interpersonal exchanges. My work brings attention to the preciousness of shared experiences in our domestic relationships.

My new role as a mother has brought on a new meaning to my collective practices. Now, I gather material possessions to ensure comfort and care for my little boy. In this nesting, I began to reflect on the importance and impact of relationships. “It is scientifically proven that the quantity and quality of social relationships affect mental health, health behavior, physical health, and mortality risk. Studies show that social relationships have short- and long-term effects on health, for better and for worse, and that these effects emerge in childhood and cascade throughout life to foster cumulative advantage or disadvantage in health.” (Umberson and Montez) I believe a nurturing domestic environment can create a foundation for healthy relationships and a healthy life. As artist Ai Weiwei stated “Life is art. Art is life. I never separate it.” (Weiwei) I use my art making process to reflect on the actions that build and break relationships, and how collected material possessions are tied to the impactful impressions of human connection. Through this process of reflection, I have created a space for the viewer to feel welcomed and embraced, while also acknowledging the fragility of our interpersonal encounters. The basis of my art begins with collecting and nesting.

PETALS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Life and art are inseparable. I looked to the natural world for inspiration, because in nature mothers create nests too. The species of mason bee, *Osmia avosetta*, makes their peculiar and beautiful larval nests with collected flower petals, nectar, and wet clay.

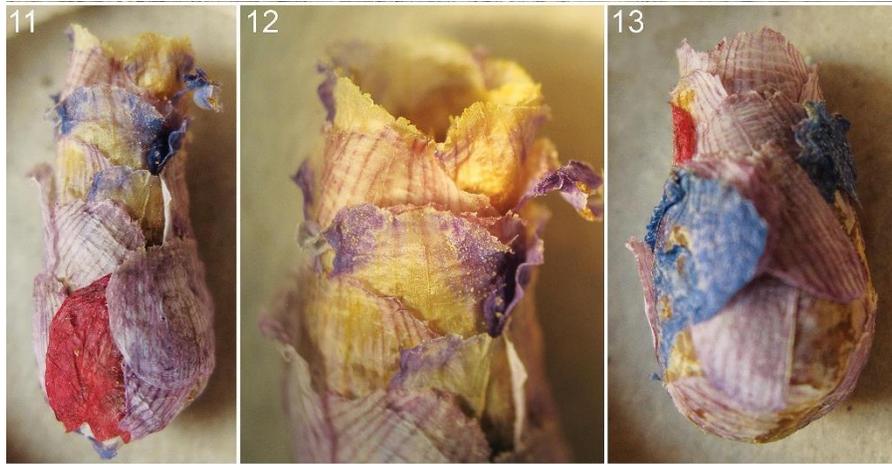


Figure 1: Osmia avosetta nests (photo by J.G. Rozen)

The bee selectively procures the perfect petals for its nest, which it harvests from the local flora. She carefully layers these collected flower petals into a burrow and then packs a layer of mud in between a second layer of petals. The mother bee finally fills the nest with nectar and honey before placing the larvae within; she then seals the top of the nest with more petals and mud. (Rozen) The flower petals the mason bee collects to make its nests hold a significant parallel to my personal collection of materials in nesting my own domestic relationships.

Flower petals' shape and colors are used to attract pollinators to help reproduce more flora in the same way clothing is used to attract like-minded people. Each person, like clothing, has their own story and role in the collective. The repetition of flower petals throughout my installation is an homage to relationships, and how they build the environment of our homes and communities. In my work, each flower petal represents an individual transformative relationship.

MATERIAL RESONANCE AND INTERPERSONAL EXCHANGE



Figure 2: Every Journey Begins Where You Are (quote on the patchwork made from Judy's shirt)

Collecting as Connecting

When someone is gone, we notice the space they once filled in our lives.

I lost touch with many family members during my twenties. Now that I have a family of my own, I am interested in reconnecting with those lost relationships. So, I decided to reach out to people through my art making process. I began my search for reconnection with a request on social media asking family and friends to send me their clothes and/or fabrics. Several people

responded and, in this process, stories were also exchanged strengthening our relationships. I also discovered that clothing can tell stories of their own.

Clothing is a form of self-expression, and in turn can comparatively show a difference in peoples' values or culture. My mother humbly sent me one extremely worn farming shirt that belonged to her partner of 5 years and one of her sun-bleached island dresses. They shared a common ideology of 'live cheap go far', though they had very opposing ideas on 'going far'. He is a grounded, hard-working farmer who will likely never leave his hometown, and she is free-spirited island woman who never settles anywhere for too long. My installation is a physical common ground where all these different relationships influence one another. Positive and negative experiences influence intrapersonal development. Some of the clothes in my work tell stories of hardship and loss.

At the time of my move to North Carolina, my grandfather had been in the nursing home after having a serious stroke. My grandmother still works at the nursing home he lived at those last years of his life. Though he never regained his ability to speak their relationship thrived. There are deeper strings connecting us all. They gifted me two bags full of their clothes, these were the first in my collection. My grandfather has passed since then, so his clothes are even more precious to me now. In the installation, I memorialized my grandparents' relationship with a shadowbox that houses one of his teaching shirts and her scrubs, along with the flowers from his funeral. Attached to the outside of the shadowbox are transformed ceramic fabric petals made from their clothing, further archiving their memories.

The other shadow box in my installation is dedicated to my sister who sent me one of her most prized possessions, the only outfit her first-born child ever wore. Her daughter, unfortunately and unexplainably, only lived 4 days. I am honored she gave me something so precious to her. I used this outfit along with baby clothes from her other two children to create the reliquary-like shadow box. One of her shirts lays in the background, encompassing her children's clothes. The combination of their clothes commemorates the bond of a mother and her children. Ceramic fired fabric petals of their transformed clothes are on the exterior frame. These shadow boxes memorialize loved ones lost and the loss of shared experiences. They archive the precious and fleeting moments, often recognized in hindsight.



Figure 3: Shadowbox memorial for my grandparent's relationship

I received many bags of fabric and many stories throughout my collecting. Newly rekindled relationships have entered my life through this process. My work symbolizes this communal growth. The stories resonate within the collection of objects and the warm glow of the space my work creates. I am grateful for these connections and want to eventually return a piece of my story to each of my participants. The shadow boxes will be part of my reciprocity.



Figure 4: Shadowbox memorial for my sister and her children's relationship

Quilts: Domestic Recollection

The exchange of stories and clothes are present in quilt-like patch work components within my installation. My work references the crazy quilt pattern (Quilt Discovery Experience) that was popular in pre-industrialized American utilitarian quilts. These quilts were made from whatever scrap clothes and fabrics that were available. Each piece of fabric holds its own story; women would gather in Quilting Bees to tell their stories while working.



Figure 5 (left): 1870 - 1886 Margaret Tormey's Crazy-patched Quilt Top

Figure 6 (right): Log Cabin Quilt Example from Nation Park Service, Quilt Discovery Experience

My work demonstrates how quilts can be used to re-purpose materials and share stories. Another popular quilt pattern during the height of pre-industrialized America was the log cabin pattern. “To pioneers traveling West, it symbolized home, warmth, love and security. The center square of the block was done in red to represent the hearth, the focal point of life in a cabin or home.” (Quilt Discovery Experience) The notion of the hearth and the home as warmth, love, and home center resonates with my concept of the domestic space being the foundation of relationships. The square red patch of fabric in the center of the area rug near the center of the

installation is representational of the foundation of all relationships beginning in domestic spaces.

“The name, Log Cabin, comes from the narrow strips of fabric, or logs arranged around the center square. Each fabric strip or log was added to the pattern in much the same way logs were stacked to build a cabin; and because the straight lines and small pieces of the pattern could utilize almost any fabric scrap available, it often became the final step in the recycling of fabric.”

(Quilt Discovery Experience)



Figure 7: Area Rug (detail)

The recycling of fabrics to make repurposed utilitarian objects such as quilts is a practice that goes back many generations. I designed a variation between the crazy quilt and log cabin

patterns for the area rug in my installation. The pattern accentuates the repurposed fabrics and brings a wholesome finish to the concept of material reuse as a tradition. There is strength found in the bonding of many worn scraps.

Furniture, Communal Domesticity



Figure 8: Couch with patch worked seat

Other objects that are often passed down generationally are furniture. I obtained the wicker couch in my installation from my partner's mother, who got it from his father's mother, who got it from her father's mother. The couch has been passed down in his family for almost

200 years. This couch has facilitated many relationships throughout the years. Furniture offers people a place to connect.

The other pieces of furniture within my installation came from my surrounding community. This collection started when I moved to an apartment on ‘the grid’, an area primarily populated by college students. At the end of every semester the curbs in ‘the grid’ are littered with old, broken furniture.



Figure 9: Found table with in-process ceramic tile additions

The furniture I found and collected once held a central position in their previous homes. The scratches and scuffs on the furniture mark the memories and stories of people from my community. As I refinish the furniture, I preserve some of the original history and give it a new place and story within my installation.

ARCHIVAL TRANSFORMATION, METAPHORIC METAMORPHOSIS



Figure 10: Cabinet of Marine Debris, Mark Dion, 2014

During the first part of my process I accumulated many fabrics, furniture, and stories. This collecting was in part inspired by artist Mark Dion. Dion repurposes old, found objects in his curiosity cabinets and interactive spaces to shed a new light on something old and previously unnoticed in a romanticized notion. (Dion, Art21) Within Dion's cabinets, such as the example above, the objects tell a story through their relationship with one another. Each object within my nested installation space adds to the overall story of building relationships.

In my installation, the objects relate to one another by the materials used and their finished treatment. The second part of my process is how I imbue the relationships and memories into the materials. My process of manipulating the fabrics and materials is symbolic to how people can change one another through shared experiences. This exchange within my work is inspired by Janine Antoni's installation "Moor". "Moor" is a rope made from fabrics, hair, and

objects that belonged to her family and friends. Antoni states, “When it comes to materials, I am fascinated by their transformation as a result of the process.” (Antoni, Art21) The transformation of the materials within my work resonate memories, and creates new relationships between myself, the work, and the viewer.



Figure 11: Moor, Janine Antoni, 2001-current

Fabric and Clay, Lasting Impressions

To transform the clothes and fabrics within my installation I exposed some of them to the effects of nature, while others went through ‘man-made’ manipulations. Many of the fabrics went back and forth through both natural and ‘man-made’ processes.

I placed many pieces of fabric outside letting nature take over. Sun, rain, and wind battered them through spring, summer, and fall. Another portion of the fabrics were bleached, dyed, and washed repeatedly. Many of these pieces of fabrics were then cut or torn into petal

shapes. These processes are symbolic of how seasons and human activities directly affect our relationships and intrapersonal development.



Figure 12: Previous quilt-like sculpture with repurposed fabric



Figure 13: Previous sculptures with repurposed fabric

The manipulated fabrics were made into quilt-like sculptures and other grouping of works before taking their final form within components of 'Recollection'. The pieces of fabric

throughout the installation lived many iterations, much in the way our relationships change and grow. This cyclical way of processing the fabrics creates a physical metaphor of the metamorphosis of relationships.

Through experimentation, I began to have my own relationship with the fabrics apart from their owners. A kind of deeper understanding and responsibility for my own actions and how even the smallest of actions may have a lasting effect. As the fabrics take their final form, they symbolize conscious acts of care, patience, and persistence in my art and my relationships.

Many of these petals made a transformation of their own. Like fabric, clay holds impressions, a history of time and wear. Every touch is recorded and if fully fired the clay becomes a frozen moment in time. I use clay slip to cover petal shaped pieces of fabric to archive the history of the wear of the fabric, leaving a transformed permanent memory in the form of fired clay.



Figure 14: Ceramic soda fired fabric petals

This process creates a physical record of the relationships the fabrics once had with their owner and myself. The fire has a transformative power, to burn out the previous material and leave behind a new shell. It is impossible to keep every detail of every memory. The transformation the fabric undergoes in the fire is symbolic of the selectivity of human memory. The fired clay petals now have a new, unified appearance, losing the loud colors of the original clothing. I use an atmospheric firing process that introduces soda ash during peak temperature. The soda applied during the firing creates a glaze that leaves a wet dew or sweat appearance to the almost flesh like color palette of the clay petals. This indicates a deeper connection between

relationships and clothes. The transformed petals achieve the delicate fragility of memories and relationships. What we get from our relationships is what we take from our experiences. Though each experience is different, we may discover more through the process of sharing.

I have made a plethora of fired ceramic petals. Each petal plays a role in the collective of my work. The individual is essential to the collective whole. The mass of petals within the installation signifies the exchanges of relationships. Every petal is a footprint of a transformation, that not only occurs within each of us, but unifies us along our journeys. My hand also leaves an impression in the clay of each petal. The mark of hand accentuates the influence of my actions on my relationships.



Figure 15: Hand-built wares on the dining table

There are hand-built ceramic components present throughout my installation. Hand-building processes takes time, patience, and persistence. I learned to refine my hand-building techniques from artist Kelly O’Briant at a workshop at Penland School of Crafts. O’Briant’s work deals with materiality and “explores humanistic ideas of presence, relationships, memory, and mortality”. Her body of work titled “Cabinets for Important Things” is an inspiration to my installation. (O’Briant)



Figure 16: Cabinets for Important Things, Kelly O'Briant

My work constantly reflects on the culmination of effort it takes to build relationships. It takes many small actions to build a single ceramic piece, and only one careless act to break one. This is symbolic of relationships as well. There are a few broken ceramic pieces throughout the installation, some left broken and some visibly repaired.



Figure 17: Detail of broken ceramic wall tile



Figure 18: Detail of broken and twice mended ceramic tiles on the dining table

Glass, Water, and Moral Integrity

In my work, I utilize glass components. Like the other materials in the space, sculpting glass take an accumulation of repetitive actions. Glass is comparable to the clay components. Every manipulation of my hand leaves a mark. Glass transforms during its formation; when heat is applied it is a molten liquid, once cooled it becomes solid. This metamorphosis is repeated during the process of making my forms. Relationships are fluid much like glass.

“The word glass comes from the Greek word: ‘Hyalos’ (who-alos) which was used not only to describe glass, or something wet and brilliant such as a drop of rain, but it was also used to indicate a person’s moral qualities of honesty and clarity.” (Beveridge, Philippa) These qualities of glass denote the transient essence and fluidity in relationships.

Glass is primarily transparent; this transparency is symbolic of the unseen exchanges in our relationships. Personal transformation occurs under the surface, often invisible even to our own perception, until a new light is shed on the experience. In my work, I pair my transparent and fragile glass lampshades with the archival quality of my hand-built ceramic stands to symbolize the duality of personal development through shared experiences.



Figure 19: End table with a ceramic nest, teacup, and small ceramic and glass lamp

INSTALLATION: CREATING COMMUNAL SPACE



Plate A: Recollection (entrance view)

This project began with a collection and has become a physical place of recollection. In my work the term recollection is relevant in multiple ways: to gather, regather, and recall. Gather refers to the spaces in which relationships are built, domestic places. My work is a physical gathering of material possessions and memories. Regather refers to the rekindled relationships that were fostered during the collection process. Recall refers to remembering connections with other people and an exchange of our shared experiences through visual stimuli, such as a texture or the orientation of the furniture within this installation. My work is a balance of the components of recollection: by the space the installation represents, the heart of the home;

through the flux and flow of materials throughout the space; and through the participation of the people involved and the people interacting or viewing with the work during its installation.

Collectively, my installation is made from glass, ceramic, fabric, and wood furniture. These materials were chosen because of their connection to domestic places. I created a nested domestic living/dining room from these materials and possessions, utilizing all their qualities to reflect on the relationships built within the home. This utilization of the components qualities for their relatability was inspired by artist Margaret Wertheim. She connects fabrics and other man-made objects to crocheted man-made reef installations. She chooses items that are familiar and mostly universal to create the natural forms they represent. This allows the viewer to find their personal role in the work. (Wertheim)

The layout in my installation is rooted in my own domestic space, with room for a family of four at the dining table and space for company in the shared living room. The room has a warm soft light, meant to feel welcoming and embracing. The room appears lived in with functional seating. A Cajun cultural essence is present from the open old window frames and screen-style door, as well as the collective of handed down, well-loved furniture and décor. The room was inspired by my maternal grandmother's house with knick-knacks filling the shelves, walls, and tables. The knick-knacks in this case are ceramic, glass, and fabric objects that represent memories and relationships, family's histories and shared experiences.



Plate B: Ceramic and glass nests on bookshelf and wall ceramic and glass petals

The ceramic nest in the installation represent a relationship or group of relationships, made from the clothes of the people involved. The glass nests echo the ceramic nests to represent the unseen exchanges in relationships, such as the personal development we gain through our shared experiences. These nests reside on an old bookshelf. The bookshelf symbolizes a place for retaining stories, and now houses the stories of these relationships.

The ceramic petals from the nests flow onto the walls, in clustered waves around the room. Each petal is a tangible impression or memory of an interaction between two or more people. The collective of the petals is symbolic of the multitude of actions and exchanges it takes to build relationships. Each participants' stories are preserved in the individuality of the petals.

Though the viewer may not have access to these stories, they may recall stories of their own through the visual stimuli.



Plate C: Memorial wall in living room

These flowing petals lead to two shadow boxes hung on the back wall. Shadow boxes are often used in homes to keep precious objects. The two in this installation are memorials for loved ones lost. The shadow boxes symbolize the preciousness of our relationships. They lead to a window with a passing crochet cloud. The delicate, ephemeral nature of the cloud emphasizes the fleeting and fragile moments that make up our relationships, emphasizing preciousness. The crochet now archived in ceramic form was once the work of my grandmother, as were the crochet samples stitched together over the back of the rocking chair. There is a passing of heritage present in the transformation of the heirlooms.



Plate D: Heritage memorial

Each piece of furniture within my installation is imbued with renewed purpose. They retain some of their history and even create new memories like in the case of the making of the dining table. The dining table has two new end extensions that display hand-made tiles with imbedded fingerprints of a little helper. My partner's daughter pressed her fingerprints in oxide washes on the tiles. We created our own memory in the making of this dining table and will make many more since this will become our family dining table in our new house. The dining

table has three adult seats with petal patch-worked seats and an old baby highchair. The four seats represent my nuclear family.



Plate E: Dining table, a family of four (viewed through the door)

The mother's chair is scooted closer to the baby's highchair at the dining table, as the baby needs tending. The chair across from the baby's highchair at the table is smaller and has vibrant colored fabric sewn into the patch-worked seat. This seat represents the child in the family. The chair positioned at the head of the table represents my partners seat, or the father. Then the space is open to the living room where there is enough seating for the extended family,

such as grandparents. The installation begins with the nuclear family, moving to the extended family, and is open to the community.



Plate F: Living room, place for guests



Plate G: Coffee table and area rug (from above)

The community is represented in the collection of furniture. The coffee table in my installation was found outside a fraternity house covered in stickers, beer bottle sweat rings and missing glass panels. I have made new glass panels in the form of fused glass petals. An end table that once lived in the carport of a friend's house originally had the stains and marks of a party lifestyle. It now has a polished natural wood finish, though the shadows of cigarette burns are still visible. The small visible hints of history left on the furniture allow the viewer to experience their own recollection.

CONCLUSION: GATHERING THROUGH RECOLLECTION

Joseph Beuys once said, “Art can no longer be art today if it does not reach into the heart of our present culture and work transformatively within it.” This Joseph Beuys said is the job of the artist: “Here my idea is to declare that art is the only possibility for evolution, the only possibility to change the situation in the world.” (Joseph Bueys Transformer) My artwork is a method for promoting change by creating a comfortable and relatable space, in which the artwork is a conduit that encourages personal reflection of interpersonal relationships. In such a disconnected society, I believe art has the power to help people connect through their shared experiences.

Throughout my thesis process, I was seeking a way to reconnect with my family through my art making practices. Along this journey I have reconnected with family, made new relationships, and lost loved ones. In the creation of this installation I have come to realize the preciousness of relationships. My work emphasizes that true wealth comes from a happy and healthy life filled with these precious relationships.

My thesis installation utilizes a warm color palette and nostalgic objects creating a domestic environment to attract the viewer, as flowers entice bees. The flower and bee have a mutually beneficial connection, similar to people and their relationships. Like the flower, my installation invites the viewer to reflect on the preciousness of their domestic relationships.

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