

Crickets In The Wall

By

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ABSTRACT

Crickets In The Wall is a personal journey back in time to some of my earliest memories of being different. The story starts with the pivotal moment of realizing my ways of thinking and working could be accepted and appreciated by my community in art school and goes all the way back to being four years old in preschool. I explore these moments, feelings, and thoughts through process, material, surface, form, and firing methods. Each detail of making is tied back to a part of the story.

Cricket In The Wall

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by

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INTRODUCTION

I have been an artist my whole life. From the time I was under two years old and making finger paintings and playdoh items, I have been a maker. Like many people, I was mostly exposed to drawing and painting as art in school. It was easily accessible. For many years, I was a 2D artist out of necessity. In my art classes throughout school, we had a certain level of freedom in what we wanted to paint or draw. When it came to the ceramics sections in elementary and middle school and even my dedicated ceramics class in high school, there was far less freedom. Everything we did was project based. A pinch pot animal, a slab-built vase, a reliquary box- there was no room to grow or explore ideas. Even with these limitations though, the magic of the glaze in the kiln intrigued me. It had since the first time I saw it on a PBS special when I was only five years old. I wanted to be a sculptor, but I wasn't sure how. In paintings, we were taught to paint the literal moment or object the piece was about. I have never liked that way of making very much, but it was what was expected.

When I started in the art program during undergrad, I was required to take a 3D design class as one of the foundation courses. It was essentially a beginner sculpture class that explored a number of different mediums. As the semester progressed, I poured all my time into it. I was in that room meticulously working from morning to late night every day. My remaining core class felt like a distraction from my true purpose of being in school.

The class was project based, but with far more freedom than I had previously had in 3D based classes. The only strict parameters given were that we had to stay within the assigned medium. For my first several pieces, I made objects. There was little concept behind them. I was happy with the amount of detail and hard work I had put into them, but they still felt flat to me. Mid semester, we had the fashion trashion assignment. We were to make a wearable accessory or

outfit only from repurposed materials. I spent every waking minute on that piece, and the attention to detail showed. At the end of fashion trashion, we had to present our work in front of the professor and a panel of other professors that we did not know. Raoul was on my panel of judges. When it came time for questions about my piece, I expected to have to share about the reason I chose to make a wearable millipede or how I picked my materials. Instead, Raoul said, “What are you doing after this?”

I paused and asked, “Do you mean right after this or after I graduate?”

“After you graduate,”

I thought about it and said, “Maybe be a middle or high school art teacher,”

All he said in return was, “No.” and wrote something in his notes.

It wasn’t until much later that I got to know him and asked about that moment that he told me he had meant I should not be an art teacher. I should be an artist.

CONTEXT

Even though the majority of my thesis work is sculptural, my study of form, glaze, and firings of pottery has informed my work the most. One person who has influenced not only my pots, but my way of being a maker is Raoul Pacheco. Raoul was my undergrad ceramics professor. He understood where I was trying to go with not only my pots, but with my sculptural work. Lots of his feedback has stuck with me, and I think about it every day in the studio. Two things I learned from him have really showed up in my thesis work. The first is face pots. He taught me his method of making face pots, and I slowly made it my own. He adds the faces to his pots while they are still rather wet. He does it by pushing the clay inward and outward to make the contours of the face, and he doesn't add anything extra. When I first started making my own face pots, I tried to do it like this. But the mouth never came together the way I wanted, so I added a little clay for the lips. Then the eyes fell a little flat, and I wanted them to be open. So, I added a half sphere of clay and some coils for eyelids. I wanted the noses of my pots to extend further than the clay of the original pot could stretch, so I added a little more clay. To add all this extra clay, I needed the pot to be a little stiffer. If the pots were leather hard anyway, I might as well trim them too. Before long, I had face pots that were all my own. But the people who know Raoul still see a little of his methods in mine. As I have shared my thesis work online, I have received a few messages from friends saying that my face pots remind them a little of Raoul's.

The other influence that has showed up in my work from Raoul is the stacking of forms. When I was in Raoul's class and focusing entirely on my crystalline research, he saw my pots as sculptural. For a while, I was making crystalline donuts along with my rounded forms. When I would come in for class, I would sometimes find them stacked up together. Raoul had come by my table and done this so that I would think of my pots as sculpture. It took several years, but

stacking and piling did show up in my thesis work. I haven't stacked my crystalline pots as sculpture yet, but the face pots did get stacked. While visually completely different from Raoul's stacked face pots, there are still some similarities.



Figure 1: Drinking vessel by Raoul Pacheco



Figure 2: Stacked face pots by Raoul Pacheco

Another artist whose work has informed my process is Jose Mariscal Paneque. He is a crystalline potter whose work I have been studying for five years now. I first came across his pots when searching for crystalline glaze information online. Everything about them drew me in from the first look. The perfect rounded body of the pot compared to the dramatic tiny neck, the large ringed crystals, the rich and metallic colors- it was all perfect. I have watched his throwing technique and tried to replicate it on a smaller scale. His pots are usually quite large; many of them are over a foot in multiple directions. Over the years I have achieved these tiny and delicate necks on my smaller pots, though mine are not as long yet. I have always liked the necks of my crystalline pots to have as small of an opening as possible. It does not invite use other than decoration. This is fitting since crystalline glazes are not safe for use on dinnerware or inside drinking vessels. This is due to the glaze being “soft.” This means that it scratches easily and that it leaches materials like metal oxides when in contact with acid. This property of the glaze is actually useful though. Like many crystalline artists, Jose uses a very high concentration of metal oxides in his glazes. When the pots come out of the kiln, they are typically very dark in color with subtle, large crystals. The pots are then soaked in acid to leach out the extra metal oxides. After this, the crystals are their true colors.



Figure 3: Galaxy glaze pot (green) by Jose Mariscal Paneque



Figure 4: Galaxy glaze pot (blue) by Jose Mariscal Paneque

Maya Elin is a wood fire and soda fire potter based in Oregon. Her body of work is almost entirely functional, and she focuses on atmospheric glaze testing. Many of her works are partially glazed so that part of them show the ash and flame patterns, and the glazes on the other parts interact with the ash or soda. I find her work particularly interesting because of how her glazes react to the ash. Many of them form small crystals, but the crystals are different than that of a traditional crystalline glaze. There are also frequently small crystallizations in the ash on her pots. I like how her work is an intersection of two different kinds of firing techniques that I like to participate in. In the last wood fire I took part in, I was able to get some small crystals in my glaze and some in the ash as well. These features are on a few of the face cups in *Always The Same*.



Figure 5: Wood fired mug by Maya Elin



Figure 6: Soda fired cup by Maya Elin

HISTORY

The history of wood firing dates back to around 2000 years ago in ancient southern China. The first wood kilns built are best compared to the modern-day dragon kiln. These kilns are long, narrow, and built in sections that step like stairs. The whole thing is constructed out of clay bricks and insulated by more clay. On one end, there is a firebox, at the other, the chimney. Heat flows from the firebox to the chimney, heating the pots along the way.

The dragon kilns of the past were often very long, and it could take thousands of pots to fill them. The firing process is also long and laborious. The process starts with sourcing enough wood to last stoking the fire constantly for several days, which would likely be several very large trees. All this wood was prepared by splitting it with an ax piece by piece. Due to these factors, firing a wood kiln was a community event. Potters gathered to share the work and fire the pots that the community needed for everyday tasks.

During this time and for hundreds of years after, wood firing was done out of necessity. There was no electricity or natural gas to fire ceramicware. If the clay needed to be vitrified, it had to be done in a wood kiln. Over the years, wood firing has become unnecessary but not obsolete. As kiln bricks got better at insulating the kilns, artists have gained more control over what happens inside the kiln. Higher temperatures can be reached with more ease, and those temperatures can be held for longer. This allows more ash to be deposited and melted onto the pot surfaces. Different parts of the kiln produce different effects. A wide range of appearance can be achieved with just one firing.

Over time, a group gets to know their kiln. Excitement builds as people prepare their work with wadding and carefully place them in their favorite spots in the kiln. First fire of the kiln is celebrated as a group, and then people break off into smaller groups for the remainder of

the firing. People bring food, share stories, and anticipate the results of the firing together. When the kiln has reached temperature, there is a break for cooling. Everyone goes home to rest after their hard work. A few days later, the excitement has ramped up again, and the group gathers for the unloading. As pieces get passed out of the kiln, there is group celebration over every success.

The whole event has become a way to participate in the larger clay community. As wood firing has become less common, artists have started to need to travel further to participate in wood firings. This has been beneficial for many. People frequently make lifelong friends or professional connections during the long hours working around the wood kiln.

I feel lucky to have participated in wood firings during my time in grad school. Time spent around the kiln during the overnight shifts has brought me closer to people in my community as a maker.

As I looked into the wood kiln during my first ever firing, I knew that the process fit my concept. Flames whip around the pots, leaving their mark on the unglazed clay. The ash rapidly swirls through the kiln. The draft of the kiln creates wind that almost seems to be a fiery storm. Other atmospheric firings are the same- the inside of the kiln appears to be chaos at the peak of the firing. Soda firings add an element; they are corrosive. Most clay is resistant to it, but it is present to some degree. Most of my work is fired in the soda kiln for this reason. The unstable atmosphere matches the way I perceived my environment during many of these events. For other pieces, like *Always The Same*, the wood kiln simply provided lots of variation on the surfaces, which convey emotion without changing the expressions.



Figure 7: Image of the last functioning dragon kiln in Yixing, China



Figure 8: First fire at the door of ECU's wood kiln



Figure 9: View inside ECU's wood kiln



Figure 10: Participating in the nightshift stoking the kiln



Figure 11: Participating in unloading ECU's wood kiln after my first firing

FINALLY GOOD

The story of *Finally Good* takes place starting in my third year of undergrad. Before starting in the art department, many of my traits and ways of thinking and processing were criticized by others. I had learned that when my ways were questioned, people were not actually looking for answers. When my professors started asking me why I was making certain choices in my work, I remembered this. During the first project of the semester, my 3D design professor approached me while I was working on a sculpture in a very particular and obsessive way. She made a comment about my obsessiveness and perfectionism, and I asked if there was a different way I should be working. She asked why I thought I needed to change my methods, and I explained what I had learned over the years. She explained that when the professors ask me something about my work, they actually want to know. Then she told me that my obsessive and perfectionist nature were perfect for what I was doing and would be the traits that allow me to take my work all the way. She pointed out that there was intention in every move I made while working. This was a major turning point for me. During my second year of being in the ceramics concentration, this information about myself gave me the confidence to approach complex glaze chemistry- crystalline. I did test after test, working through chemistry and then different firing methods. The process was tedious and repetitive.

As I worked through all these tests and started perfecting my formulas, my professor asked me when I would finally be satisfied with my results. I thought about it and told him I would be happy when I could integrate my crystalline studies with my wild clay studies. For this piece, that is what I have done. The colorant in the glaze on this piece is a wild clay I harvested and processed myself.



Plate 1: *Finally Good*, ceramic with wild clay crystalline glaze, 2026

ALWAYS THE SAME

Always the Same is about my lack of facial expression. I had put in work throughout the years to add variation to my voice, and I assumed that my face matched. I found out that it did not match when I was telling a serious story in undergrad, and one of the listeners couldn't hold back his laughter. When I pressed for an answer on why he was laughing over a serious matter, he informed me that my voice had a lot of emotion, but my facial expression wasn't changing at all. I looked around for confirmation from the rest of the group, and they all agreed. It was then that it made sense why so many people thought I was being sarcastic all the time or otherwise misinterpreting me.

For this piece, I have made a series of cups with an unchanging expression on them. However, the distance between the eyes and size of the noses are varied. To me, these variations feel like all different emotions. To most of the people who see the cups, they seem to have blank expressions.





Plate 2: *Always The Same*, wood fired and soda fired ceramics, 2025, (top) installation view / (bottom) detail

IT'S JUST DIFFERENT WITH YOU

My whole life, I have been kept separate from my friends' other friends. I never understood why this happened. I heard about their other friends all the time, but it was made clear that I was not invited. Some of them assured me that the group I knew wasn't invited either, so it was okay. Eventually, I found out that the group of friends I did know had been invited to the outside group all along, and I was the only one that was told I couldn't come. When I finally questioned this, all they would tell me was, "It's just different with you." None of them would ever tell me why. Since these days in middle school, it has happened many more times, and I have found out why.

For the piece *It's Just Different With You*, I have made a set of vessels that are uninviting on the outside but pleasant once they are opened.



Plate 3: *It's Just Different With You*, soda fired and reduction fired ceramics with wild clay wash, 2026

THE LIES YOU TOLD THAT WERE TRUTH TO ME

The Lies You Told That Were Truth To Me is about missing subtleties, strict adherence to rules, and realizing that people lied to manipulate. The story takes place in fifth grade with one of my friends. She had learned that if there was a spoken social rule, I would follow it precisely. The one she used against me to get her way was that the guest gets to pick the activity. She would secretly arrange for the boy she liked who lived in my neighborhood to meet her at my house on my trampoline and then kick me off of it to talk to him alone. If I ever protested, she would say that the guest gets to pick the activity because she knew I would follow it. It felt wrong to me, but that was the rule. These sorts of situations happened in all areas of my life, and they ended up leading to much larger issues.

For this piece, I took a cast of my body in plaster and used the mold to make myself in clay. I added skrunkles to the outside of the body, which are the lies. The lies enter the body through the openings in the neck, arms, and legs. Once inside, they are true and physical.



Plate 4: *The Lies You Told That Were Truth To Me*, soda fired ceramics, 2025

RIVER HANDS

When I reflected on the geologic history of Earth as a child, I liked to imagine what it would be like to be an atom and go through all the phases of inorganic earth. I would imagine myself as molten earth cooling to form igneous rock, then worn away by the elements to just particles, compressed into sedimentary rock, and heated into metamorphic rock. The process could repeat forever in nearly any order. I also thought of what it might be like to be the wind or water that weathered the rocks to sediment. Because of this, I have made a piece titled *River Hands*. I made it in a way that flowed naturally just as water would. The modular pieces come together to form a canyon full of hand weathered river stones.





Plate 5: *River Hands*, soda fired and reduction fired ceramics, 2026, (top) installation view / (bottom) detail

PERCEPTION ON CHRISTMAS

Perception on Christmas covers themes of issues with being perceived, expectation to perform normalcy. This story takes place in the middle of my elementary school years, though it was an ongoing event. The story begins on the way to my dad's side of the family for Christmas. I would always be anxious on the way there, and thirty minutes out, we would always have the same conversation in the car. I would be reminded of how to act, what to say, and to make sure to let everyone hug me even though I didn't want them to. I was the youngest by twelve years, and all the attention was on me. They expected me to be overly excited, play, and be the center of attention. It felt like I was watched the entire night, and I was never behaving correctly.

For the piece, I have made individual spheres with ruffles (skrunkles) all over them. They are fired in several different ways, but all have a busy surface to represent overstimulation. Each sphere is meant to be a family member or activity during the Christmas gathering. They all fit together to represent the family and activities working together. At the same time, I'm in the center surrounded with the same expression as always.



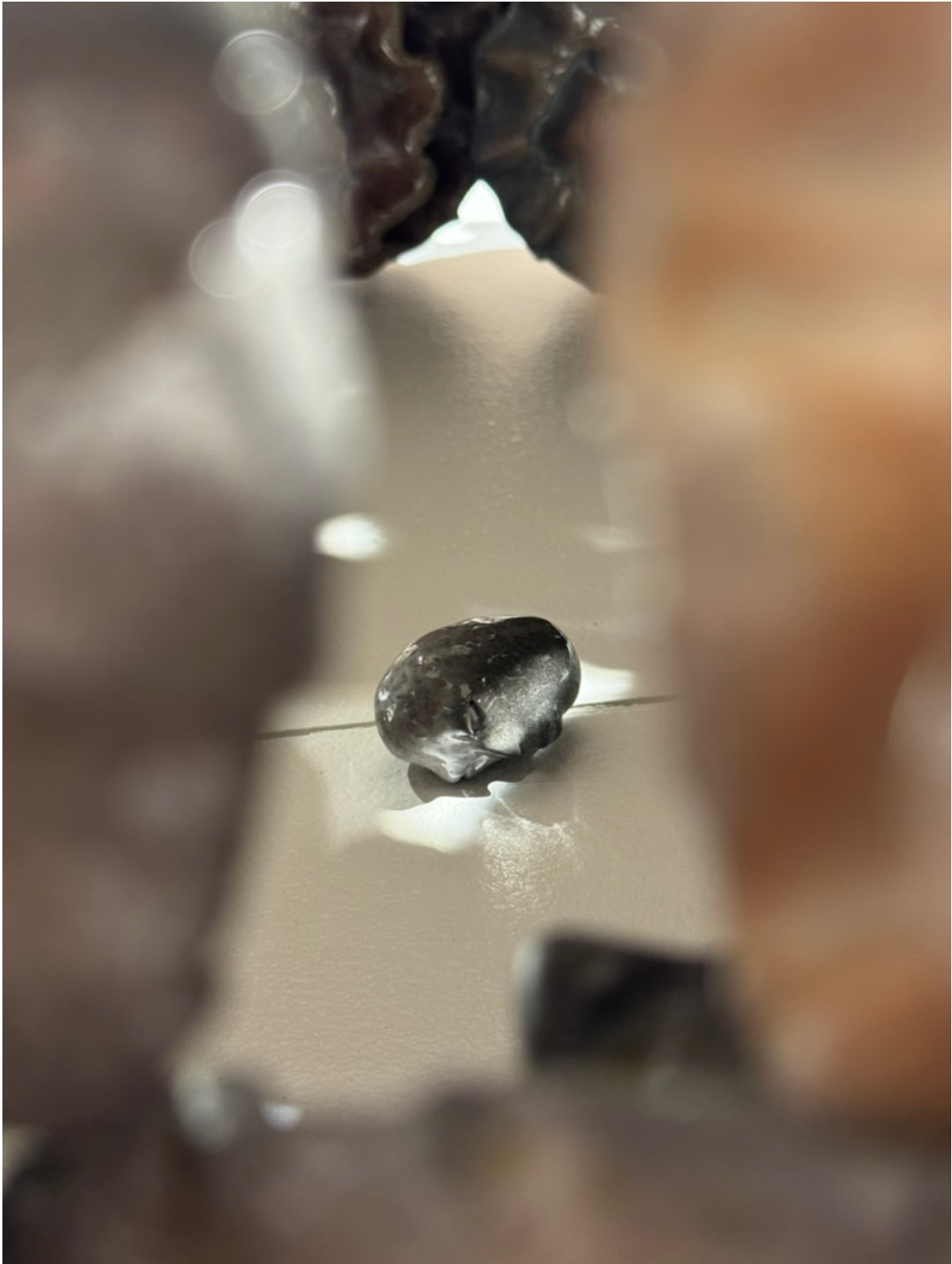


Plate 6: *Perception On Christmas*, soda fired and reduction fired ceramics, 2025, (top) installation view / (bottom)

detail inside piece

THEY DON'T MEAN IT

They Don't Mean It is about missed social cues, punishment, shame, realization, and feelings of inadequacy. The story takes place in first grade, when I had just moved to Georgia. In front of the whole class, my teacher asked me a question, and when I answered honestly, I was yelled at. I did not understand that her question was actually a command, but the other children did. As I sat outside at the punishment wall in the Georgia heat, I thought of all the times this had happened before. I realized that I was seemingly the only one who didn't pick up on unspoken cues.

This piece is made up of many narrow neck vases with my unchanging face on them. The necks are narrow to represent that I'm not taking in the subtle information of social interactions. They are all melting together as they process that this has happened over and over. They represent the thoughts of every previous event converging into the moment of realization.





Plate 7: *They Don't Mean It*, soda fired ceramics, 2026, (top) installation view / (bottom) detail

PEARS AREN'T YELLOW

Pears Aren't Yellow takes place when I was in pre-k. Every week, we had a color of the week. Each day, we had a new sheet of items to color. On yellow week, we had a sheet that had a banana, a baby duck, lemons, and a pear. I colored everything except for the pear. I was told to color the pear or else I couldn't go out for recess. This didn't work for two reasons. One was because I didn't want to go to recess, and the other was that pears aren't yellow. I could not make myself color it yellow, because that would be a lie. Finally, a teacher told me to just color the pear green since that was the color I thought it was. I could not do that either, because the top of the sheet was labeled as things that are yellow. Either way, I was lying. I went round and round in my head trying to compromise with myself, because not coloring it at all was not an option.

For this piece, I have made a series of pears that are also not yellow. I have made many of them to represent my repeating thoughts with no solutions. The existence of pears felt overwhelming to me in that moment as if there were far more than a single one on the page in front of me.





Plate 8: *Pears Aren't Yellow*, soda fired ceramics, 2026, (top) installation view / (bottom) detail

CRICKETS IN THE WALL

Crickets in the Wall tells a story of anxiety, overstimulation, being misinterpreted, and perceived betrayal. The story takes place when I was four years old and in pre-k. Every day, I would be extremely anxious on the way to school, but it wasn't about something I had the words to describe yet. My brain had learned the pattern and knew that I would be facing sensory overwhelm very soon. Throughout the day, this would get worse until it was unbearable. We would finally go out to recess, and I would spend it watching the crickets that hid in the brick wall that surrounded the tiny playground. I felt that the crickets and I were the same; we both wanted to escape what was surrounding us. The teachers thought that I was lonely and secretly wanted to play with the other children even though I told them I didn't. Eventually, they brought a bunch of bug catching supplies, handed them out to my peers, and sent the entire class my way at recess. They thought they were helping me when I was too shy to admit I wanted it. I felt betrayed since I had told them the truth.

The piece shows the overwhelming atmosphere I was surrounded by at school. It felt huge and all-consuming to me. I have placed a representation of self in the center of this atmosphere.





Plate 9: *Crickets In The Wall*, reduction fired ceramics, 2025, (top) installation view / (bottom) detail

CONCLUSION

During the past three years, my work has gone through major changes. I started the program with a portfolio of my best crystalline pots, each made to be perfectly neat without any visible flaws. My goal had been near complete control over the material with the exception of where the crystals formed on the surface of the pots. I knew that I did not want to continue with this mindset for my thesis work. I did a lot of exercises in making to let go of my need for perfection in my work. Once I could accept the physical imperfections in my pots, I was able to stop thinking so literally when making my sculptures. I had been mentally stuck making scenes as sculptures for many years, and I was unhappy with how most of my work was turning out. My goal has always been to make sculptures that capture the feeling of a moment rather than the moment itself. Through my exploration of nonobjective form, surface texture, glazes, and atmospheric firing, I feel that I have finally achieved this. Throughout my time in the program, visitors to my studio have told me that my work evokes a lot of emotion. Friends who have similar experiences to me have said that the pieces really capture the feeling of the moment. Many of the comments that were left in my notebook during my show said that they were moved by the exhibition even though the stories were not made public.

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