

WE/ME

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

University of Washington

2016

Committee:

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

School of Interdisciplinary Arts & Sciences- Bothell

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Abstract

We/Me

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We/Me uses hand-stitched poems to explore how layers of fabric relate to layers of time and space. It is a collection of poetry that is stitched, rather than written, and is slowly made by hand. The poems are endowed with tactility and weight, and occupy a swath of three-dimensional space. The artist's house in the Beacon Hill neighborhood of Seattle inspired the poems that make up *We/Me*. The layering of text and textiles create a visual metaphor that addresses issues of gentrification, feminism, and land-ownership. These short, concrete poems use wordplay to create friction and elicit multiple meanings.

I. We Dwell Well

We moved into the house on Beacon Hill in July after my boyfriend, Mike, purchased it with the help of his mother. She is going through her third bout with cancer. Over the last few years, she has dedicated considerable time to fulfilling her late husband's bucket list, which included buying a house in Seattle—a dream he died before seeing to fruition. Mike and I had each been living in separate one-bedroom apartments, and we have similar taste, so it seemed like we each could move our things into this new three-bedroom house and have plenty of room to grow.

But it was more complicated than that.

For one thing, the couple that sold the house was divorcing. Alice is a doctor. Maurice is an artist, wood worker, and stay at home dad. They have two boys, in or nearing their teens. Even now, the Google Streetview of the house shows their eldest son leaving our front steps on a skateboard. Alice and Maurice had been living in the house for fifteen years, and their lives were so seeped into the property that perhaps we shouldn't have been surprised when on moving day, the house appeared to be empty, but in almost every drawer or closet something had been left behind. It was like the dust of their lives had collected in the corners. In the basement, it lay in piles. They had left many boxes and storage bins. We found old pictures of the couple, sketches and drawings from Maurice's art-school days, and even their wedding invitations. After we moved in, Maurice called and set up a time to pick up his things. He took one truckload, but didn't come back for the rest.

On top of the belongings from our own apartments, and what was left behind by Maurice and Alice, Mike's mother sent up a U-Haul truck filled with furniture and boxes from both her sister's and her own house. All of a sudden, we were jammed into our new space, and it was less like we had moved into a home, and more like we had moved in on top of the family that had been here before. It was as though we had layered our lives on the history of the house. Even now, as I look around, there are echoes of Maurice and Alice's footsteps walking the halls.

Once we were able to find places for most of the things we had brought into the house, we began to filter through the things that Maurice hadn't taken on his last trip. We found bins of Legos, boxes of house paint, and lots of tools. Tucked away in a dark corner was a dollhouse. It must have belonged to Alice. It is too faded to have belonged to one of the boys, and the color of the mock-furnishings—burgundy and brown, allude to an artifact that was created in the 1970's. The dollhouse is not in good shape, and oddly a lot of the needed repairs resemble those required by our own house: part of the roof of the dollhouse is torn off, mimicking our roof that needs to be replaced, and when I first came upon it, furniture and toy blocks were strewn inside, resembling the furniture and boxes left by Maurice and Alice.

The abandoned dollhouse sticks with me. I imagine there was a child who once staged imaginary domestic routines in each of the tiny rooms. Was the dollhouse a stage for aspirations left unattained? Was the fact that the dollhouse was left behind a sign that Alice's attempts at domestic stability had been in vain? What childhood hopes were abandoned beneath that broken roof?

I wanted to know more about the dollhouse. I started by taking it out of the storage bin, removing the scattered furniture, and evicting the spider who had taken up residence. I cleaned, scrubbed, and dusted the dollhouse, but it gave up no further secrets. However, I did realize that I was reenacting the same inspiration that had set my thesis in motion. I was playing house, while in real life facing the task of building a home with someone I love. This space requires maintenance and tending. It can be both confining and empowering. Beyond our doorstep, I am concerned with occupying a space within a community, and recognizing that by moving here, we are perpetuating the trend of gentrification in the city of Seattle. In short, moving into this house has brought up questions of gentrification, gender, ownership, and developing relationships. I am choosing to express those questions through embroidery.

I find that working with textiles is uniquely suited to address the questions and concerns that have arisen out of moving into this house. In working with fabric, I am able to literally create layers by placing pieces of fabric on top of one another. In using embroidery to create poetry, I am directly engaging with the domestic sphere while simultaneously pushing against it. I have chosen cross-stitch, an easy beginner's stitch, to explore questions about playing house and making home. The poems are purposely left unadorned, without images or designs that would be found in more traditional embroidery. The language that I use is frequently plucked out of the domestic sphere, and I play with words nested within other words to create additional friction and meaning. While these poems are short, they are also dense, and presented with plenty of space around them in order to provide room for

thought. The end is a collection of minimalist concrete poems that use wordplay and color to evoke meaning.

In contemplating the unique features of the dollhouse, I realize that they also form symbols of my poetics inquiries. As I discuss my poetics, we will move through the various rooms of the dollhouse. Upon the completion of this project, the embroidered poems will be stored in the dollhouse, and the dollhouse will serve as a bridge between the poetics and the poems.

WE COME

It is a two-story dollhouse with an attic in the peak of the roof. The front and sides of the house have windows and yellow plastic shutters that someone once adorned with round red, blue, green, and yellow stickers. A few shutters are open, so that if a light were on in the house, we would be able to see inside. The back of the house is a flat piece of thin chipboard that has no adornment. From this detail, I can guess that the house was meant to sit against a wall. On the other sides of the house, bricks and siding are printed, and flat orange flowers sprout out of bright yellow two-dimensional pavers. To the left, a round window without panes stands above the front doorway. The door is missing. I found it in the bottom of the bin where the dollhouse was stored. It is white and plastic, but the nobs that served as hinges are broken. Even without the door, the doorway is out of sync with the rest of the dollhouse: a white doorframe flanked by a portico of colonial pillars topped with a triangular pediment.

The colonial style house is emblematic of mid-century America. Replicated in miniature, it speaks to how deeply the colonial mindset is rooted. The white pillars of the doorway are emblematic of what theorist Andrea Smith refers to as “heteropatriarchy,” or a combination of both male (patriarchal) and heterosexual prevalence in positions of power. In her essay, “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy,” Smith defines the three pillars as slavery/capitalism, genocide/colonialism, and orientalism/war. As she elaborates on the pillar of genocide/colonialism, she writes, “The pillar of genocide serves as the anchor for colonialism—it is what allows non-Native peoples to feel they can rightfully own indigenous peoples’ land. It is okay to take land from indigenous peoples, because indigenous peoples have disappeared” (Smith 68). Her essay requires me to reflect on my own social position. Even though the house that we’re living in was lawfully purchased, there was a point in history when this land was stolen from Native hands. Regardless of whether or not we were complicit in the first acts of colonizing this land, the fact that we are able to live here is a colonial inheritance.

As I am working with fabric and embroidering my poems, it is important for me to recognize that the most elemental choices I am making can push against these patriarchal/colonial ideas. It is not enough to just pick up any fabric from the store. Each fabric has its own story, and a lot of those stories are tied up in the history of colonialism. For example, batik is typically associated with West African culture. However, most batiks are produced in Indonesia. When the Dutch colonized Indonesia, they began mass-producing batik with the intention of selling it to Indonesians. However, the culture and political climate of Indonesia supported the

higher quality, locally made fabrics. As a result, the industrially produced batiks were largely sold in West Africa, where they became very popular in the nineteenth century, and later absorbed into a visual signifier of West Africa. The link that the fabric creates between these two separate geographic areas is exclusively a result of colonial history. The fabrics I am working with are not imported from Indonesia, but it is important for me to recognize that many hands from many backgrounds have touched these materials, and their stories are woven into the warp and weft even before I begin stitching.

As I step outside and look at our yard, I sometimes imagine what it would be like to conduct an archaeological dig on this site. The top layer of the soil is filled with Legos and Hotwheels from Maurice and Alice's children. But I could dig further. I imagine what I would find if I dug back to 1923, the year the house was built, or to the 1850's when this neighborhood was known as Hanford Hill. I find a satisfaction in imagining what an excavation might reveal if I dug down past the settlers to a time when the Duwamish referred to this area as "qWátSéécH" or "Greenish-Yellow Spine" because of the deciduous trees that grew on the hill.

My imaginary archaeological dig would show that groups of people have been moving in and out of this neighborhood for a long time. Currently, a steady flow of people is migrating to more affordable neighborhoods, like this one, from more expensive areas in Seattle. One of the major conversations concerning gentrification is the way that it whitewashes the history of everything that has come before, and that newcomers enter the neighborhood without a respect for the history of the community. This conversation implicates me on a personal level. What

does it mean to be the white couple that moves into a house previously owned by a mixed race couple? What is our role living in a neighborhood where the population is 78.3% nonwhite? What can we contribute to a community that didn't ask us to move here? I am constantly assessing my responsibilities as a resident of this neighborhood.

Gentrification is experienced through a confluence of factors. In DW Gibson's, *The Edge Becomes the Center: An Oral History of Gentrification*, published by Overlook Press in 2015, one student and Brooklyn native, Shatia Strother puts it clearly:

"I really started to notice when I would walk to the train and there were more white faces than black faces... But that's also when I became aware that I had a very skewed view of gentrification because I never thought of black wealthy gentrifiers. It always had this racial connotation to it. And I woke up and realized that gentrification is a class issue, it's not a race issue, and it took all the white faces to move in for it to occur to me that gentrification has been occurring for a very long time, it's just now it has a white face." (Gibson 70)

Between Gibson's interviews and Smith's essay it becomes clear that gentrification is experienced through a confluence of factors including race, class, and gender. I am not able to excuse myself from the gentrification of Beacon Hill, but I have learned that there are things I can do to be a responsible citizen and member of this community. For me, it was important to research the land where our house was built. I read about how the population of Beacon Hill has changed over time, as

people from different backgrounds have called this area home. I know that reading about history is no substitute for living it, but I do feel as though cultivating an understanding of the area where I now live has made me feel more at home.

I also did some digging through King County's records and found the plat of the neighborhood. The plat represents the idea of the home where we live, and was created before the house was built. Much like an embroidery pattern, the land is divided into squares, and it takes a very strong imagination to envision the color and texture of the final product. It was after looking at this plat for the first time that I began to call the patterns I made for my embroideries "maps." I imagine them as aerial views of neighborhoods that spell out the words and phrases of my poems.

HOMEMADE

As we turn back to the dollhouse, it comes time to swing open the wall and look at the interior. Unlike a real house, we do not enter in through the front door. Once open, with the attic at eye-level, it seems to make sense for us to start at the top and work our way down. This space of the house is unfurnished and bare, exposing the raw materials that make up the dollhouse. In the house that Mike and I moved into, that attic has been converted into the master bedroom. At one time, a chimney cut through the room, and looking out our bedroom window, we can see a pile of bricks from the chimneystack that has sunk into the backyard. The hardwood floor of our bedroom is patched with new wood in the space where the chimney was removed, an odd square that breaks up the otherwise clean lines of the flooring.

In truth, it was this room that really made Mike and I fall in love with the house. Wood panels run across the ceiling, and something about the way the wood contours to the odd peaks of the roof makes the space feel like a ship. On nice days, sun falls in through the big windows, and the wood shines warm and clean. Ascending the stairs is like discovering a secret, and it's my favorite place to curl up at the end of the day with our cat purring next to my head and the blankets piled on top of me.

Even as I settle into this comfortable domestic space, I can't help but recall the literary trope of the madwoman in the attic, which suggests something sinister about the seclusion of the peaked roof. We are familiar with this trope from books like *Jane Eyre*, in which Rochester keeps his wife, Bertha Mason, locked in the attic. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story, "The Yellow Wallpaper," provides another example. Her protagonist, prescribed rest for her depression, takes to her bedroom in the attic of the house her husband has rented, a respite that ultimately turns into a place of solitary confinement that causes her to become delusional. The story is frustrating because we see time and time again that she knows how to help herself. She asks for the company of her friends, but her husband dissuades her from inviting visitors. She is also forbidden from writing, and is forced to write in secret when her husband is at work. Rather than being able to channel her desires and frustrations into a creative outlet, she turns those same desires into a destructive force, and sets to peeling off the wallpaper in the attic with singular focus and determination. She tells us that she is helping the ghost of a woman escape the

wallpaper. The woman trapped in the wallpaper ultimately becomes a metaphor for the strict and confining space of women's societal roles.

As I read "The Yellow Wallpaper," I can't help but compare it to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Even though the protagonist in "The Yellow Wallpaper" technically has a room where she can write (even if she is forced to do so in secret), it is not enough to keep her sane. There is something in this comparison that speaks to the need for a porous dwelling space. In my thesis, I am working to define a house as a space in which the dwellers are not permanent, but the house (and the land) serve as hosts to a variety of lives that have lived here before us and will live here after us. I have questions about what it means to occupy this house and land, and about the privilege that comes with living here. However, underlying all of my questions is the idea that I have a large degree of control over when our door is open and when it is closed. I am able to remove myself from distractions when I need to write, but I am also able to open our doors to company. There is nothing inherently confining about the home. It is only when a woman is not able to dictate the terms by which a dwelling space is occupied that we begin to witness violations to her wellbeing. In the "Yellow Wallpaper" we see the results of these violations in both the protagonist and the ghost she is trying to free.

In a way, our house is haunted, too. Not by the spirit of the deceased as in "The Yellow Wallpaper," but by Maurice and Alice. It nags at me to think that we are walking the same halls, dancing the same daily steps as the couple that came before us. Part of my intent in embroidering my poems is to explore the ways in which our lives are stitched together—Mike's to mine, as well as our lives to those of Alice and

Maurice. As Mike and I are discovering what it means to live together in this house, we are taking part in domestic chores that come and go with the seasons—cleaning the gutters, planting bulbs in the fall, and repairing the roof. One by one, we check things off our to-do list, and I can't help but wonder if these chores, which act like team-building exercises, are what keep a couple together. Since we are tracing our routines in these same floors and hallways, is it foolish of me to think that our relationship won't come to a close with the same unhappy ending? When we fall asleep together at night, is the clock that ticks away the hours of our slumber also ticking down the time in which our happiness will end?

I don't have the answer to these questions, but I do find it interesting that domestic labor helps bond Mike and me. There is something important in handiwork and labor. The physical labor necessary in tending house and making a home deepens our sense of ownership and care—not just to the house, but also to our relationship. This is something I'm exploring as I embroider my poems: each stitch, letter, and word is the product of labor and learned skill.

A sense of intimacy comes automatically when working with fabric. We each have a personal relationship with textiles. We wrap ourselves in material daily, and at night we swaddle ourselves in sheets of cotton. This level of intimacy carries over into embroidery. The fact that tactility is inherent to each piece, that my hands touch, fold, and work this fabric means that pieces of me get left behind in each of the poems I embroider— from the spit that I use to help thread the needle, the tiny drop of blood that forms after a needle pricks my hand, or the sweat that rubs off my clammy palms after I've been sitting too long. In the same way that our house is

haunted by the dance of the lives that have played out here before us, so am I aware that I will haunt each of these pieces I create. Small pieces of me have made their home in each of these poems.

TRY, TRY, TRY

From the attic of the dollhouse, we move down to the living room and kitchen. These are the rooms in our house where Mike and I invite people to come in, sit, and join in a meal, the place where family is formed and nurturing takes place. In these rooms, I find myself cherishing familial relics. I sit at our kitchen table and flip through old photographs, cookbooks, and textiles that have been crocheted or embroidered by my great-aunts and great-grandmothers. I think about their creative practice, and the ways they were able to carve out space for themselves within a restrictive domestic sphere. My mother taught me to cross-stitch when I was young, and she learned the skill from her grandmother. It's fitting that this is a matrilineal craft, because the stitches that form a counted cross-stitch are little x's that mimic the double-x female chromosome.

Additionally, I feel a sense of comfort when I surround myself with these familiar objects. If our house is haunted by the past of Maurice and Alice, then these objects that contain pieces of my own family and heritage are like the seeds of a happy home. In addition to the strata of history written in the soil, there are also layers of history and heritage we bring with us. By layering fabric and working with embroidery, I strive to create a visual metaphor for the tiers of time while also honoring the legacy of the women in my family. The process of embroidery is

methodical and slow. It requires that I meditate on the themes of gentrification, domesticity, and ownership as the words in my poems emerge slowly in the fabric. Each stitch is the product of my hands' movement, and in that sense, the themes that I explore are pulled through my body and into the material.

As the poems are stitched through me, other questions of my own experience become a part of these poems and textiles. How do I carve out time for myself and my art within a shared space? How do I find balance between my relationship with Mike and my relationship with myself? This project uses the space of the dollhouse and the labor of handicraft to cultivate both sides of these questions. It is both frustrating and rewarding to recognize that neither of these relationships will ever be complete. However, I begin to find comfort in the consistency with which my relationship, art, and home all need careful tending, focus, and attention.

As a combined result of setting up home and studying domestic themes, I witness myself behaving in ways that exemplify homemaking. Aside from spending hours embroidering, I cook more, and I have started renewing small corners of the house. I've planted an herb garden in the kitchen window and redecorated the downstairs bathroom. The footsteps and handiwork of Maurice and Alice still haunt our floorboards, but it feels that bit-by-bit their ghosts have begun to fade as the layers of our lives spread outward in ever-thicker swaths.

The longer Mike and I live in the house, the easier it becomes to set aside time and space to find the balance between cultivating our personal needs and those of our relationship. Ultimately, we are in a really good place. With this sense of stability, we've been able to ask ourselves more often, "What is the best use of this

space?” So far, the answers have been relatively small things—we adopted a cat from a rescue shelter, and are opening up our home to guests from out of town. Even though these gestures are small in the grand scheme of things, they spark a discussion of the porousness of our household—what is it we would like to invite into our home? And in the times that we are having these discussions, even though it is not always explicitly stated, the question we’re asking is, “Can we do this and still maintain our balance, both as individuals and as a couple?” As we weave, warp, stretch, fold, and ultimately layer our lives, my poems are ultimately about the questions we are unprepared to answer, but have the privilege of being able to ask.

II. Maps

The poems that make up WE/ME are embroidered on two layers of organic cotton gauze backed by an additional layer of a greenish-yellow cotton fabric, used to evoke the Duamish name for Beacon Hill, “greenish-yellow spine.” The embroideries look simple, but the process of creating them is time consuming and laborious. To start, an embroidery hoop is placed over an area of fabric, and a square piece of waste-canvas is tacked onto the fabric held taut by the hoop. Waste canvas is a loosely woven fabric that is held together by starch. The threads of the waste canvas form the grid onto which the pattern is stitched. Each square on the pattern is equal to a single cross stitch. Once the embroidery is complete, the waste canvas is patted with a wet cloth or sponge, which dissolves the starch, and the strings that form the grid are removed with tweezers. I enjoy the way this process is evocative of the histories of the house that remain unknowable, the memories and lives that took place within our house that have been pulled away, without artifact or documentation to hint at their existence.

As I began this project, I started by centering myself around artists that work with language and fabric. I was inspired by the visual puns illustrated by Kay Rosen, and the history engrained in the fabric works of Yinka Shonibare. It was only after I was introduced to the short poems of Aram Sharoyan that I became confident calling my embroideries poems. However, due to their unusual format it was necessary to consider the ways these poems will be encountered.

When it comes time to exhibit these pieces fully, I imagine that viewers will approach these poems draped by threads from the ceiling—allowing them to

encounter both the neatly presented face of the embroideries as well as the messy reverse of each piece. The reverse side of embroidery is the side that illustrates the labor that went into it—the flaws and knots are typically covered up when the embroidery becomes a pillow or wall-hanging. Often in the domestic sphere women are asked to sweep a mess under a rug, or to present the façade of a happy home. For the purpose of my work, it is important to expose the illegible side of these poems, and to give the mess a space of its own.

The poems that follow are inspired by what I have come to know. I present them with the full understanding that neither my process, nor my understanding is complete. I have taken up a task that will continue to evolve in the same way that I know my relationship with Mike and our household projects will require constant tending.

WHITE
SHAME

GUILT
SHAME

SHAME

Thematically, the three poems above address the topic of white shame. It was important to me, while working on this project, to not simply discuss the issue of gentrification, but to implicate myself in this process. The words “I AM” emerge from “WHITE SHAME” and “GUILT SHAME” as a simple declarative sentence. There is no hedging or qualifying the topic. In the third poem, white shame is illustrated as the word “SHAME” emerges in negative space, surrounded by a thick mass of multi-colored embroidery thread, done with a silk stitch to provide an interesting tactile sensation. The end result will echo Zora Neale Hurston, “I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background.” The reverse of Hurston’s statement is likely true as well—that the pang of white shame is more keenly felt against a background of racial diversity.

colon:alism

In the same way that everything after a colon is directly defined by what came prior to the colon, so is everything that came after colonialism directly defined by it. In effect, we are the heirs of colonizers.

MAISON D'ÊTRE

This poem plays on the French phrase *raison d'être*, or reason for being. The poem replaces “raison” with “maison,” French for house/home. It’s a quick, jaunty pun, however, there is something slightly sinister in the new form of the phrase. In one reading, the poem puts the value of the house over the value of the person tending to it, as though the house is the only reason the occupants exist. However, *la maison d'être* is also a tool used by French teachers. It is an illustration of all the action verbs that take place within a home—from coming and going to being born and dying. It succinctly illustrates the way our homes are central to our daily lives.

What’s mine is **yours**.

As Mike and I have adjusted to living together, we often discuss what is our shared space and what belongs solely to us as individuals. The poem is directed at the spaces and times where property is shared, but it comes with the understanding that the inverse is also true: what’s yours is mine.

In a larger perspective, the poem questions what it means to own land or property. This property has not always been ours, and will not always be ours. The transitory nature of the space necessitates the fact that it is shared by many people over a long period of time.

DWELLING
DWELLING
DWELLING

In Heidegger’s “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” and “Poetry, Language, Thought,” he posits a strong connection between the idea of dwelling and the community as a whole, but also a strong connection between dwelling, thought, and poetry. That dualistic meaning pairs nicely with my own intentions—to explore the link of the dwelling space to the community through poetry.

However, within “DWELLING,” the word “we” complicates the meaning of the poem. On one hand, it expresses domestic happiness between people who dwell well” together. However, that pesky “we” could also be a stand in for white, upwardly mobile gentrifiers. The fact that “We dwell well” even needs to be stated reminds us that there are other people in the world who do not have a happy home life, or who may not have a home at all.

WELCOME
WELCOME

When we enter anyone’s home, we almost universally step over a welcome mat: the gateway to the home. In this poem, we see the word “Welcome” dismantled into “we come” and “we me.” The first line transforms an invitation on behalf of the owner into a declaration made by the visitor: we come. The visitor no longer needs to be welcomed, much like a gentrifier, a newcomer that no one invited. The second

line, “we me” acts as a clarification and way of implicating myself in these changes. I am a part of the uninvited people transforming a neighborhood with my presence.

Stainless,
 stainless
 steel
skilllets

This short poem uses repetition to stretch the words “talent” as long as possible. The effect of this stretch makes “talent” difficult to discern. However, talent and skill are rarely words used to describe home cooking, and by making “talent” difficult to read, the poem asks the reader to not overlook it. Within this poem, there is also a material tension created by couching subjective ideals within a heavy, solid piece of cookware.

pots and pans
spick and span
quick as a snap

The language in this poem sounds like it could be found on a box of dish soap. The repetition of the short “a” at the end of each line gives us a sense similar to a rhyme. The rhythm of the poem is very quick, and we can almost hear the sound of a deck of cards being shuffled within it, rearranging the letters s, a, n, and p. Like a magic trick or slight-of-hand, the labor of cleaning is completely removed from the

poem. It is as though the dishes are cleaned with the wave of a wand rather than a set of hot, wet, soapy hands.

KITCHEN SINK
KITCHEN SANK
KITCHEN SUNK

The tone here is the opposite that of the previous poem where dishes are done “quick as a snap.” Exemplifying the feeling of being overwhelmed with housework, this descent is also portrayed in the vowel sounds in sink, sank, and sunk. The short i in “sink” is formed high in our throats, the short ă forms in the back of the throat, and the ũ is guttural, drowning language in the speaker’s mouth.

born and bread
raise and rise

A lot of my questions, both in and out of my creative practice, are about what we purposefully choose to pursue (active), and what comes to meet us (passive). In this poem, connections are made on both sides of the “and.” “Born” is paired with “bread”—a pun on the typically used “bred.” The pun on “bred” links in our minds the ideas of childbirth and baking, both associated with the feminized domestic sphere. The next line, “raise and rise” feeds off that connection. Children are born

and raised, while bread is allowed to rise. Both lines are working through growth and maturity, but one is active while another is passive.

GROW UP
OVERGROWN
OUTGROWN

play house
make home
homemade

Several pieces in WE/ME explore the language of maturation and growth. While “grow up” is what we say people do, words like “overgrown” and “outgrown” also describe plants in a garden. These three stages are linked to stages of becoming an adult. Children grow up, become overgrown, and finally outgrow the homes in which they are raised. Complicating these three stages, the word “own” rears up within the image of growth. The poem seems to be asking the question—how do the things we own act as a gauge for maturity as we age?

In the second poem, each line also acts a step in maturity. Playing house conjures up a connection to the dollhouse, while the next line evokes living in a real house. The last line flips our expectations in a multiple ways. The two lines that precede it take the form of a verb followed by a noun: “play house/ make home.” The last line is a compound word of a noun followed by a verb: “homemade.”

Homemade is also typically used as an adjective, but from the context, we come to understand it here as the end result of homemaking. Playing house and playing home are done for our own benefit, while homemade brings to mind making for the benefit someone else, while also suggesting that a task has been achieved. Through the process of play-acting and adult activity, a “home” has been “made.”

PALTRY
PANTRY
PASTRY

In the process of embroidering these poems, I had to come to terms with my errors. Sometimes in making a pattern I would add an extra line or fill in a box incorrectly. Other times I noticed too late that I had sewn an extra stitch in one letter, and due to the repetitive nature of these poems, I chose to incorporate that same error into the rest of the instances where that letter appears. The relative rigidity and permanence of the mediums in which I am working come into direct conflict with my own desires for perfection. Clearly, the mediums weren't going to become more malleable, so I had to change my outlook. My goal became to accept my mistakes, to not take them personally, and to find a way to work with them.

made from
scratch
on the
kitchen table

This poem conjures up images of baking, perhaps of rolling out dough flat and round on a large table. Tucked within this image, we are given “scratch” and

“itch” which add a physical sensation to the poem. We are forced to question what kind of urge needs to be sated. Is the itch a craving or a sexual desire? Perhaps the itch is a creative urge, and the kitchen table is the surface on which it is satisfied.

The kitchen table is also a central image in feminist theory. The kitchen table is the anchor of the home, as likely used for preparing a meal as helping a child with homework, or doing work from home. It is the fixture around which families gather day in and day out, as stable as a stone unchanged with time.

saint
stain
satin

We know women who are idealized and placed on pedestals like a saint. We know women who are treated as though they are a stain on their family’s heritage. Lastly, we know women who are characterized as a seductress, robed in a long, red satin dress. In reality, women can be all three of these things, and many, many others. Women are not made like cookies—either in one shape or another. To characterize women in these limited terms places them in a box (or a tin, as it were) where they will never quite fit.

HOME
IS
WHERE
THE
HEART
IS

This poem is made of a colloquial phrase that is so common as to be a cliché in the history of household embroidery. The difference here being that “HEART” is broken into two words—“he” and “art.” This phrase asserts the centrality of the creative impulse to the domestic sphere. The heart has room for both romance and art, and the home, here, takes shape where both thrive.

HEARTH
HEARTH
HEARTH
HEARTH
HEARTH
HOME

This poem pays homage to the phrase “hearth and home,” while also building a connection between the structures that make up a house and the structures that make up a body. The heart addressed here is invited to listen for the kinds of echoes that characterize these poems—an “ear/art.” Both “hear” and “heart” are nested within “hearth,” which gives us an understanding that we are dealing with a body nested inside a house. The following pair form a connection with the previous two lines. The ear is the part of the body that is used for hearing, so perhaps we can then

surmise that art is the tool that is best used for listening to the heart. In the last two lines, “he” and “me” are close together, without overlapping. The poem creates a sense of listening, love, and art all taking place under the same roof.

MAURICE & ALICE

MIKE & KAITLIN

I began this project with concerns about my domestic life and community. I was amazed by how the act of purchasing a house felt like an individual decision, but once we were moved in, the repercussions extended beyond our front door and into the community. We are tied to the space we occupy and to the land we inhabit. I stitch our name to those of the house’s previous tenants to represent the layering of our lives. In doing so, our individual names become unpronounceable and unrecognizable. They become placeholders for the names of the people who have come before us, and those who will come after us. It is a visual representation of the history and layering of lives that has taken place within the space of this house.

HOME MADE

In our backyard, there is a very old conifer that seems to hold up the hill on which our house was built. Oddly, hanging from the tree is a chandelier, with a light switch attached to the tree, and at night, the chandelier illuminates the backyard in a

dim circle of yellow light. I see this tree as a metaphor for the colonial history of this land. It is a symbol of western living hanging from an old, thick branch.

While we did not hang the chandelier, it is the source of light by which we extend our home to others. On summer evenings we gather within its circle with our friends and neighbors to share meals, drink, and weave stories. I have mixed emotions about the fact that our colonial inheritance is now the means through which we connect to our larger community. While we wouldn't take down the chandelier, it is important to acknowledge the legacy of which it is a part. The stories that we have to tell are a part of the warp and weft of this complicated history.

As I sit with this discomfort, I begin experience gratitude. I am grateful for this home, this relationship, and the questions I have begun to ask. I have a room of my own, a needle and thread, and a story to tell.

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