

“We don’t forget, something *Vacant* settles in”

Elizabeth Fortunato

A thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the

Requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

University of Washington

2017

Committee:

Amie McNeel

Mark Zirpel

Jamie Walker

Adair Rounthwaite

Claire Cowie

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

School of Art + Art History and Design

© Copyright 2017

Elizabeth Fortunato

University of Washington

**Abstract**

“We don’t forget, something *Vacant* settles in”<sup>1</sup>

Elizabeth Fortunato

Chair of the Supervisory committee:

Amie McNeel

I recreate and represent objects and settings, translating meaning and remembrance through material to make a peripheral memory tangible.

*Nostalgia*: a longing for a past that never was. It is a curated history based on the ruins and artifacts of the past. Longing for the past is historically cyclical in culture and is universally related to individual personal history. Nostalgia is currently threatened by contemporary immediacy, brevity of material and throw away culture.

*Punctum*: to be struck by a fleeting reminiscence. The tiniest detail that brings forth a wave of remembrance. A forgotten object, a previously overlooked detail or a photograph of someone in their youth, a face you innately understand but have never seen. Both foreign and familiar. In its familiarity you are struck by its oddness.

*Periphery*: the background, the blurry action in front of the settings. The background is fixed. The wall papers unchanged and burned into my mind. The starkness of the light. The particulars are blurry, but the peripheral is permanent.

In my current investigations with installation, I am interested in narrating or extending finite moments. The re-creation and adaptation of everyday objects presents a dichotomy of ephemeral materials; handmade yet untouchable. Being at once recognizable in form but enigmatic in materiality. Reflecting on familial photographs and objects in contrast to my internal faded memories, I create disjointed vignettes as incomplete but immersive spaces.

---

<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mourning Diary: October 26, 1977- September 15, 1979*, trans. Richard Howard, annotated Nathalie Leger (New York: Hill and Wang 2010), 227.

“We don’t forget, something *Vacant* settles in”

Artifact is to Relic: Monument is to Ruin

A deep understanding of object and history has been impressed on me since an early age. A Roman Catholic background taught me that history is not only alive, but literally instilled in objects. A relic holds the embodiment of a saint. An object or fragment becomes a physical representation of our connection to the historical and holy person it reflects. Relics are stored in reliquaries; comparatively huge to the relic’s miniscule size and lushly decorated with gilding and filigree. The Catholic Church elevates their canonized objects. A scrap of cloth or wood is a representation of a moment and is an experience to behold and internalize as the embodiment of a once living saint. A literal closeness to that object becomes a closeness to the holy, a step closer to God. There is no question of the object’s significance. The relic is a single, focused, version of “Truth”.

My grandmother was a hoarder and a Depression-era child. She was able to see the value in most any object or discard. There was no hierarchy in objects. An old newspaper clipping could have easily found its way into a reliquary in her home and mind. Her house became my cathedral. I equate a piece of the “true cross” sitting, gilded beside a tabernacle, with an old shoe at the bottom of a box in an equally unreachable place, inside my grandmother’s bedroom.

Instead of gilding, there is flocked wall paper. Instead of incense there is the mustiness of a century old home. Instead of a congregation, there are my siblings in cahoots. Instead of a bible, there are old love letters. I immerse myself into the homes’ history through the true stories passed down and the fiction I create to fill in the gaps. The objects inherit a meaning beyond their physical humility. The combination of untouchability, elevated status, and parable-like fiction create a house full of relics.

My obsession with objects is dual; a connection to the past and a strong irreverence for the present. I hold dearly my familial objects. The relics speak for and act as a stand in for loved ones lost. I pour over the personal relics, the detritus of a life. I piece together an image of my formative family members using the artifacts they’ve left, unintentionally, for me to discover. Viewing, holding, using the object brings me literally closer to the figure in the way that a relic brings you closer to the holy. The reliquary, the home, monumentalizes the humble artifact, but all I have are the ruins, the fragmented memories.

Reflective: Restorative

Nostalgia is a result of sentimentality for the past. It is innate, cyclical and unavoidable. In her book, *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym lays out two forms of nostalgia; restorative and reflective.

Restorative nostalgia is based on historical “truth”. Historical fact is often fictionalized through a personal and cultural lens. However, tradition, religion and monument, all persevere to keep history alive and “truth” intact. Restorative nostalgia is not sentimental, it is self-referential in a boastful way, saying that the past is true and should be resurrected.

Boym reflects on catholic opulence in a brief reflection on the restoration of the Sistine Chapel, “actual material traces of the past might disturb the total recreation of the original, which was to look old and brand-new at the same time”.<sup>2</sup> The physicality of the monument is monumental and is a created form to signify a specific event. The original painting is culturally indoctrinated, but only appreciated in its majesty. The relic remains but is escalated to the monumental.

Reflective nostalgia “lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history”.<sup>3</sup> On the surface restorative nostalgia is similar to reflective. Reflective nostalgia embraces historic ritual, but loses truth as it falls deep into symbolic meaning and invented tradition. Patina is an ideal metaphor for reflective nostalgia. The eroded surface is a visual reminder of time passed and the past. The object has a history for us to observe and insert our narrative into. The sheen of newness is lost. Newness can only be reminisced and retold through our coded versions of the past, thus creating a new truth through our individual narratives.

So which is true? The boastful and vapid restoration of restorative nostalgia? Making the present appear as glorious as the past. Creating a hollow shell. Preserving so dearly the fragment in vain. Only allowing us a limited intimacy with the physical past. Acknowledging its fragility and pumping the past with opulence. Or the sappy internal monologue of reflective nostalgia? Creating fiction around truth to make ourselves the center of the narrative. Giving us the warm feelings we crave and indulge in an undoubtedly a flawed recollection.

I float aimlessly between restorative and reflective nostalgias. I take slivers of my familial history, an artifact, an object, owned by a loved one, and make it beloved. I leaf through images, focusing, honing, fascinated by a time before mine, infantilizing my own narrative into existence. Or I close my eyes and desperately attempt to fill in my own flawed memory, starting with the periphery and working my way in. I begin my process with relic, an elevated artifact of one lost. I then restore, recreate or monumentalize it. Eventually, I’m left with my own ruin.

## Monumental Ruins

I continue to revisit the past in my mind or in photographic evidence. The memory or document is perfectly the same, but always growing as some details fade or bloom. However, the illusion is shattered every time I visit the homes, which are still in my family. While many piles of memories are unchanged, gently, a new life is taking over. Remodels are slowly funded, curtains and paint colors change. I realize that what is concrete in my mind is in reality false.

It appears that in my work I make a monument, referencing an architecture of a space that was; a glorified version of a historical triumph or defeat. However, I feel that I am making a ruin; a once functioning unglorified part of life that is elevated in the contemporary by its mere existence. Because these fragments of architecture are standing, they have persevered, they are worthy of our inquiry.

---

<sup>2</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books 1959), 46.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 41.

Ruins give us physical evidence of the past through their skeletal architecture. We can infer how people navigated the world, what activities they participated in, how they chose to decorate space and what materials were available at the time. The fragmented state further cloaks them in mystery and in fiction.

Boym defines ruinophilia as “a fascination for ruins that goes beyond postmodern quotation marks”.<sup>4</sup> It is a deep interest in physical and psychological remains. Restorative nostalgia is dripping from a monument in its built up lavishness. So we presume that the human connection of reflective nostalgia is present in a ruin. Those of us who suffer from nostalgia can insert our narratives into a historical perseverance. On the contrary Boym boasts, “there is one important difference between ruinophilia and nostalgia: ruinophilia is less affected by the personal story; it is not a longing for home or for identity but more of a material and visceral experience of the irreversibility of time.”<sup>5</sup> I dare to disagree. We are attracted to ruins for the mere potential of pursuing narrative within the rubble, not for the architecture itself. I do however echo her material sense.

I make spaces that are a fragment, a curated selection, or what is left persevering in my mind. I start with an artifact, elevate it to a relic and place it uncannily into a ruin. A ruin is more than a human construct. It is the “collaboration between human and natural creation”.<sup>6</sup> Time over takes the construct and reveals its flaws.

While my pieces are carefully fabricated, I leave room for nature’s chance. The perceived permanence of a monument is replaced by temporality as “ruins give us a shock of vanishing materiality...suddenly our marveling at grand projects and utopian designs, we begin to notice weeds and dandelions in the crevices of the stones.”<sup>7</sup> Natural growth and oxidation are a metaphor for the passage of time and fortunately can be quickly and naturally achieved in the studio. *Rust Print* (Fig.1) is a process I equate with photography or printmaking. I select the subject, set up the dimensions and conditions for an expected result, and let the piece develop without interference. I employ purity in this process involving only the source metal form, water, vinegar, glue and time. We are left with the impression of an object. Depending on the print orientation<sup>8</sup> the ghost or impression of an object is left. The impressions are more descriptive of the object than the object in certain aspects. Similar to a coffee ring left on a surface, the rust print shows the action, the figure, the mood, the conditions of the scene. Only the reality of the object is missing.

My installations are similar to the coffee ring, hauntingly absent through their human scale and domestic settings. “All of these structures are both drained of human life and filled to bursting

---

<sup>4</sup> Svetlana Boym, “Ruinophilia: Appreciation of Ruins” in *Architecture of the Off-Modern* (New York: Architectural Press 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> The print orientation meaning horizontal, vertical, paper or metal over or under, saturated, pressed etc., gives varying results. The most common are a transfer of oxidation from the object to the paper from the surface of the object, leaving a positive print. Or the object can act as a resist, leaving a bloom of oxidation around the object and a white ghost where the object lies.

with melancholy significance—the process in which nature takes its slow revenge.”<sup>9</sup> Patina sinks in as vacancy over takes the scenes. In still, empty, quiet spaces, nature and moisture creeps into our human constructs, slowly reclaiming the space.

### Texxture

Extracting a shallow interpretation of texture or *Texxture*<sup>10</sup> by Renu Bora, referring to the personal, material, social and physical histories of an object, he speaks of “the material repertoire—crosses between orders of phenomenon and process of different types of personal history and material history”.<sup>11</sup> That an object is more than its surface or utility. It is engrained with its personal, historical and social connotations. Comparing kinetic and potential energy is Bora’s best metaphor to understand texxture. An object can be ordinary, made by hand or mass produced to serve a function, it is kinetic. However, it holds the potential energy to speak as nostalgia, either identifying the era from which it was fabricated to the hands that have used it through time. The object becomes and is all of its innate history at once.

Through the lack of physicality and potential energy in the mass produced and poorly made, or non-items of contemporary culture, I am at the dilemma of future nostalgia<sup>12</sup>. I make in order to preserve and project a personal history, however I see the futility in doing so as my objects are often ephemeral.

Conceal: Reveal: Translate

I appreciate casting as a practice. Multi step material translation allows me time with the objects. I become familiar with the form, surface, tradition and personal significance of found objects. I spend hours with them making molds, coating, layering, obscuring, extracting and revealing a new material.

Casting, literally recreating an object from an original, is my most honest way to represent the object. The process captures the precise essence of an object; its unique form and tex(x)ture. Evidence of age is like a fingerprint. An imprint of the objects’ history and owner through use and wear.

Casting is also alluring to me in being an intimate and hands on form of making. I spend hours prepping an object, coating it, sealing it. I then cover it with silicone rubber material, patting thin layers over each detail. Once cured, I have to dissect the mold, cutting in, revealing the object once again, and often destroying the original object in the process. The result is a hollow mold, a void of a now unsalvageable object. A relic I treasured is now lost in translation.

---

<sup>9</sup> Max Pensky, *Three Kinds of Ruin: Heidegger, Benjamin, Sebald* (Binghamton: State University of New York 2011), 3.

<sup>10</sup> Renu Bora, “Outing Texture” in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction* Ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham and London: Duke University Press 1997), 99.

Bora explains texture with one x as a surface, *texxture* with two x’s to be the inherent and cultural history of a manufactured object.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>12</sup> See Re:Present

I use lost wax to create my positive pattern. I have the opportunity to make multiples, to destroy the object's previous individuality. In grappling with multiples, "no doubt there are as many constants as variables among the terms designated by laws, and as many preservations as there are fluxes and variations in nature. However, preservation is still not a repetition..."<sup>13</sup> Perhaps to satisfy my new loss, I sacrifice one treasure to make countless wax copies with endless material possibilities.<sup>14</sup>

The wax can then be altered, or enhanced. I attach limbs and cones to ensure proper air and material flow. The object is now a foreign shell covered in spider legs, obscuring its original function entirely. Coating the form in plaster or a plaster and silica mix, building up layer by layer, gives me hours to dote on the object. Hours spent allow a momentary mental pause to consider why. Why copy, obscure and recreate the objects I find dear.

In the end, I break open the shell of plaster. I gingerly peel and scrape it away to reveal my object transformed. Though the original has been destroyed, I feel that I have preserved the objects, creating a memorial of the previous owner. The translation, my hand, and the new material all obscure the object, but to me it is an honest representation of my memory, my lens of what the object was.

Similarly, the material based artist Leonardo Drew (Fig.2) transforms raw materials into weathered expressions. He creates a new material history by putting work on the roof of his studio to "cook". He burns, rusts and distresses wood, cotton and paper. He then accumulates them together into an overwhelming grid of decay. Drew credits growing up next to the dump for his source material and the repeating grid referencing the layout of low income housing.

I relate to Drew in homegrown influences. Growing up in Pittsburgh has afforded me the opportunity to look at a lot of beautiful garbage. As "the rust belt" implies, Pittsburgh is a segment on a line of blue collar, mill working river folk. An ideal import city, the three rivers are lined with now defunct steel mills and coal barges. The history of grit is crucial to my aesthetic.

A city, well past its prime, sprinkled with rusting bridges, dangerous underpasses and abandoned buildings has seeped into *Punctum* (Fig.4). Featuring a paper cast of the inside and outside of an old cast iron bathtub, rust is inherent to the piece and concept. I allow the paper to develop and encourage natural decay, to then bring into the gallery, referencing my home in a fragmented space.

Contempt: Content: Content: orary

Nostalgia is not a dirty word, though it has become a cliché in contemporary art. Nostalgia provides a necessary emotive relief for modernity.<sup>15</sup> The authors of "Nostalgia: Past, Present,

---

<sup>13</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press 1994), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Lost wax process allows the wax positive form to be made in multiples if so desired and then recreated in any pourable or packable material. After the wax is melted out metal or glass can be melted in to the cavity.

<sup>15</sup> Constantine Sedikides, Tim Wildschut, Jamie Arndt and Clay Routledge "Nostalgia: Past, Present and Future" in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, Vol 17, No. 5 (Sage Publications Inc. 2008), 306.

and Future” take a scientific approach to nostalgia or “the suffering due to a relentless yearning for the homeland”<sup>16</sup>, claiming nostalgia to create positive and necessary social bonds, affirming closeness. A selfishness is not blatant in their studies, however the “self-relevance” and “protagonist” coping that nostalgia enables, leads us to concluded that nostalgia is indeed a helpful catharsis, perhaps introspectively as well as socially.

Nostalgia is a social tool for the self, but is also culturally cyclical. For example, the 1950’s brought in an era of “self-mythologizing”, creating “visual tropes”.<sup>17</sup> The era of American “materialistic golden age” began to (mass) produce a culture of wholesome consumerism.<sup>18</sup> Consumerism became the backbone for nostalgia. A series of mundane objects suddenly reflected the time or era. Through these objects we are able to build a physical representation of a generation. The same object proliferated, becomes mass, and thus survives as an icon. I blame and embrace the nostalgic object. Personal objects hold individual truth to the owner while mass produced objects hold a cultural current of the time. When they merge, originality becomes murky.

Re:Present

I embed myself deeply in familial history as a result of my discontent with the present. The present represents the disposable, the cheap, the insincere. I identify with the past, however, I am left with nothing to show my future generation. Because of the proliferation of 1950’s paraphernalia, I have sources objects and motifs to reference a former generation. I am left bitter from mass production’s lack of originality, but celebrate the cultural clutter. I am left in a pile of the past, wondering what will I pass down as today represents fleeting media. What will be my mark on my personal history? What objects will describe me after I pass?

My sentiment is substantiated “what drives restorative nostalgia is not the sentiment of distance and longing but rather the anxiety about those who draw attention to historical incongruities between past and present and thus question the wholeness and continuity of the restored tradition”.<sup>19</sup> I create a *representational* nostalgia. Part true based on artifact, part invented narrative to make an entirely fabricated space to immerse myself in my own nostalgia.

Real: Reel

I reflect on the past via photographs and internal memory. I find memory intriguing in that it will never be true. Memory functions as a compilation of snap shots taken from our minds.<sup>20</sup> I think of nostalgia first in the emotional, in the literal gut feeling of loss and second in decorative, in the backgrounds, the wall papers that coat my mind. Roland Barthes believes “in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes”.<sup>21</sup> Photographs are supplementary to

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 305.

<sup>17</sup> Christine Sprengler, “The Fifties: Nostalgia’s Privileged Object and the Origins of its Dominant American Strain” in *Screening Nostalgia: Populuxe Props and Technicolor Aesthetics in Contemporary American Film* (New York: Berghahn Books 2009), 39.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>19</sup> Boym, *Nostalgia*, 45.

<sup>20</sup> Radiolab *Memory and Forgetting* host Jad Abumrad and Robert Krulwich episode 304 (PRX, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* trans. Richard Howard

memory, but can reveal different sides of the same story. In my work I express emotional (reflective) and domestic (restorative) nostalgias in a hybrid of representational nostalgia. I am not striving for the truth or a solution, only an opportunity to submerge myself into a history that I have created for myself.

I morph histories into my revision of the past. I am left wondering what my lens obscures. A photograph is a literal representation of a captured moment, an ultimate truth. But, it is wildly limited to capturing only that moment. It tells nothing of the moments before or the years after. Objects are truer to the owner. They have been worn on the body, or used by the hand, customizing the object to the owner, yet lack the figure entirely. Add my distorted lens, “forgetfulness is (nostalgia’s) secret and particularly effective weapon, a sharp knife that cuts ever deeper into the layers of memory and invents a past that never existed...what we miss never existed since it is, on the contrary, our present projection, the projection of our present desire, that gives it its existence”<sup>22</sup> an idealized version of the past, a true discovery seems futile.

I enjoy recreating or exploring times, photographs or snap shots that I had no significant role in, but feel connected to. It’s like remembering a home movie. Times you were too young to recall, but have seen the image and know it to be true. I am interested in this intersection between familial tradition, truth and appropriation.

I have become (re)infatuated with old photographs, I have a collection that I once found interesting because I could rummage through boxes and simply ask who was who and what the conditions of the memory were. Now that the former matriarch is gone, I have both the necessity and the liberty of making my own narratives. I can piece together fact, hazy memory or idealized fiction into one new narrative. Barthes explains “a photograph is always invisible: it is not what we see”.<sup>23</sup> What we see is the momentary physical embodiment of the past, a memory, a loved one. It is not that our focus is put on the photo, but on the inner dialogue that comes in a vivid daydream. The narrative develops as if watching the reel, the film of the photo unfolds.

Photography is similar to casting—you study the subject, capture it, obscure it and then reveal it. It develops as an object almost on its own. We set up the frame for the desired effect and it becomes, making permanent the uncaptureable, the physicality of the lost.

### *Punctum: Periphery*

*Punctum*: to be struck by a fleeting reminiscence. The tiniest detail that brings forth a wave of remembrance. A forgotten object, a previously overlooked detail or a photograph of someone in their youth, a face you innately understand but have never seen. Both foreign and familiar. In its familiarity you are struck by its oddness. Barthes describes his experience of his term punctum, a phenomenon in photography, “What pricks me is the discovery of this equivalence. In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die”.<sup>24</sup> It is the liminality of

---

(New York: Hill and Wang 1980), 53.

<sup>22</sup> Marc Augé, *Everyone Dies Young: Time Without Age* trans. Jody Gladding (New York: Columbia University Press 2016), 76.

<sup>23</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 6.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 96.

the photograph that is jarring. That an entire life is summarized in one stare. Punctum is the difference between seeing and being shown.<sup>25</sup> It is seeing her face, but understanding a lifetime, now as finite as the image you hold.

Punctum is not immediate. It is the quiet detail that follows you, that creeps back into your mind after the image is no longer present. My interpretations of punctum are installations of memories. I distill the scene into punctum, selecting objects that stand out in our minds. I question; how little visual information is necessary to elicit a vivid memory?

In *from ashes* (Fig.3) I am referencing a literal document, a photograph of a woman smoking a cigarette in a chair with presumably her small children in the foreground. The color polaroid is in no way exceptional. It looks like any other tired mom in the 60's with small children. It is a document of the woman, the era, the fashion, the décor. It is a fact. I have it. I can hold it, analyze it. However, it is chillingly far from my truth.

The woman is my grandmother. I know her face, at any age. However, this is a time well before my own. I am struck by her familiarity. I know her. Her being is more of a fact than my own because of its finality.

We realize the limit of our experience of remembrance in photos through “the absolute past of the pose, the photograph tells me death in the future.”<sup>26</sup> She is deceased, therefore she is the face captured in the frame, ever unchanged. But everything is wrong. Her deep disdain for that moment is an expression only captured while in one's own thoughts. A distance, a vacancy of eyes “depict(s) figures who appear deeply absorbed in what they are doing, thinking, and feeling who therefore also appear wholly oblivious to being beheld”.<sup>27</sup> Her kind loving demeanor is vacant and is replaced by a shell. She is removed from her surroundings and is lost in her thoughts. She is erased by her bland dress and her generic domesticity.

When I drift to my remembrance of her, it is her embrace. Her body swathed with a bright blue floral dress. An ever cheery, sassy, petite but domineering woman. So the image must be a lie.

She melts into her surroundings. Her dress becomes the scene. No longer an embodiment of her, but the weathered old chair she sits in, the spilled ash tray and lace table cloth all washed in blue and gray.

She fades into the background as the reality of her surroundings engulf her. The charismatic woman is replaced by a flawed one. Lost in her own selfish world away from her children, smoking a cigarette.<sup>28</sup> I am forced to face the reality that my visualization of her is a flawed farce. The fact that I can see myself in her resonates throughout the space of my mind, coating everything in dingy blue floral. The shadow becomes more than the object. The floral becomes the print, the dress, the chair, the wall paper; it covers everything in a helpless gray.

---

<sup>25</sup> Michael Freid “Barthes's Punctum” in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol 31, No. 3 pp 539-574. (The University of Chicago Press 2005), 546.

<sup>26</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 96.

<sup>27</sup> Freid, 549. Referencing the Diderotian project with Walker Evans, Beat Streuli and others.

<sup>28</sup> A major faux pau in our home. I never knew she smoked until her illness and death.

Shoes, a common stand in for a figure by literally occupy the square footage of a human, speak to a deeper understanding of use and activity. The shoe has traveled with the person, has been molded to their experiences. Perhaps as strongly as the ash represents the cigarette, as the cigarette butt represents the mouth, the air, the quiet exasperation of her.

Seven sets of children's shoes rest in disarray around the ottoman representing the seven children she raised. It is the dislocation of a vivid personal experience into a vignette. Given all the necessary information to understand a space reminiscent, transcendent, representation of a past. Veiled, flawed, incomplete, is the closest we can get to the warmth we crave.

Rust: Rot

Vacancy takes over the ruin. It is a graveyard of curated objects built from personal recollections.

Step into a dim rotunda, simply spot lit on an unusual scene<sup>29</sup> (*Punctum*, Fig.4). An intimate space, a bath, has been extruded from its humble home. Left here to rust and rot in the gallery. The tub, two nestling shells of paper, are left damaged and stained from our figment of time and the creation process. Held up by almost glowing cast glass feet, the heaviness of a cast iron tub is challenged as the paper visually floats in its impossible situation. The faucet mirrors the feet, unusually pristine and far from its original function. Above, the bare curtain ring is confused in function, both copper plumbing oxidized by moisture and its decorative implication. The scene is grounded with a perfect orb of patterned accumulation.

The paper cast bathtub captures the history and natural oxidation of the cast iron form it was peeled from. Layering the cotton webbed paper, slowly patching together a solid shell, was saturated as it cured into the visually heavy base layer, allowing the oxidation to seep and bloom through the layers. The "porcelain" is similarly achieved by a waxy tracing paper patchwork. The extraction process is active and violent as the shell is slowly torn from its original form. The porcelain dries and warps. As it is massaged back into form, stain creeps into its crepe texture, oddly familiar to cracked skin. The faucet "leaks", the hole is left without repair, allowing us to see the shallow cavity between the two shells thus exposing its self as a farce. The heft is replaced by skin and crust, empty, fragile and temporal.

The feet and the faucet mirror each other in materiality. Both being cast too beautifully for the scene. The two minor details that provide the most implied function are the most solid pieces of the install. Their delicacy is threatened by their intended function of motion and support. The harsh spotlight allows the clear glass to glow. The feet peek out, pristine, from under the decay.

Above, the curtain rod is present. Noticeably absent is the curtain, a foreshadowing for the second scene. Adding a visual extension into space, the form disappears as the focused light fades. The copper implies the utility of plumbing, while the operation is lost as it becomes a purely decorative curtain rod.

---

<sup>29</sup> Rod Serling, *The Twilight Zone* 1959-1964.

The scene is grounded by an ephemeral print. The powder material references a bath mat with its raised and accumulated texture while being reminiscent of dingy tile in color and vintage linoleum in pattern. The perfect circle cut out is a pattern stencil from a cast iron vent, implying that the accumulation is an atmospheric incident. Ephemerality and atmosphere reference Catherine Bertola's dust prints (Fig.5). The "rug" is fictional. The material is sourced, not harvested from the space as in Bertola's work, but references an atmospheric effect outside of itself while literally functioning as flooring and division of space. The circle operates as a visual divide and platform for the "ruin". The print is an intended boundary, but not a rule. Viewers are welcome to approach the piece, to step on the rug<sup>30</sup>. However, few would dare, understanding that the piece is elevated as art. It is a set, a vignette, an extraction, a three-dimensional photograph, to be beheld. The circle print allows very close access along the long horizontal line of the tub, but creates a distant boundary for entrance into the bath. The scene, the memory is on display, in life scale, in three dimensions, but is inaccessible. No matter how vivid the memory, it is always just out of reach.

The tub is bodily in its skin like porcelain texture as well as its to life scale. The scene reminds us of self-care, hygiene, and secluded intimacy. It reminds us of mortality. Of solitude. The scene ages, as does our own physicality. It is both domestic and clinical.

The scene is bathed in yellow. The moisture, the light, hovering overhead is reference to the vintage heat lamp, in the real bathroom. The scene is warm, too warm. Yellowed, moist, moldy, rusty, disgusting.

Similarly, Robert Gober presents meticulously crafted "found" objects in baffling scenarios (Fig.6). He exudes at once humor and horror. Duchamp-ian in nature, Gober displays hand crafted artifacts of domesticity and fragmented bodies in jarring installations. We must piece together the symbolic nature of the crafted banal objects.

Gober has a mastery of space and presence that I strive for in my own works. Both cynical and insightful, ordinary and coded, quiet and gut wrenching. While *Punctum* is set firmly in reality, Gober creates irrational situations with the body. I strive for the same effect while being ghostly absent of any bodily human fragment or form. In the material investigation or strategic placement, we search for a moment past, or that never was.

### *Periphery* (Fig.7)

A cascading curtain references the flow of water, warmth overtaking in the form of a hand cut silk screened column. The hollow space inside, we are not invited into, but can see through allowing the pattern to overlap. It is the intersection of object and pattern as based on real spaces and peripheral memories. I am interested in taking patterns, in two or three dimensions, and layering them with objects. Object, pattern and reminiscence reference fleeting memories of space, pattern and light.

Two sides of the same memory are represented in *Punctum: Periphery*. *Punctum* is the solid state. The striking focus in detail. *Periphery* is the beginning. The patterns of the wallpaper and

---

<sup>30</sup> The powder material is partially affixed to the floor. It will be disturbed but not ruined by an interference.

shower curtain that blend and vibrate in the far corners of my eyes. I grasp dearly at them, bring the periphery into the foreground. A hybrid of pattern, a repeating morning glory motif, is a solid ephemera, atmosphere as object.

Beth Lipman creates glass installations that are visually stunning complex still lifes (Fig.8). She employs a layering of pattern and object to illustrate excess, beauty and the space between perfection and weakness. We approach and enter a world that is fragile, ephemeral and beautiful, simultaneously assaulting us with excess referencing both historical still lifes and the mass produced surplus of today.

I feel that Lipman and I have a similar lust for the elegance of glass. While my work focuses on decay, hers' beauty. While glass is not present in the *Periphery* installation, the curtain acts as the translucent veil of temporal space, extending into the dark above.

The scene is grounded with the solid rusted feet of the tub. A cast plaster form absorbs natural oxidation and weathering. The feet are placed inside of the extended floral column, making us aware of the absence of the tub. We are struck with a warm embrace of cleansing contrasted with the silhouette of empty grave.

I find myself drawn to an object, that thing that pricks me. The misplaced intimacy that reverberates and brings forth flashes of memory. I take these precious objects, worn, used by those who I've loved and cherish them as a relic, a sliver of physical closeness. I want to live in the object, in the photo. I create a monument to the space. I blanket it in the pattern, the papers, the warmth. Finally, I can inhabit it. It is more true than the original. It is a curated and invented nostalgic space to indulge. But it will never be complete. It is a fragment, a ruin, a space to learn from, infer from, but never be full.

Images Cited



Fig.1- Elizabeth Fortunato and Margie Livingston, *Rust Print*, from Strange Co. 2017. Oxidation on paper. 30in x 40in.



Fig.2- Leonardo Drew, *Number 43*. 1994. Fabric, plaster, string, rust and wood. 138in x 288in x12in. Available from: [leonardodrew.com](http://leonardodrew.com). Source [leonardodrew.com/gallery/exhibitions/](http://leonardodrew.com/gallery/exhibitions/) (Accessed June 2017).



*Fig.3- Elizabeth Fortunato, From Ashes, 2017. Hand silkscreened and laser burned fabric, ink, oxide, ash and paper. Installation variable.*



Fig.4- Elizabeth Fortunato *Punctum* from *Vacancy*, 2017. Cast paper, cast glass, copper pipe, powder print. 6ft x 6ft x 8ft. Photo credit Brad Fombelle.



(Detail) Fig.4 Elizabeth Fortunato *Punctum* from *Vacancy*, 2017. Cast paper, cast glass, powder print. 6ft x 6ft x 8ft. Photo credit Brad Fombelle.



Fig.5 -Catherine Bertola *After the fact*, 2006. Found dust and sound. Installation variable. Available from 36 Lime St., Source <http://36limestreet.co.uk/creative/catherine-bertola-artist/> (Accessed June 2017).



Fig.6- Robert Gober, *Untitled*, 2009–2010. Forged iron and steel, beeswax, cotton, leather, aluminum pull tabs, human hair. 21 x 17 x 17.5 in. Matthew Marks Gallery. Available from art.net. Source <http://www.artnet.com/artists/robert-gober/untitled-a-Kzwvg6H58czdebAQh9E2MQ2>(Accessed June 2017).



Fig.7 -Elizabeth Fortunato *Periphery*, 2017. Silk screened and hand cut shower curtain, oxidized plaster. 12ft x 6ft x 4ft. Photo by Brad Fombelle.



Fig. 8 Beth Lipman, *Sideboard with Blue China*, 2013. Glass, wood, paint, adhesive; composition depicts things we consume such as wheat, corn, birds, fish, and fruit paired with parts of the human body including feet, hands, heart, lungs, brain, intestine, and genitalia. 111in x 300in x 22in photo credit: Margaret Fox. permanent collection of the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art. Source [bethlipman.com](http://www.bethlipman.com). Source <http://www.bethlipman.com/sideboard-with-blue-china/df5sr59a9vqfuqvwebytkx608were> (Accessed June 2017).

## Works Cited

Marc Augé, *Everyone Dies Young: Time Without Age (European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism)*, trans. Jody Gladding (New York: Columbia University Press 2016), 75-77.

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang 1980).

Roland Barthes, *Mourning Diary: October 26, 1977- September 15, 1979*, trans. Richard Howard, annotated Nathalie Leger (New York: Hill and Wang 2010).

Renu Bora, "Outing Texture" in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham and London: Duke University Press 1997), 94-127.

Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books 1959).

Svetlana Boym, "Ruinophilia: Appreciation of Ruins" in *Architecture of the Off-Modern* (New York: Architectural Press 2008).

Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press 1994).

Michael Freid "Barthes's Punctum" in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol 31, No. 3 pp 539-574. (The University of Chicago Press 2005).

Max Pensky, *Three Kinds of Ruin: Heidegger, Benjamin, Sebald* (New York: Binghamton 2011).

Radiolab *Memory and Forgetting* host Jad Abumrad and Robert Krulwich, episode 304 (PRX, 2014).

Constantine Sedikides, Tim Wildschut, Jamie Arndt and Clay Routledge "Nostalgia: Past, Present and Future" in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, Vol 17, No. 5 (Sage Publications Inc. 2008), 304-307.

Christine Sprengler, "The Fifties: Nostalgia's Privileged Object and the Origins of its Dominant American Strain" in *Screening Nostalgia: Populuxe Props and Technicolor Aesthetics in Contemporary American Film* (New York: Berghahn Books 2009). 39- 66.

## Slide List

### Image 1

#### *Rust Print*

Collaboration with Margie Livingston from Strange Co.

Oxidation on paper

30in x 40in.

2017

### Image 2

#### *Rust Print* (Installation view)

Collaboration with Margie Livingston from Strange Co.

Oxidation on paper, glass

2017

### Image 3

#### *Burdens*

Digital print

2016

### Image 4

#### *Interior/exterior*

Cast plaster, natural oxidation, laser burned paper, umbrella frame, hand altered found object

Installation variable

2016

### Image 5

#### *Interior/exterior*

Cast plaster, natural oxidation, laser burned paper, umbrella frame, hand altered found object

Installation variable

2016

### Image 6

#### *Interior/exterior*

Laser burned paper, umbrella frame

3ft x 3ft x 3ft

2016

### Image 7

#### *Interior/exterior*

Hand altered found object

Installation variable

2016

### Image 8

#### *Interior/exterior*

Cast plaster, natural oxidation

Installation variable

2016

Image 9  
*Fall 2012*  
Cast leaves  
12in x 12in x 36in  
2016

Image 10  
*From Ashes*  
Hand silkscreened, hand and laser burned fabric, ink, oxide, ash and paper  
Installation variable  
2017

Image 11  
*From Ashes*  
Hand silkscreened, hand and laser burned fabric, ink, oxide, ash and paper  
Installation variable  
2017

Image 12  
*From Ashes*  
Hand silkscreened, hand and laser burned fabric, ink, oxide, ash and paper  
Installation variable  
2017

Image 13  
*From Ashes*  
Hand silkscreened and hand burned fabric, ink, oxide, ash and paper  
Installation variable  
2017

Image 14  
*From Ashes*  
Cast paper, natural oxide  
12in x 6in x 3in  
2017

Image 15  
*Punctum* from "Vacancy"  
Cast paper, cast glass, copper pipe, powder print  
6ft x 6ft x 8ft  
2017

Image 16  
*Punctum* from "Vacancy"  
Cast paper, cast glass, copper pipe, powder print  
6ft x 6ft x 8ft  
2017

Image 17

*Punctum* from “Vacancy”

Cast paper, cast glass, copper pipe, powder print

6ft x 6ft x 8ft

2017

Image 18

*Punctum* from “Vacancy”

Cast paper, cast glass, copper pipe, powder print

6ft x 6ft x 8ft

2017

Image 19

*Punctum* from “Vacancy”

Powder print

6ft x 6ft x 8ft

2017

Image 20

*Periphery* from “Vacancy”

Silk screened and hand cut shower curtain, oxidized plaster

12ft x 6ft x 4ft

2017

Image 21

*Periphery* from “Vacancy”

Silk screened and hand cut shower curtain, oxidized plaster

12ft x 6ft x 4ft

2017

Image 22

*Periphery* from “Vacancy”

Silk screened and hand cut shower curtain, oxidized plaster

12ft x 6ft x 4ft

2017

Image 23

*Periphery* from “Vacancy”

Silk screened and hand cut shower curtain, oxidized plaster

12ft x 6ft x 4ft

2017



Image 1



Image 2



Image 3



Image 4



Image 5



Image 6



Image 7



Image 8



Image 9



Image 10



Image 11



Image 12



Image 13



Image 14



Image 15



Image 16



Image 17



Image 18



Image 19



Image 20



Image 21



Image 22



Image 23