

Fragments, as I remember

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ABSTRACT

Fragments, as I remember is a site-specific installation combining the following three “memory cells”: photographic images of dioramas derived from my memories; a film projection; and a sculpture composed of butterflies and a visual diary. The accompanying thesis support paper is written as both a journal of my creative thought process and an exposition of the research that thematically contextualizes my work.

The paper indirectly unpacks specific elements that inform and inspire this work. It is a journal intended to contextualize my creative practices within my research on memory in relation to family albums. This research is informed by theorists such as Martha Langford, Matte Sandbye and Annette Kuhn, as well as Deborah Chambers’ notion of the “gaps” within the context of family albums.

DEDICATION

After many years of working in the IT industry and much time reflecting, I have, with great strength and courage, returned to my roots and passion in the arts. This journey began in 2009 when I returned to Ryerson University to pursue my Bachelor of Fine Arts, Image Arts. I have regained my knowledge and interest in photography as an art medium. Seven years later, I completed this journey at York University, in the Masters of Fine Arts program, and with my two lovely children. This journey could not have been completed without the support, love and encouragement of my family: Ann Chan, Kei Chan, Alex Chan, Cameron Dow, Seren Dow, Hendry Dow and all my friends and extended family who have supported and encouraged this journey.

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INTRODUCTION

My 2016 thesis exhibition, *Fragments, as I remember*, is a site-specific installation at IX Gallery, in the east end of Toronto, that combines my interest in photography, sculpture and video projection. The exhibition is divided into three main sections: constructed memories, documented memories and conceptual memories. First, the viewer enters the gallery to see six large photographs; these photographs are two-dimensional representations of my childhood memories reconstructed as dioramas, along with three original dioramas featured in the photographs. Also central to this exhibition is a video projection, which loops every fifteen minutes, situated within a smaller room in the same exhibition space. This video is a first-person point-of-view portrayal of a ferry ride to Georgina Island. The final component of the installation is a sculpture consisting of 1,000 ceramic butterflies circulating and visually obstructing a visual diary. The thesis exhibition as a whole attempt to engage the viewer with two main themes – memory through transformation, and memory as remembered history – as a way to connect the viewer to an understanding of memory loss.

In addition to this image-based storytelling, my thesis includes research into theories of memory found in a wider cast of disciplines, such as psychology, philosophy and social science, with emphasis on cultural studies theorists such as Deborah Chambers, Annette Kuhn, Martha Langford and Matte Sandbye, and their research on the family album. These varied research components serve as the foundation for both my art and thesis paper.

The thesis support paper is written largely in the first-person in a journal format, interlaced with academic research. The first chapter, “Memory Cells,” discusses my own personal journey of memories that serve as the motivation for the exhibition. It contains three subsections: “The Photographs,” “The Video Projection” and “The Sculpture.” Each section is a detailed account of my personal memories of people, objects and places that inspire the artwork. I will also discuss photographers Imogen Cunningham and Henri-Cartier Bresson, and how their work shaped my earlier work.

The second chapter, titled “Creating the Exhibition,” explores the process of creating the artwork exhibited in *Fragments, as I remember*. This chapter attempts to summarize a process that took place over one hundred fifty-nine days, from the time that the new direction emerged to the day of the exhibition installation. Here I discuss the creation of the series of photographs, the video projection and the sculpture, interspersed with journal entries from that time.

The third chapter, “Research on Photography, Family Albums, and Memory,” discusses my theoretical thesis research. It includes a discussion on photography and memory, drawing upon Susan Sontag’s thoughts on photography as a medium that can “posses” time. Here, I will discuss the work of artists Jo Spence and Christian Boltanski and their explorations of the theme of family albums, narration and the role of the compiler/artist. This relates to my interest in using photography as a narrative tool to describe personal memories – specifically, my own memories of my childhood as a springboard for discussion of remembered history, relationships and memory loss.

It is critical to highlight that this paper is not an in-depth analysis of the cultural theorists mentioned above, nor is it meant to be an extensive piece of research on broader social instances of the family album, memory and remembered history. This paper is instead intended as a support paper for the exhibition, providing the viewers with insight into some of my most personal memories and reflections, which have informed and motivated the artwork.

CHAPTER 1: MEMORY CELLS: THE EXPERIENCES BEHIND THE INSTALLATION

THE BEGINNING

“You are not very sentimental, are you?”

This is how everything began. Sometimes you go about life without any reflection on your actions or way of being, as the way you are is who you are.

My upbringing was very much infused with Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoist philosophy and ideology. Without even knowing it, I have at least partially detached myself from exterior longing, as longing itself can be a painful act.

It is for this reason I prefer to keep my surroundings minimal and organized; perhaps even my habit of grouping things and making lists descends from this.

I find myself wondering about the preceding statement for the next few days – it appears to be a rather simple observation.

“Am I really not sentimental?” I ask myself. I then search for evidence to either prove or disprove the observation. In conclusion, I am not really sentimental – quite the opposite.

MEMORY CELLS

Three distilled ideas: constructed memories, documented memories, and conceptual memories – what I am calling “memory cells.” The exhibition is separated according to three different memory cells, each existing in isolation, waiting to be retrieved. Each symbolizes a memory passage – my personal memory passages, one leading to another. It also speaks to my own attention deficit tendencies: my mind tends to be in different spaces at a given moment, but is contained by my desire for order and structure.

The gallery is open and airy with off-white walls – a perfect backdrop for the installation. This is also a reflection of own tendencies. I am easily affected by my physical environment; therefore, clutter and chaos around my workplace or living space tends to exacerbate my anxiety and stress, making it difficult for me to concentrate. The ideal space is a space without clutter and noise, not even music. Photographs, mementos and belongings are not often found in my work and living areas.

The gallery and exhibition need to exude the same sense of calm, quiet and openness – a reflective space, consistent with the tone and dialogue of my exhibition. It is a dialogue of transitional memories, remembered history and relationships. Perhaps, subliminally, the exhibition also grapples with my many anxieties, and serves as a high-level discussion of

dementia.¹ Those who work closely with people with dementia may see elements of this disease reflected in my work – for example, the repetitiveness and use of shadows in the installation.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS



Figure 1: Elaine Chan-Dow, Paris, France (2003). Silver Gelatin Print.

Since the age of fifteen, photography has always been a part of my life.

¹ My father was diagnosed with the early stages of Alzheimer's disease, and is under observation and treatment.

The Minolta manual camera was my first camera, and it endured through many trips and much abuse. Friends and family would often find me on the ground or climbing trees with the camera to get the perfect vantage point.

Thirty-six clicks. After that, I would spend the next few days stuck in the darkroom in my family home, developing and processing these images. This process was therapeutic for me. I would spend hours in the darkroom, only making the occasional appearance for lavatory breaks.

I was a landscape and darkroom photographer inspired by Imogen Cunningham and Group f/64, as well as the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson. I travelled to Paris, New York and California to see their work. The most memorable of these visits were to Cunningham's *Magnolia Blossom, 1925*, seen up close at the Weston Gallery in California, and Cartier-Bresson's series, *Decisive Moments*, at MoMA in New York City. Their work carries the technical precision that I aspire to, and captures the fluidity and romanticism of everyday life.



Figure 2: Imogen Cunningham, Magnolia Blossom, 1925. Photo: Imogen Cunningham Estate



Figure 3: Henri Cartier-Bresson, Hyères, France (1932). Decisive Moments. Photo, Phaidon.

My travel and impromptu images still carry aspects of what I called the “pre-Ryerson era.” Most of these images are of people, places and objects that warrant an involuntary response to immediately capture an image; it is precisely what Cartier-Bresson coined as the “Decisive Moment.”²

The fast-paced urban environment has morphed this process for me.

2009. The year I succumbed to the world of digital photography. I needed speed.

My instructor was Mr. Iain Cameron at Ryerson University Image Arts Program. There were many photographic projects. I recall ten, or maybe it was twelve projects, to submit with one final photographic series. We were to produce, execute and exhibit these works every few weeks. I really needed speed. The strength and stubbornness in my convictions to remain true to analogue photography weakened as time passed. The allure of the digital camera finally overcame my desire after the second project.

My work evolved from straight photography³ to a hybrid of staged photography and documentary. I brought the tactility of the darkroom process into digital photography by incorporating my interests in bookbinding and sculpture as a gesture and homage to my more tactile roots as a craftsman.

Visually, my work has transitioned from black and white analogue photography with a straight photographic aesthetic to large-format colour image with influences from Bernd

² The “Decisive Moment” is associated with the French Photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson and his candid photographic style and technique. The phrase is an English adaptation of the book ‘Images à la sauvette’ (Image on the Run).

³ Straight photography here refers to the photographic aesthetic set by the Group F/64. Under this guidelines images are pure from manipulation, black and white, sharp and in-focus.

and Hilla Becher, Andreas Gursky and Hiroshi Sugimoto. However, I am also drawn to Jo Spence, Christian Boltanski, and Yasuak Onishi, and how their visual work engages the viewer in a social, political and conceptual way. I am also influenced by Rebecca Louis-Law, whose installations such as the *Garden series* and *Meadow* engage the senses of sight and smell.

All these elements informed the making of my exhibition, beginning with my love of photography and miniature, which forms the basis of the first of the three memory cells exhibited in my installation.

What follows in the proceeding section are memories that form the content of the photographs of the dioramas.

Strangely, my memory of each scene is triggered by specific sensory experiences: the warm glow of the sunset casting light onto the ice cream truck; the sensation of the spicy chili pepper; the disappointment of not being able to play the clarinet; the texture of the sand in the sandbox; and the process of making the book, the feeling of the textured papers as I hand sew the signatures⁴.

It only makes sense, then, that these key elements (or memories) are re-constructed through senses.

⁴ A signature in bookbinding terms refers to a section of paper that is folded in half to be sewn together with other signature to form the book structure (book block).

THE SANDBOX



Figure 4 : Fragments: Sand Box. Elaine Chan-Dow 2016

Light beige mixed with bright white. Fine, sugar-like particles that flow from one container to another as if through an hourglass.

This moment is frozen in time. It is me at the age of three, sitting in the sandbox, playing alone in front of my childhood home. This is the precise moment that repeats itself here and now with no obvious triggers. My mother often tells me that I liked to play on my own, and I still prefer this. Some find interest in engaging and speaking with others, while I find solace being in isolation, with not even the sound of music, often working on my latest obsession.

For no known reason, this memory recurs spontaneously, as if this memory is reminding me of my past – a quiet and tranquil past.

THE CHILI PEPPER



Figure 5: Fragments, the Red Chilli Peper. Elaine Chan-Dow. 2016

Fiery red: the colour of passion, energy and love. A recurring colour.

A colour that dominates my childhood home. Red, a symbolism of happiness and celebration, a heritage colour, yet a colour I detest.

This is the colour that I see when I invoke the memories of me eating the chili pepper when I was three years old. Some neighbourhood friend dared me to eat the chili, and I did. I have no recollection of what happened afterwards, except the story that my mother shared with me. She also negates my memory of the chili pepper being almost ten inches in length: “It was really tiny.”

Perhaps, in this scenario the effect of eating the chili left a heightened sensory impression, imprinting and exaggerating that particular part of my childhood in my memory.

ICE CREAM TRUCK



Figure 6: Fragments, Ice Cream Truck. Elaine Chan-Dow 2016

It is a hot day. The sound of cicadas in the air.

The soft jingle based on “The Whistler and His Dog” (1960), by Lester Morton, can be heard in the distance. This is the sound of the ice cream truck, the sound that brings me back to my childhood to my spirited age of eight to ten years old.

This memory intensifies as the truck now approaches our house. “Mommy, Mommy, please...,” is the next sound I hear, from my children. The same plea I would make with my mother as the truck parks across from my childhood home.

The soft glow from the sun casts off different tones of orange onto my surroundings. The landscape is filled with this majestic beam, as the light slowly descends towards the horizon.

The music brings back the ephemeral joy of my childhood, along with the beautiful and unexplained visceral feeling of the sun's glow radiating throughout my body.

It is a hot summer month, near sunset, as the truck parks across the house where the park is. My eldest brother runs across the road to buy ice cream for us, and then we sit quietly on our porch, watching the sunset and enjoying the ice cream.

How wonderful are those days? Without fear – only simple joy and full of hope.

Popo's House

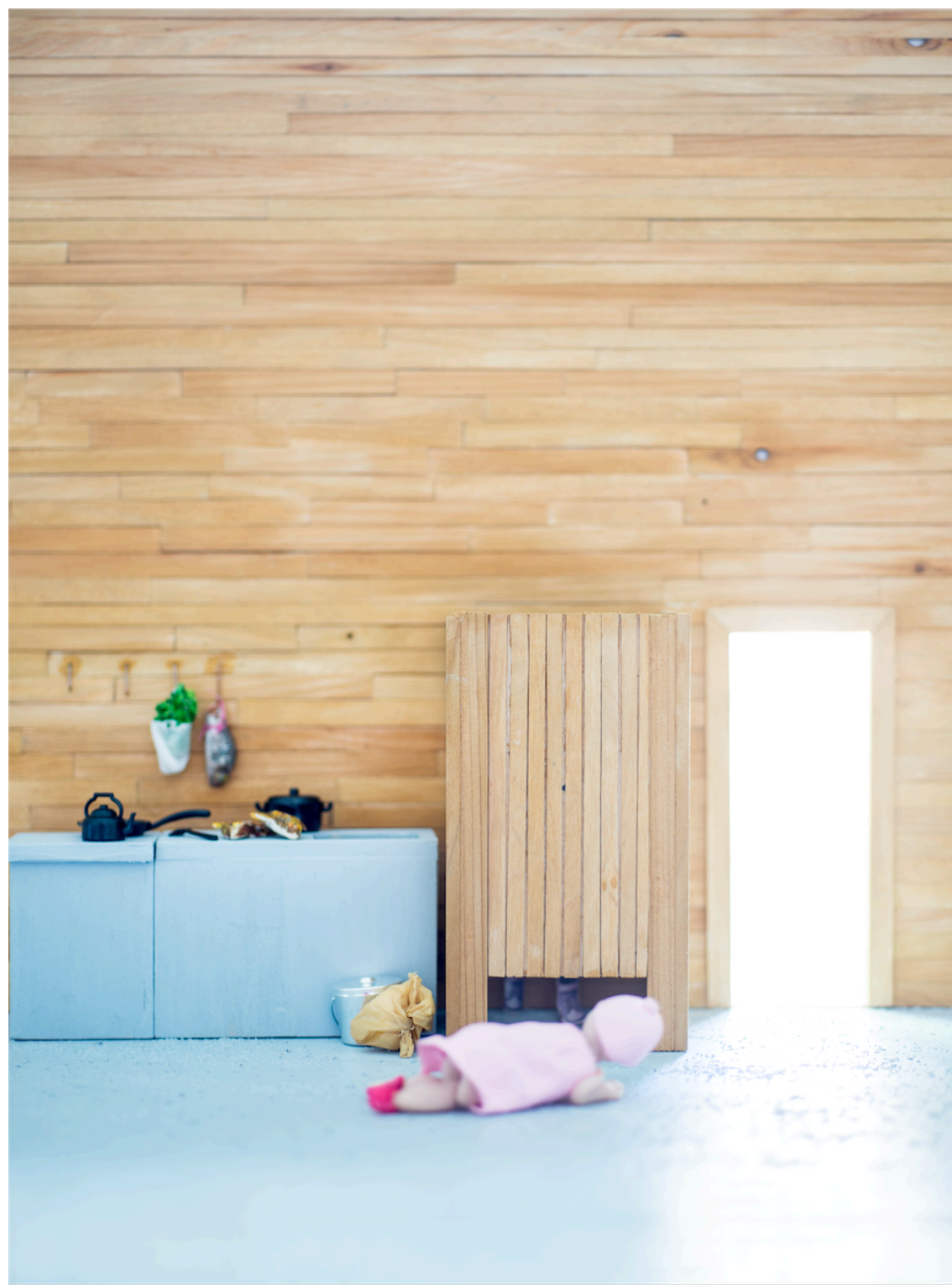


Figure 7: Fragments, Popo's House. Elaine Chan-Dow 2016

“Popo” – this is what I called my maternal grandmother. I have very few memories of her, as she passed away when I was a young child. She was a loving woman, a woman that endured many wars and the aftermath of the war, as described by my mother.

Popo smoked cigarettes here and there, and would often hide it from her grandchildren by smoking in the bathroom, but I knew.

I had not been back to Asia until I was an adolescent. My memory of Popo’s house is vague – China and Vietnam, my heritage and birthplace, are elusive and foreign to me.

This specific memory of her in the kitchen is frozen in a mental time capsule: I went to the bathroom (located near the kitchen) to take a peek at Popo, under the bathroom door, curious to see what she was doing. I recall saying out loud, “Popo is smoking! Popo is smoking” She replied by saying, “Is the soup ready?” It is a random memory, but a vivid image of my maternal grandmother that is imprinted forever in my mind.

THE BOOK



Figure 8: Fragments, The Red Book. Elaine Chan-Dow 2016

Books are considered monuments in my family home. To me, as a follower of Confucianism, they symbolize knowledge and liberation. We would recite Confucius' writings every evening before going to bed, and this tradition has now been passed onto my own children.

Books were treated as sacred objects while growing up, and belonged on the desk or bookshelves. My brother and I would be scolded if the books were misplaced – even our schoolbooks were treated in the same manner.

Books were just that to me as a child, a sacred container of wisdom.

Subconsciously, books became a shadow that quietly influenced me, even though I was not aware.

“Ah. The books are not lined up again.”

Drawn to books, and having an obsession with lining the books in a straight line, it was natural that I became a librarian assistant in high school, and then worked in the Archive and Library at Ryerson University. My first major photographic project, *Libraria: The Evolution of Literary Spaces*, was a direct result of this obsession.

However, it was not until the birth of my first child that I took an interest in the process of bookmaking. My daughter was four months old when I decided to become a bookbinder. It was a creative and hands-on outlet for me.

The classes were intense, as three months' material was condensed into two weeks. The process of making released my stress and anxieties as a new mother, a process that helped my postpartum depression.

THE CLARINET

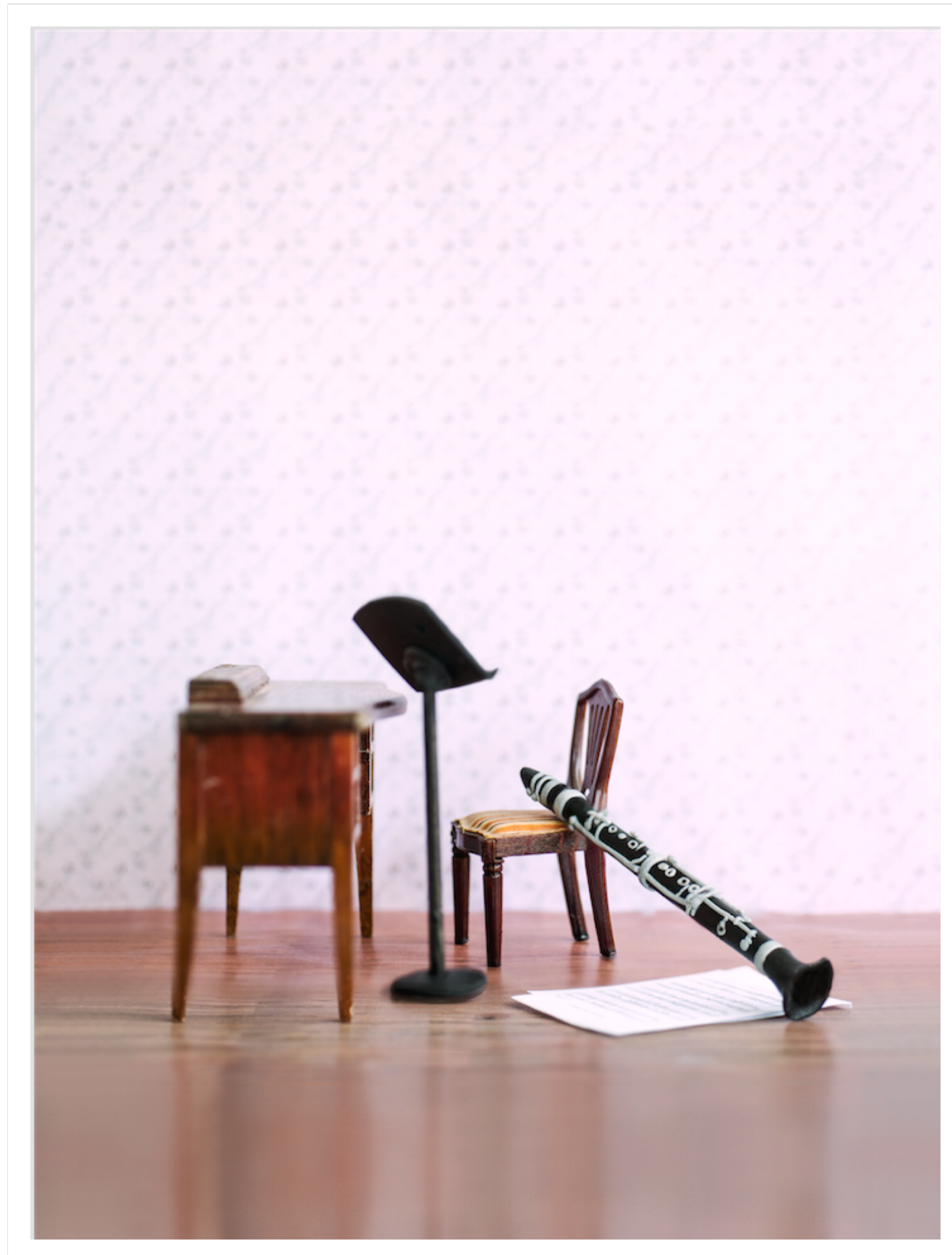


Figure 9: Fragments, the Clarinet. Elaine Chan-Dow. 2016

When I see this beautiful, luxurious, black and silver object, it is as if the clarinet is whispering to me, telling me how lonely it feels, unearthing memories of a painful past. A past that I have subconsciously kept in a hidden place – a memory that very few people know or remember.⁵

⁵ Would this be considered “repressed memory,” as discussed by Paula Hertel et al. in their book *Memory and Emotion*? For more on repressed memories, see Chapter 3.

It was the Summer of Grade 7, and I was thirteen years old. I had suddenly contracted Bell's Palsy, which left my right side of my face paralysed. I would spend the next few months in hiding. My mother would take me to seek alternative therapy, as Western medicine was not able to find a cure.

I was traumatized. I was not able to smile as I once did. My iconic smile had disappeared and could be seen only in earlier photographs. Even to this day I refuse to smile when being photographed.

It is still very painful recalling and retelling this part of my childhood – a part of me that is hidden and locked. Even more painful was not being able to play the clarinet. Quitting the school band was the hardest part of all, a social activity that I enjoyed and still long for.

There is no photographic evidence of this, as I would spend the next few years hiding from the camera.⁶ No matter how hard it is to hide this past, however, it resurrects itself whenever I see a clarinet. Instead of meeting the memories with a smile, only the sound of a sigh surfaces.

⁶ Perhaps this is an instance of the “gap” that Deborah Chamber describes (see Chapter 3).

THE VIDEO PROJECTION



Figure 10: Structure -6862, Elaine Chan-Dow. 2015

“Brrr...,” I said as I stood on the harbour of Georgina Island. The crisp air was cool, refreshing and invigorating. It was almost -30 degrees Celsius.

I was waiting patiently for Jake⁷ and his friend after meeting Susan Smoke, an indigenous cultural coordinator and a Sacred Spirit dancer. “I am so ignorant,” I thought to myself after meeting Suzanne Smoke. “I am not as informed as I thought about the missing indigenous girls and unaccounted children.” It had been a great visit; I was sure we would meet again for another project in the future.

⁷ Jake Charles is a First Nation Representative, particularly for the Ojibwe People and the Chippewa of Georgina Island First Nation.

“You are not dressed warm enough!” a voice echoed from behind me.

He was right. I was not well-equipped for this weather.

Jake and his friend gave me a tour on their snowmobile on the lake, explaining where things were once located, how colonization took place on their land and where his fishing hut was located.

“Excuse me Jake, I need to head back to land, as I can’t feel my legs anymore.” He probably chuckled in his mind (as I would have). “City dwellers...”

Although this journey was cold, the ride and tour of the native land on the snowmobile was freeing yet calm – a sensation I would like to recapture when I can visit Georgina Island again in the near future.



Figure 11: Photograph, Still of Projection 00.01", Elaine Chan-Dow 2016

THE SCULPTURE

“Sculpture?”

This is the reaction that I received from acquaintances when describing my intention for the thesis exhibition – a reaction that is justified, as photography dominates my visual art practice.

However, those that follow my work closely will notice two other dominating themes: miniature and bookbinding. Therefore, incorporating both into my exhibition would not be out of the ordinary.

Butterflies. An obsession of mine.

Bewildered by nature and her music, the monarch butterflies and tiger swallowtails butterflies, along with the bees, have returned to their habitat. This is the beauty of the macro life of nature, creating a majestic symphony as the butterflies waltz through the sea of peonies, salvia, lavender and their beloved milkweed. Through each connection and interaction, a new life is formed through the process of pollination.

This is consistent subject of mine, often found in my doodles on my course notes, drawings and photographs. My fascination with the butterfly stems from the biology of its transformation – similar to the story of “The Ugly Duckling” – as well as the micro life of insects and their connection to the environment that surrounds them.

Psyche, meaning soul in Greek: the term is expressive and precise. How fitting it is to find a word that captures the true essence of the object represented. Perhaps this is why Darwin used the butterfly as an emblem of the soul, dying and then resurrecting to become a beautiful creature. This is precisely how I see the conceptual representation of memory in my exhibition – dementia is merely a transformation, another phase of life. The body and mind still exist, but in another form – a form that might not be easily accessible by others, external to oneself.

What is life all about? At the end of our life, others are left with only a representation of oneself, perhaps in a form of an album. All our life's worth, trials and tribulations, is told through the second generation vis-à-vis the "family album." One's memories, experiences and transformations at the end of our life sits within this visual diary.

THE BIRTH OF FRAGMENTS, AS I REMEMBER

The idea of sentiment and sentimentality became my obsession. I began looking at the reasoning behind one's sentiment: hoarders versus minimalists, and the underlying psychology giving way to my ongoing photographic art project, *For Memories since 2010*.

For Memories is an investigation and interpretation of objects and how they solicit meanings and memories for those who possess them. The concept of *For Memories* stemmed from a neighbour who was in the late stages of cancer and her experience during her last visit back to her childhood home. Her story was touching and telling, illustrating

images in my mind as she recounted her childhood story, stories of her late mother and funny moments while she was suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

The project is divided into two phases. The first phase captures these private moments (see figure 12), or a location or object, that are rather ordinary to everyone else, but initiate an intimate story for those to whom the object or experience belonged. It illustrates what Hertel discusses in *Memory and Emotion*. The objects act as a trigger for their memories, bringing out emotions and feelings of the past, and are accurate in historical terms.



Figure 12: *For Memories, Joy*. Elaine Chan-Dow 2012

Only after taking a break from this project did I achieve some clarity about the reasons behind my obsession to seek meaning in an object and its owner; this continues to intrigue me. Perhaps this is my own quest to connect myself to the past. Or is it trauma that is blocking the emotional connection to objects and substances? This led to the inquiry into the symbiotic relationship between memories and the trigger. What happens when these memories are impaired, or at least no longer available in a cognitive way? This gave birth to *Fragments*, the initial intention.

Like the sound of a vintage 35-mm film spinning forward, after many trials and failures, the project transformed into *Fragments, as I remember*.

“Would you consider exhibiting your personal sculpture or paintings as well?” A question that was asked by my committee members during one of our meetings, while discussing my new intentions for the thesis. Looking back, this was an important question as all along I had no intention to exhibit any other medium except for photography.

“No!” was my immediate reaction. My personal work is informed by momentary experiences. The process of making is therefore very personal; this is a method for me to process information and emotions. Showing this personal work would be too personally revealing – it would mean revealing my inner-most thoughts to the public.

I spent many days thinking through my conversations with my committee advisors. The advice of my supervisor, Yvonne Singer, was to just let my creativity guide my work, and just create.

This notion of “just creating,” without any forethought and restrictions, was the turning point for me. This advice, although short and simple, was just like that given in a letter that Sol Lewitt wrote to Eva Hesse: “just do.”⁸

Just create. Play. Photograph Images. Explore.

This was the simple message that took me to the next level of my creative threshold – the crucial moment of my thesis, and perhaps my artistic career.

I have decided not to let myself, as a photographer, dictate where this project will be; instead, I will just create as ideas arise.

Since then, I have let go of the pretenses of being an artist: all the pressure of making “good” work, what is appropriate and inappropriate, etc. Instead, I “just do” – as Lewitt wrote in his letter to Hesse.

Elaine: “I am nervous now. I have too many ideas.”

Yvonne: “I understand how you can be, just continue working as ideas arise.”

Elaine: “Thank-you. I needed this talk. I am nervous showing this diorama and sculpture.”

Yvonne: “That is a good thing. Just create, and don’t worry about that just yet. That is something that you can work at a later stage.”

⁸ See the full letter in the Appendices.

CHAPTER 2: CREATING THE EXHIBITION



Figure 13: Exhibition: Installation and Projection Room

THE INSPIRATION

Beauty and Sublime.

These are words that can be applied to the work of both American artist Rebecca Louise Law and Japanese artist Yasuaki Onishi.

Law's work exudes a sense of beauty – beautiful in its creation and installation. The viewers are often greeted with an overwhelming explosion of colours at the exhibit. The installation *The Beauty of Decay* is exquisite with the allure of children's book illustrations. The installation overwhelms the senses, both visually and aromatically.

In contrast, Onishi's installation *Vertical Emptiness* evokes a sense of grandeur and sublime. The ghostly white structure, pure and quiet, contains an ominous presence, a duality of darkness and light, deep in its meaning and thought-provoking. Both artists are a source of inspiration for my installation. For me, the ideal installation would be a hybrid of both their approaches.



Figure 14: "The Beauty of Decay" at Chandran Gallery Rebecca Louise Law. Photo by artist.



Figure 15: Yasuaki Onishi, "Vertical Emptiness." Photo by artist.

THE FOURTH DAY

Four days have passed since the conception of my new intentions.

I found myself sitting in the empty space of the gallery floor.

My mind was like a rhythmic dance, envisioning how my artwork might fit in this empty space.

“The installation should be the first thing you see, right at the back wall, and the images of the dioramas at the front, the video projection should be in its own room...” I muttered out loud.

“It doesn’t feel right!”

The images of the dioramas, at first, are all photographed with dark, cinematic lighting. This created an oppressive atmosphere, not in keeping with the butterfly installation, but more importantly, not the feeling I wanted to create for this exhibition.

There will be a couple more visits and four days of installation to come.

THE INITIAL INTENTION

Underneath all the layers, the exhibition is a personal journey about remembered history and relationships. As a hierarchy, it offers another perspective regarding memory

loss as a process of transformation – dementia as perhaps another transformative state of mind.

As a former program developer and a project manager, I often worked with conceptual ideas, but these ideas were grounded by rules operating within a system. Subconsciously, I have applied the same framework to my photographic projects. Aside from being a photo-based artist, I also paint and work with miniatures and bookbinding. However, I see these artistic endeavours as personal and private, a practice to engage in when I am overwhelmed. My creative practice encourages the opposite to rules and structure, and I am often left with endless possibilities. Ideas are often generated by dreams or impulses. This would be the first exhibition where my work was driven by personal exploration through self-expression and the tactility of object materials.

There were many impulses at the beginning of this process, and they were refined down to a select few. The ideas were worked like flour through a sifter, until only a resolved few remained.

The initial intention was a photo-based installation that would engage the viewer in a deeper understanding of memory and how we experience the world around us through self-reflection. A focus on the issue of Alzheimer's disease and dementia was to serve as a way to connect the viewer to the concepts of memory and identity. My initial intention was also to make a collaborative project, involving the participants in all stages of my creative process. This was, firstly, so that I could understand persons with memory loss through experiential work rather than scientific or theoretical readings; secondly, this was to ensure that the final artwork genuinely spoke of memories through the self-reflection of the

participants themselves. Volunteer fieldwork was to be conducted at a day program for persons with dementia, which meant engaging and interacting directly with the participants. This entailed working closely with Dr. Gail Mitchell, as well as with Dr. Christine Jonas-Simpson and her team at the Dotsa Wellness Academy⁹ program, to better understand how to incorporate art when engaging with participants.

The final image approved by the participants, whose identities would not be given, would have been used as an inspiration for the final portrait for the public art exhibit. When viewed from a distance, the final portrait, printed on a transparency and adhered to a mirror, would have resembled a large-scale image similar to Chuck Close's *Lucas I*¹⁰ (in which the portraits are formed by colourful pixels¹¹ but printed on a transparency instead of on an art canvas). The viewers would see through the portrait and see a reflection of themselves. Upon coming close to the image, the viewer would likely notice the portraits are made up of hundreds of 4" by 4" black-and-white photos created from photographs of the objects, events, people and places important to the participants and their relationship with their environment. However, due to certain research ethics protocols, this installation will not be part of the final exhibition.

Photography alone for this personal voyage felt slightly cerebral. This exhibition needed me to return to my roots as a maker – or what Richard Sennett calls a “craftsman,” in his book *The Craftsman*.

⁹ Dotsa Bitove Wellness Academy is an art focus academy for persons with memory loss.

¹⁰ *Lucas I* was created between 1986 and 1987. It is a photo-realist portrait of artist Lucas Samaras, formed by colourful, grid-like patterns, created in oil and graphite on canvas. The painting is 100" by 84" wide.

¹¹ Image can be found here: <http://www.walkerart.org/calendar/2005/chuckcloseself>

The vision was clear when I stood on the gallery floor. I could finally envision the installation. The gallery was my white canvas, where I could project my emotions towards a specific subject: the subject of memory and memory loss through personal experiences.

THE FIFTY-SIXTH DAY

Fifty-six days of working on ideas that would emerge from my consciousness. The tactility of material things evoked an explosion of new ideas, one after another. Like in baking, however, my ideas need to be sifted like flour.

Some ideas were abandoned while others warranted further exploration. Just in the midst of the fifty-sixth day and ten hours, the ideas took form, giving birth to the new intention.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS



Figure 16: Exhibition: West Wall, The Photographs

Ten.

This is the number I envision when I discuss my dioramas. Therefore, for a good part of my project, I wanted to create ten dioramas and ten photographs.

Six.

In the end, there are six 40” by 30” photographs of the dioramas. The diorama images consist of involuntary memories¹² of my childhood – spontaneous reoccurrences of

¹² “Involuntary memory” is when a memory is spontaneously triggered through a sensory cue (Mace 4-10).

the past. Some are triggered by a sound, such as music, while some occur with no triggers, as described in below.

The image needed bokeh.¹³ The backdrop is soft and surreal.

The photographs are mounted in an orderly fashion along the perimeter walls of the exhibition space. Each photograph captures the vivid memories of my childhood that, up until the present moment, existed only in my mind. The photographs employ dramatic lighting techniques to create both a sense of a childhood dollhouse and the hyperrealism. These ephemeral images from my unconsciousness are brought into an accessible three-dimensional form, and then return back to a two-dimensional photograph, to be placed in the family album.¹⁴

I elected to use selective focus and high-key lighting¹⁵ techniques when photographing the images. Selective focus is the photographic technique I use to mimic the sensation of memories in which certain things are vivid and others are illusive. Selective focus also helps direct the viewer's attention to one specific area within the image, as it highlights certain areas while blurring others. This cinematic lighting technique also helps to

¹³ "Bokeh" refers to an out-of-focus area in the photographic image. This effect is normally achieved with a specialty lens such as a 60mm macro lens with a shallow depth of field when the aperture is open to the widest setting, such as F1.4.

¹⁴ The family album described here is the album featured in the sculpture, immersed with moss and grass.

¹⁵ High-key lighting is a style of lighting that uses multiple lighting sources to achieve a bright background and atmosphere, usually creating a lighter mood. This can be compared to the alternative low-key lighting, which is generally dark with high contrast.

highlight the area in focus by casting more light on it, while creating shadows elsewhere, to create a more dramatic effect.

THE DIORAMAS

Failure, success. Success, failure.

The transitional nature of material life – a process that I endure, a process that makes working with clay engaging.

“For the world is movement, and you cannot be stationary in your attitude toward something that is moving.” (Henri Cartier-Bresson)

Methods and methodology are an endless process that changes and morphs over time, from project to project. This process also applies to my practice-based research. Some projects are initially driven by impulses followed by pre-determined rules and frameworks. Other projects, such as *Fragments*, are more fluid and organic, with no specific rules or frameworks, allowing the process to be intuitively driven, open to possibilities with no conscious framework. However, over time an informal framework organically evolved through the process of making, failing and succeeding.

At times, deadlines can be a hindrance to my practice, but they can also be beneficial in that they drive productivity and intense artistic inquiries, typically leading to insightful observations and conclusions.

A new artistic intention is driven by artistic impulses informed by my surroundings and my engagement with people – in particular, people with memory loss and neurological

impairment. An idea emerges, followed by an immediate need to execute the idea. At times, the idea is merely a thought followed by several failed attempts. In this instance, however, the idea of combining visual memories and formalizing them into dioramas was a concrete route that needed further exploration.

The dioramas are made from polymer clay; each miniature is slightly larger than 1/24 scale ratio. The size of certain key elements, such as the disproportionate large pepper, are exaggerated, to reflect how I remember it. The making of the dioramas was a process of discovery; certain memories that were once forgotten resurface through this process. I wanted to capture this essence, by transforming my memories of a past event (being ephemeral) into a concrete form, a form that people can see through the dioramas. The process continues by turning them into a physical documentation through the use of a photograph, reiterating the idea of story telling through a family album.

I am fascinated with Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, and how Spiegelman approached a dark subject through the form of a graphic novel, an alternative approach in speaking about war. Illustrating is a tactile process, as is bookbinding and making dioramas – a process that can be used to contemplate and meditate. I can only wonder if this is the same for Spiegelman?

THE TWO-HUNDRED-AND-TENTH DAY

210 days have passed from the last time that I was here in Georgina.

The crisp air has returned to Georgina. The seagulls are calling at a distance. What once seemed isolated and desolate is now filled with the gold-rusted colours of Autumn.

There's Jake, standing near the harbour of Georgina.

"It will take fifteen minutes to get to the island," says Jake.

The cars slowly approach the ferry that would take us to the island.

Pitter patter, as the rain drops hit the windshield of the car. The sound of rain in a silent space is precisely what I needed.

A thought occurs to me in the silence: If time is an illusion, what is the tangible present?

It was a refreshing fifteen minutes of quiet and nothingness with no external distractions. Fifteen minutes of just being, something that had not happened since my first child was born. Fifteen minutes of no obligations – not someone's mother, wife or daughter. A long-awaited fifteen minutes. I longed for those days when I was practising Zazen, where no one is to speak but just be present in the moment.

Quiet and relaxing. I would like to repeat this fifteen minutes.

The experience of this particular fifteen minutes is the kind of time that I was inspired to capture in my video projection. This *being present* for fifteen minutes, for me, resonates

with the same feelings as being with persons with dementia and others that experience memory loss. There is no before and after – just being in the moment.

THE VIDEO PROJECTION



Figure 17: Exhibition: Film Projection, Fifteen Minutes. Elaine Chan-Dow 2016.

In the exhibition, *Fifteen Minutes* (2016) plays on a continuous loop, offering viewers a space for contemplation. There is no sense of past or future in this digital media

projection. It offers a contemplative view of memory through time's passage and the idea of "being in the moment." If history requires a past, then what happens to memory in this context of "being in the moment"? What is the meaning of memory if the "present" is a recurring idea?

The creation of this video projection was rather spontaneous. While waiting for the ferry to arrive, I found myself in a peaceful state of mind – a feeling that I had not felt for a long time, especially after two recent panic attacks. I remember thinking to myself, "If I were to be stuck forever in a specific time, wouldn't this be a nice space to be in – mentally and emotionally?"

This thought is what prompted me to capture this ferry ride. As this was not pre-planned, but rather spontaneous, I captured this with my smartphone. The fifteen minutes of video projection is unedited, raw footage of the ferry ride.

THE TWENTY-NINTH DAY

Eureka! The twenty-ninth day.

The sculpture has now been transformed from a single piece into one that incorporates all the nuances and feelings of memory loss and myself as an artist. An exhibition that is intrinsically motivated.

THE SCULPTURE



Figure 18: Installation View – Sculpture



Figure 19: Close-up of the Visual Diary

The impermanence of memories is like a live symphony or a fading sunset. The transitional stage of memory. These are the subtleties of my life, and also feelings that I wanted to resurrect in the exhibition.

A few days into the creation of the exhibition I succumbed to this idea, but remained unconvinced, until the idea of incorporating butterflies in the exhibition emerged while making the dioramas.

Imprint. This is the source of my inspiration.

The butterflies are made of polymer clay – a soft, thick, yet malleable mixture, to be shaped and reshaped. The butterflies are left white, allowing the viewers room for imagination. This also places emphasis on the shapes and shadows the butterflies cast onto the gallery floors.



Figure 20: Close-up - Butterflies curing at the Studio



Figure 21: "Dead Bodies" - a collection of failed work

Unlike photography, clay as a medium is rather exploratory. Like processing images in the darkroom, the process of creating dioramas is a meditative process, a personal process, a process I considered private and therapeutic. After several months of working on different materials as a creative outlet, purely for inspiration, clay eventually became my medium of choice for the exhibition. Clay is fragile and strong, a metaphor that extends into my thesis. Polymer clay emphasizes the elasticity of the object, making it the perfect material to create one thousand butterflies that hover within the gallery space.

One thousand was just an impulsive number that naturally occurred while working on the material; I later discovered, while speaking with my mother, that one thousand is a significant number in my Chinese heritage – one representing unity and zero representing stillness.

The colour white represents purity and reflection, but also gives room for imagination, allowing the viewers to imprint their own ideas and thoughts.

The sculpture is situated in the centre of the gallery space, as though the butterflies are singing and dancing to the tune of nature, but also suggesting an ominous presence.

A red visual diary, partially obscured by the butterflies, is located at the core of the sculpture. The visual diary is hand-bound in red book cloth. It is a visual diary of my journey since 2014. It contains 108 pages, each page representing one week. The images within correspond to the week.



Figure 22: Images within the Visual Diary

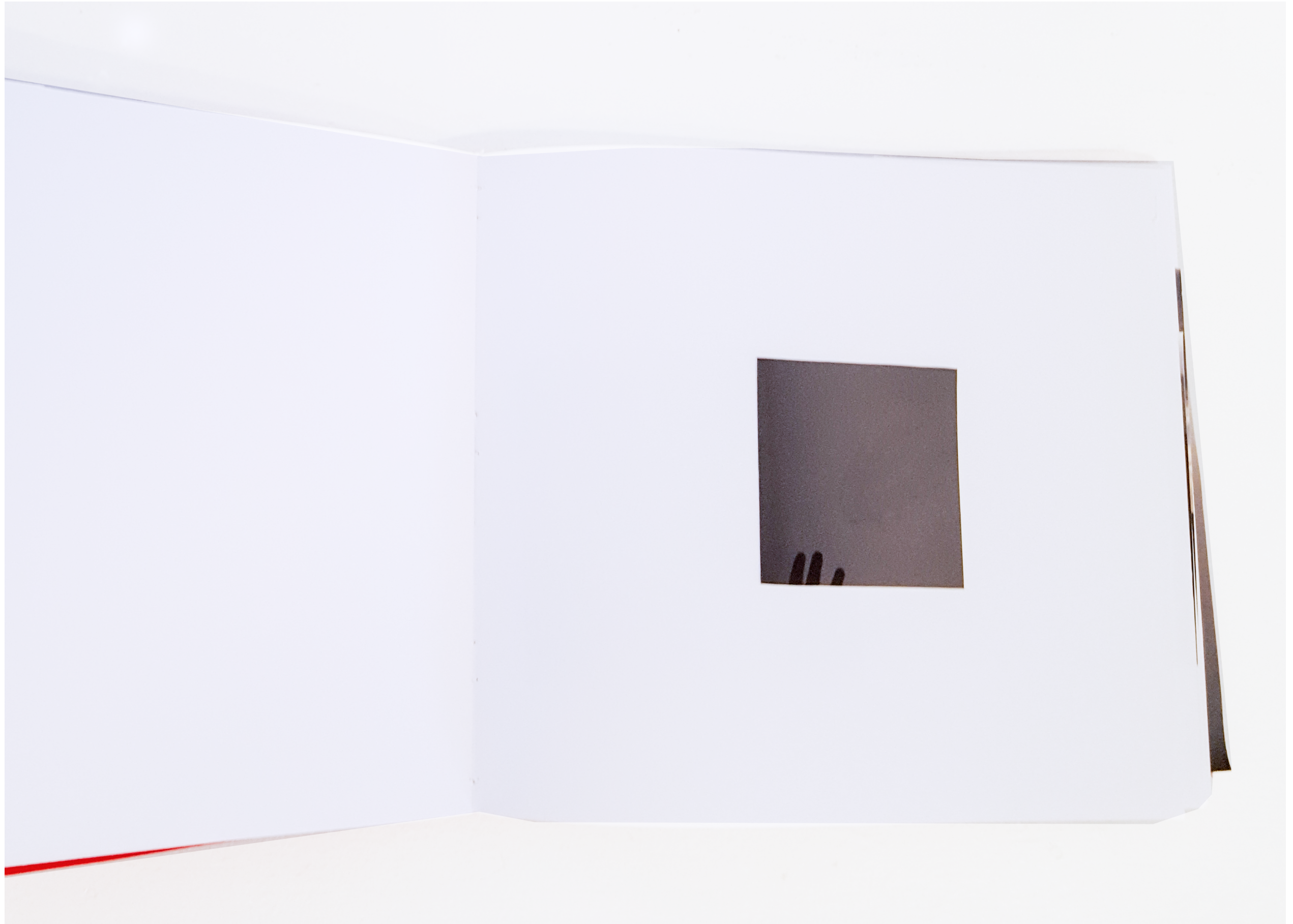


Figure 23: Images within the Visual Diary

Red is the colour of passion, energy and good fortune and luck in Chinese heritage, but it is also the colour I like the least. It presents me with a feeling of anger and hatred; it is a colour that I cannot fully grasp. However, it is a colour that I feel will balance this sculpture.

Perhaps the white and red, lightness and anxiety, are conflicting emotions in my subconscious and my anxiety towards memory loss and being able to pass down memories that formed my identity.

This sculpture morphed and transition three times to its current state (see Figures 24–25).

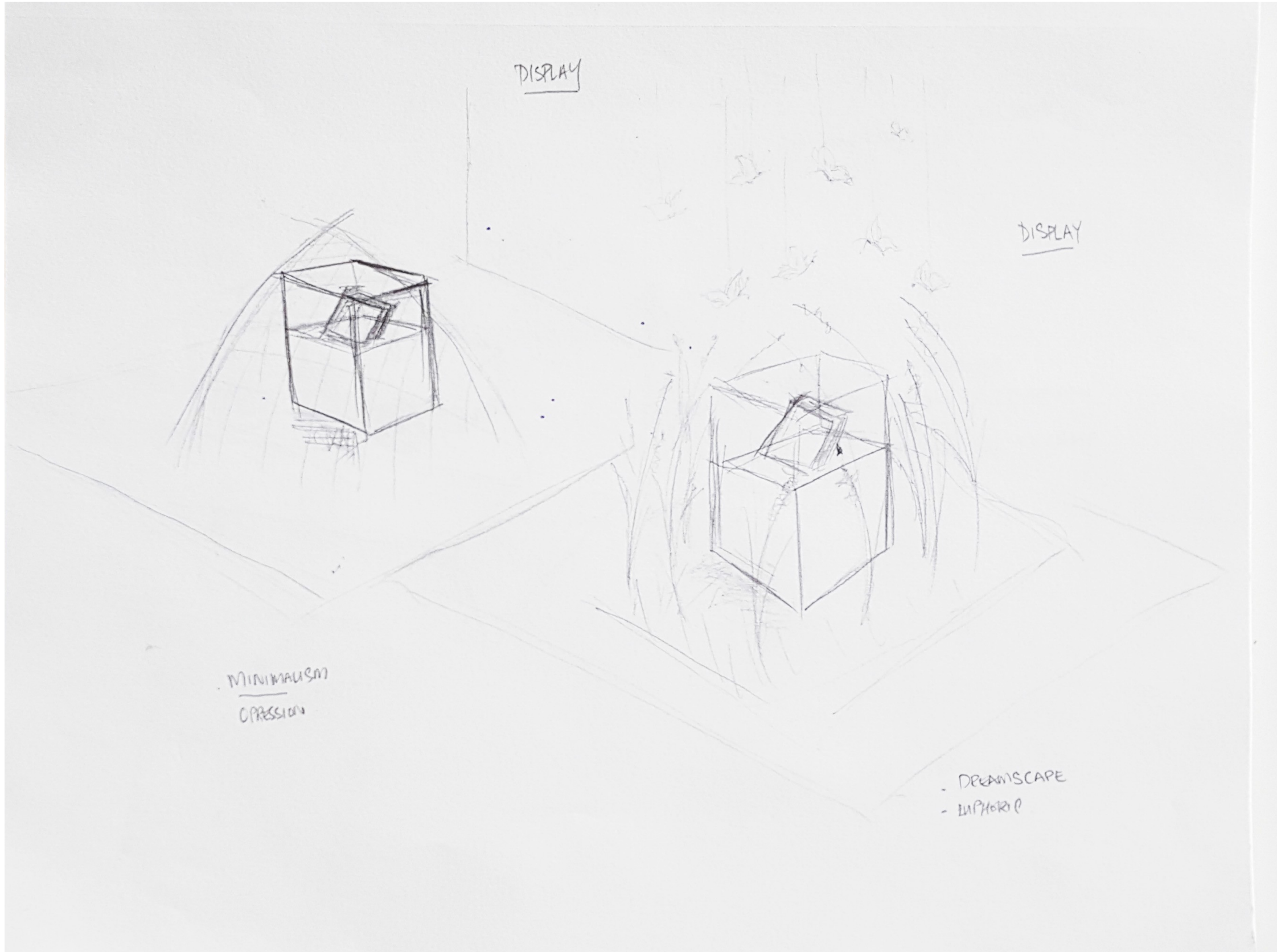


Figure 24: Sketches of the installation, version 1 and 2.

Melancholy. This was the mood of my first version.

The first vision, with the wires and butterflies surrounding the vitrine, felt oppressive, alluding to a sense of “being trapped.” However, this was not the dialogue or sentimentality I wished to evoke. This idea was short-lived.

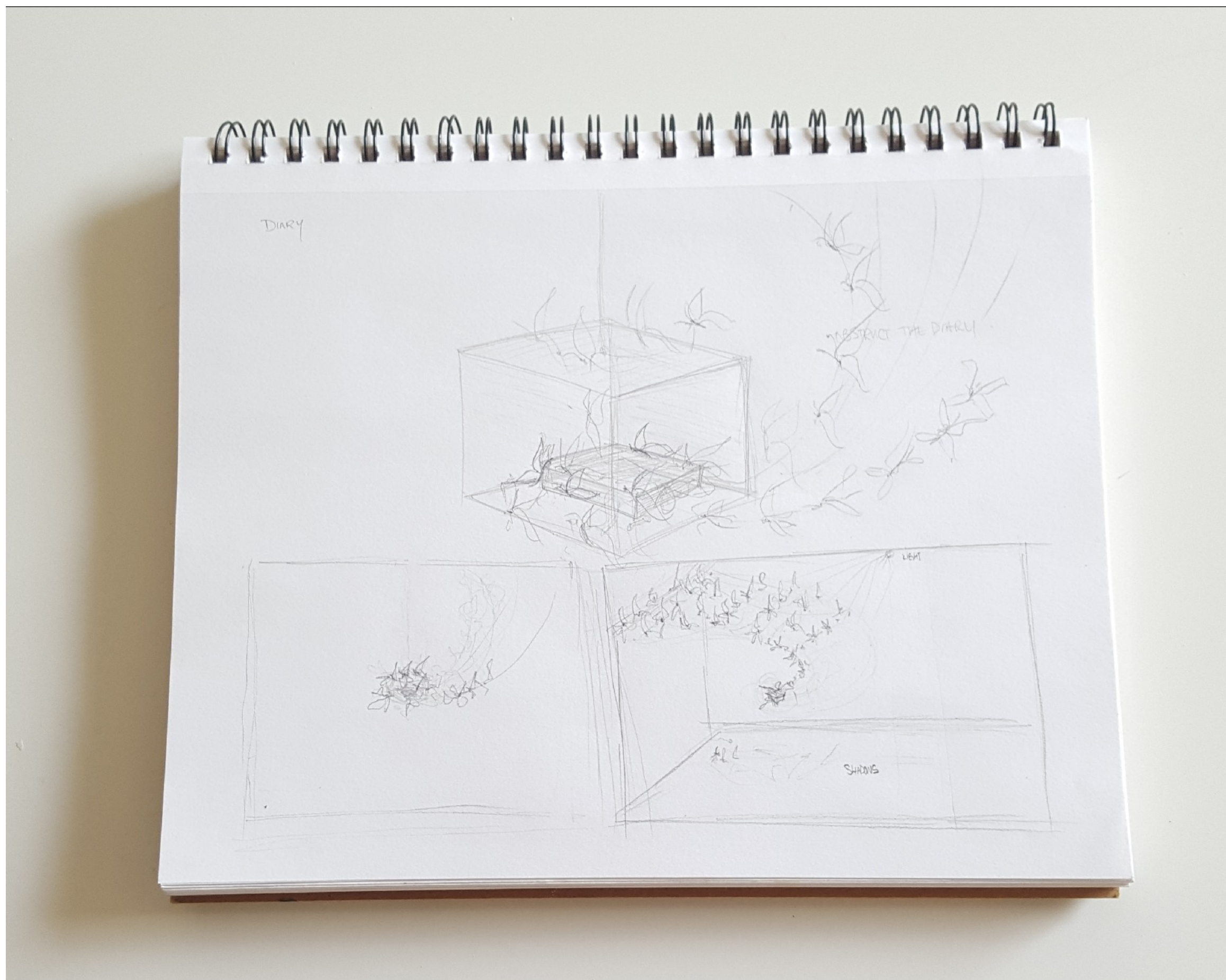


Figure 25: Sketches of the installation version 3.

Colour. A cornucopia of nature at its peak! This was the inspiration for the second revision.

The second intention carries a sense of euphoria: beautiful and vibrant butterflies floating in the air, with moss and grass inside and outside the book, creating gaps and holes within the diary itself. I quarrelled with this idea until the butterflies were painted.

Doll-like and artificial. These were the two immediate reactions that I had to this vision. This was not the atmosphere I wanted to create for this exhibition.

THE FINAL INSTALLATION

All three elements of the installation – the photographs, the sculpture and video projection – speak to the remembered history of its artist and creator. Together, they offer the idea of memory loss as a form of transformation – transformation through decay.

Transformation. Different aspects of life – growing, aging, gaining knowledge or memory loss – is all about transformation. Transformation is perhaps a kinder and more compassionate outlook of a degenerative (stigmatized) process like dementia. Similarly, it also represents my own artistic transformation during my residency at York University.

THE ONE-HUNDRED-AND-FIFTY-NINTH DAY

“Illness is the night side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place.” (Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*)

The sound of birds chirping after the rain.

How fitting – the melancholy atmosphere with a gentle sound of hope and happiness in its background.

Life begins and ends with stories. Your legacy or immortality continues beyond your death because of these stories and those that will share your story with others in the future.

Standing in the centre of the gallery, as a conductor, orchestrating the percussion with the melody of drills, chatters and footsteps.

Me. Orchestrating the location and the position of the butterflies.

One hundred and fifty-nine days, at the eighteenth hour, the exhibition is completed.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH ON PHOTOGRAPHY, MEMORY AND THE FAMILY ALBUM

INTRODUCTION

My thesis research is based on one key question: If the meaning of relationships, with people, objects, and ideas, relies solely on the memories that the person has of the meaning, what happens when a person's memory changes or no longer exists in a cognitive way?

In the 18th century, philosopher John Locke's memory-based theory of personal identity claimed that the cognitive recall of memories is crucial to personal identity, suggesting that one is no longer the same person when memory is lost (Uzgalis). Locke's contemporary, Thomas Reid, rejected this idea, and put forth his own theory of memory and identity, using the example of "The Brave Officer."¹⁶

Contemporary scholars and researchers, such as Christine Jonas-Simpson, Pia Kontos, Sherry Dupuis and Gail Mitchell, all affiliated with the Academy, propose that

¹⁶ The "Brave Officer" is an example that Reid uses to disprove Locke's memory theory. In this example, a young boy was flogged as punishment for stealing. As an adult, he remembered the flogging but not the reasons for it, only that he was brave. When he was much older and became a military general, he only remembered how brave he was as a boy, but had no memory of the punishment nor the reasons for the flogging. See Reid, Chapter IV, for the exact story.

memories and selfhood are relational and embodied, as well as cognitive. Their work at the York-UHN Academy on relational care and embodied selfhood are philosophically aligned with my work and intentions for this project.

My project, *Fragments, as I remember*, draws from Reid's theory and the philosophy of the Dotsa Bitove Wellness Academy on relational and embodied personhood. It is my contention that even when memory is impaired, one's true self still exists, although it is often misunderstood by others. This idea is particularly important when considering persons living with dementia, whose personhood still exists in relational ways (Mitchell 2012).¹⁷

ON PHOTOGRAPHY AND MEMORY

As Susan Sontag describes in her book *On Photography*, photography is a tool to “possess the past.”

As a photographer, telling stories through the use of images is essential to my artistic practice. Narration within vernacular photography is controversial in contemporary arts; Does a singular photograph tell a story? Does it tell a history? Can a photographer represent another person's vision, in particular someone's memory, especially someone who no longer has cognitive memories? I believe it can, but like many photographers before me, it is difficult for me to inject myself as an artist while constructing or photographing a scene and remain one

¹⁷Gail Mitchell, RN, PhD, is a professor of Nursing at York University, and former Director of the York-UHN Academy.

hundred percent authentic to the original vision. There are also many ethical issues to consider when one undertakes the representation of another person's story. On the other hand, however, recounting one's own history is fundamentally liberating.

The decisive moment as described by Henri Cartier-Bresson is the moment in which Sontag describes as a process in which one can possess the past: photography is "a way of imprisoning reality... One can't possess reality; one can possess (and be possessed by) images... one can't possess the present but one can possess the past." (Sontag 1977, 163)

These "possession," as described by Sontag, can be misinterpreted and misleading without text or oral narration, as seen in the artwork of Jo Spence (such as *Beyond Family Album*) as well as Duane Michals' work. Sequencing, cropping and narration are all important in storytelling, as seen in Michals' *Things are Queer*. There are multiple meanings in this work, depending on context and perspective, posing the question of narrative – fact or fiction? Therefore, when photographs are placed in a collection like *Things are Queer* or *Beyond Family Album* – or even a personal family album – the author, albeit artists or the amateur layperson, is creating a narrative through the use of photographs as a collection.

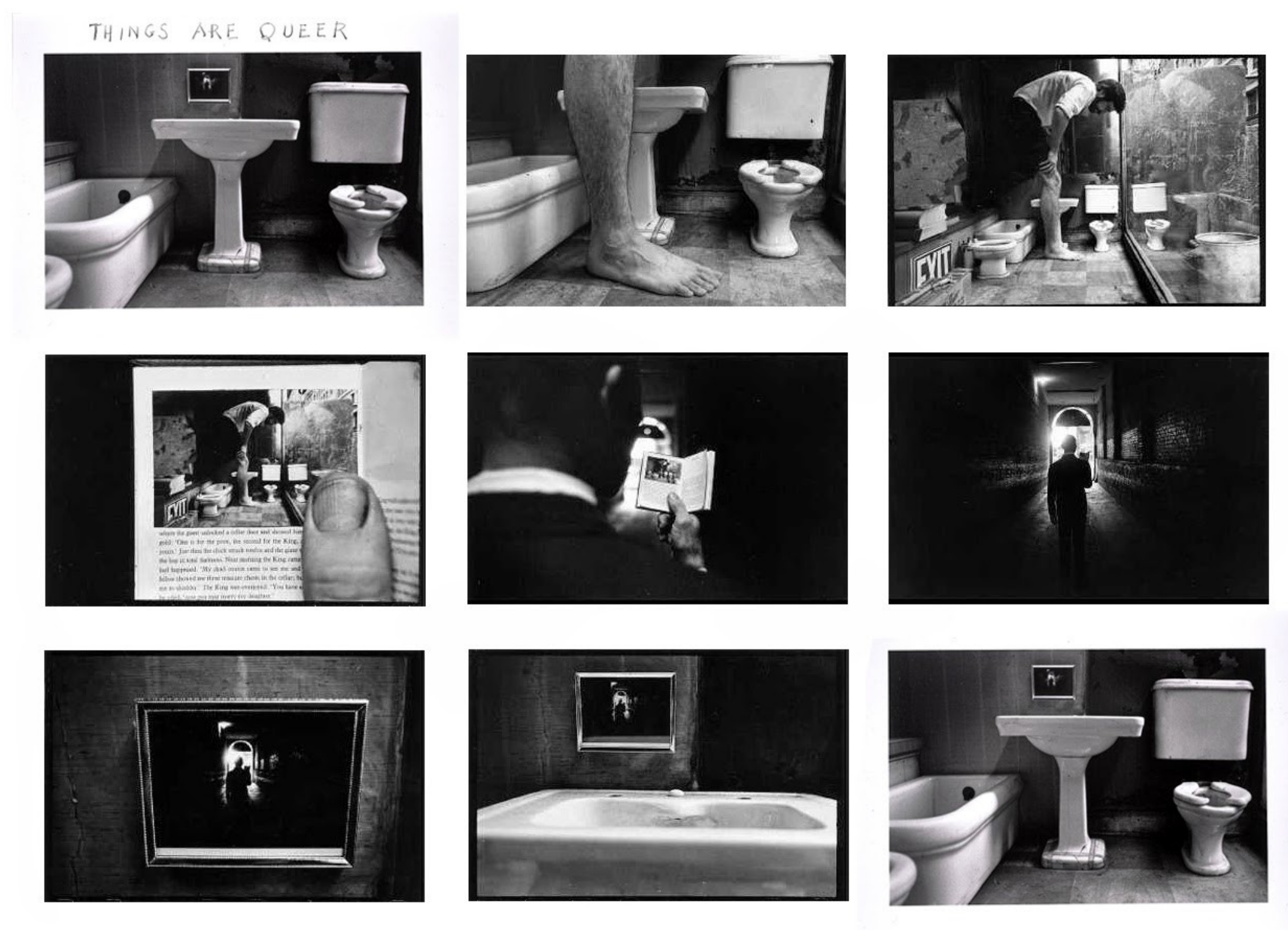


Figure 26: Duane Michals, *Things are Queer*

THE FAMILY ALBUM

There are many contemporary visual artists, such as Tacita Dean, Tamaryn Simon and Gerhard Richter, who work within the genre of the family album, sometimes crossing over into the representation of archives. However, there are two distinct artists, Jo Spence¹⁸ and Christian Boltanski¹⁹, who not only work with the idea of family albums but also discuss the gaps as described by Deborah Chambers, offering another layer of insight into the discussion of the family album.

¹⁸ Jo Spence is a British photographer who switched from being a commercial photographer to a documentary photographer later in her life, when she was diagnosed with cancer.

¹⁹ Christian Boltanski is a French artist, working mainly in the theme of self-representation.

A high level of *familiarity* is expected when decoding the subject matter which presumes distinctive modes of viewing. The family album is therefore located in oral interaction. The lack of captions and explanations to guide the viewer through the visual narrative is typical of this cultural form. Complex, and often contradictory, meanings encoded by the compiler are lost on non-family members (Chambers 2003, 96–7).

What are the roles of the creator and the album? How do contemporary artists use these roles to create their own narratives in the discussion of family albums? Imagination and fabrication then become a common practice, especially in found photographs. However, when applied to the album as an artefact itself, one can argue that authorship, from the perspective of remembered history, is critical to the understanding of a private album. This makes the works of Jo Spence, such as *Beyond Family Album* and *Picture of Health*, and Christian Boltanski's *Ten Photographic Portraits of Christian Boltanski*, 1946–1964 and *San Sacci*, worthy of further exploration. These examples use a combination of found photographs and personal images and re-contextualize them to discuss the gaps and misinformation within family albums, and underscore the need for narration (oral or otherwise). If the function of family album, as described by Martha Langford and Matte Sandbye, is to construct an inquiry or dialogue with one another, then the gaps become an essential element in the psychological inquiry inherent in Deborah Chamber's notion of

“gaps.”²⁰ Are these gaps driven by social and psychological reasons, as suggested by Sandbye?

What are the roles of artists in this discussion, and can we bridge the understanding of family albums with the theory of self portraits²¹ to further understand the artists through their work? These are all important questions in relation to my thesis.

In *Beyond Family Album*, Spence creatively juxtaposes her own photographs with found photographs, often purchased at flea markets and antique shops, to create an artificial family album (Dennett). The album contains black and white images,²² text and captions, graphically organized in a fourteen-page spread, similar to layouts often found in magazines. Her intent is to walk you through her life from childhood to the present moment (Figures 20–21) by recreating the aesthetic of a family album. It is obvious through this approach that she is not interested in the photographs themselves, but rather in merely using the images as a backdrop to discuss the importance of verbal and non-verbal annotations to complete her family history. At a glance, the images capture one’s curiosity, luring the viewer into the page, leading to the text that dominates the spread. The central role of the text is to highlight the importance of narration. The spread is divided into sections, key moments in Spence’s life that were not well documented – such as her

²⁰Deborah Chambers, in *Family as Place: Family Photograph Albums and the Documentation of Public and Private Spaces*, notes that the gaps and missing images can offer psychological, political and social details of the author and their surroundings.

²¹ Self-portraits in relation to self-presentation theory as described by Crozier and Greenhalgh is a method that one would use to create an external impression of oneself to others. (Crozier 29-33)

²²*Beyond Family Album* is sometimes shown as colour photographs, but are seen as black and white in Jo Spence’s *Memory and Archive* website. I will reference the project found on the website in this paper.

childhood as an evacuee during the war and her estrangement from her mother and father during her teenage years (Dennett 125).

As discussed by Kuhn in her book *Family Secrets*, “telling stories about the past, our past, is a key moment in the making of our selves. To the extent that memory provides their raw material, such narratives of identity are shaped as much by what is left out of the account – whether forgotten or repressed – as by what it actually told.” *Beyond Family Album* questions the function and lack of annotation of family albums through an introspective inquiry into her childhood. Spence includes images that are “underrepresented aspects of family life, including divorce, illness and strained relationships (particularly mother and daughter). In these works, Spence seeks strategies of self representation that opposed the prevailing orthodoxies and normalised codes of behaviour that were expected of her” (Vasey 2015).



Figure 27: Family Album, 1979 Jo Spence Archive



Figure 28: Family Album 3, 1979 Jo Spence Archive. Close-up view of spread #3.

Boltanski's *Sans-Souci* is an artist book with black and white photographs that have the aesthetic of photographs in the 1930s era. Boltanski, in describing the project, says, "when I later compiled a photo album, I didn't show my photos of my friend, Michel Durand, partly as his surname was Durand, the most common name in France, and partly as he came from a normal, petit-bourgeois family as normal as can be. But of course no family is normal" (*Les Vies Possibles*).

Boltanski's project is made of all constructed images, and it is clear that the deceit/fiction is intentional, with humour as his strategy. While these projects speak to the paradoxical nature of photographs, this can be extended to the discussion of the potential lies and misinformation (intentional or otherwise) when recounting one's past history. In contrast, *Beyond Family Album* underlines the importance of oral history through questioning the role of the family album without accompanying text, annotations or an oral narration. Langford's thought process, highlighted in her book *Suspended Conversation*, would agree with both Boltanski and Spence in terms of the gaps within the family albums. Langford would argue, however, that these gaps create a platform for further inquiry and dialogue, especially those in the private sphere. Langford states that "our photographic memories are used in a performative oral tradition" (Langford 2008, VIII). When organized in chronological sequence, it then turns into an album, something Langford describes as an "epic and anecdotal dimension" (Langford 2008, 199). By highlighting the importance of oral narrative in relation to family albums, *Beyond Family Album* also points out how albums are idealized versions of the "truth," purposely voiding moments of conflict and sorrow. However, concurring with Chambers in *Family as Place: Family Photograph Albums and the Documentation of Public and Private Spaces*, I believe that at

times these gaps within the family album can serve as a witness or study of ethnography, also reiterated by Langford in *Suspended Conversation*, through her discussion of Greta Chambers,²³ an interesting investigation of family history as self-portraits.



Figure 29: Christian Boltanski, *Sans-Souci*. Photo: Grahame Gallery

Both *Sans-Souci* and *Ten Portraits* presents to the audience an unconventional form of the family album. Both claim to be a documentation of Christian Boltanski, but in fact they are fictitious, using others to represent his “normal” childhood as in *Ten Portraits* and his later “normal” life in *Sans-Souci*. Knowing his overall work and his strategies in dissemination makes this a great piece of artwork, in contrast to some critics of his work who describe it as “cheap sentimentality and opportunism” (Ruchel-Stockmans 2006, 3). It also offers insights into his psyche and identity as described by theorists such as Langford.

²³ For the story of Mrs. Greta Chambers, and how the gaps bounded the family, see p. 156.

Each of us creates our own sort of mythology, a sort of dream life, in a way, an emblematic life. In my early work, I referred a lot to my childhood memories, yet strangely I never said anything about my childhood, which is very strange. I chose to talk about a perfectly normal childhood, an almost interchangeable one, I made this little book of photos of different children, who are all Christian Boltanski I had a strange childhood as after the war, our house had become a madhouse. I first went out alone at 18. We were always together sleeping in the same room. A sort of terror hung over the family, a very strange anxiety-provoking atmosphere. Yet when I talk about my childhood I deliberately spoke about a normal one. (*Les Vies Possibles*)

If we contextualize Langford's logic, then "the aggregate structure of the album then comes anything but random, meaning is nested in clusters and adjacencies that leap to the eye" (Langford 2008, 199). As for Spence and Boltanski's artwork, we can conclude that an album, along with an artist's works, can be a form of self-portrait. It is with this in mind that I situate the concept of visual diary and photographs in the context of the family album and related theories in my exhibition. Spence and Boltanski also explore the gaps in family albums by highlighting the construction of history and the ambiguous boundary between fact and fiction.

GAPS IN THE FAMILY ALBUM AND MEMORIES

The sound of the familiar floors creaking, the smell of my mom's cooking as the door swings open. My father opens the door to greet us with a smile.

“Baby!” An enduring word that my father would call my children.

Drinking my tea, a forty-year-old Pu-er tea that my father bought in China, looking through my parents' family album. This is when the idea of incorporating the family album came to light. The images are familiar, but the memories are vague, as if I was a passenger with a sense of being a voyeur. The album contains many gaps, missing memories that are vividly ingrained in my mind. These memories reflect my personality as a child and as an adult. If history can be seen through the family album, then my family album contains many moments that are underrepresented – such as my life between the ages of ten and thirteen, when I contracted Bell's Palsy. I cannot rewrite history; however, I could bring history forward by creating these moments and then incorporating them into my family album.

There are many theories on how the brain deals with the past; it may vary based on personal experience, upbringing and how one manages stress. For example, a common reaction of victims and/or survivors of traumatic experiences, such as war, is a tendency to block the memory of that specific experience. This a method of coping with the stress it creates, a method called “repressed memory” (Hertel & Reisberg, 2004).

My own example of the clarinet illustrates these “gaps” (e.g., lack of photographic representation) as described by Chambers. For Chambers, it is through these gaps that one can see the nature and tendencies within a private family album. For example,

The burden of domestic work experienced by women tends to be systematically discounted within the selection of themes for photographic albums, emphasizing the idea of the family home as a ‘leisure’ unit. This means the pleasurable moments of heightened activity are generally celebrated. Housework has few celebratory qualities, so women collude in its dismissal from family photography’s range of themes. (Chambers 2003, 101)

The Clarinet is one of those gaps.

The ice cream truck is another tricky one. The memory is not necessarily of the truck itself, but the combination of the warmth of the sun and the sound of the music, making the key element the sunset. I revisited the same location later in life, as I remember it to be parked along the street near Greenwood Park in the east end of Toronto.

Waiting patiently for a perfect day. I set out to visit the park and place my camera so as to capture how I see it in my mind.

Sitting patiently, waiting for the sunset to appear. Yes – this is the colour, the glow I see in my mind.

With the click of the shutter, I recapture the same sunset as I remember. This image completes my ice cream truck diorama.

SUMMARY

“In this connection it is finally worth noting that the intense subjectivity demanded for understanding such photographs is perhaps why some of the more successful projects in affective terms have been framed as art works – for instance, Jannane Al Ani’s family history piece *Untitled 1 & 2* [‘I Once Knew a Man’] (1996), or community histories such as the still and video oral portrait installation on Britain’s first Yemeni community *The Last of the Dictionary Men* by Tina Grahivi and Youssef Nabil (Baltic Exchange, Newcastle upon Tyne 2008). Both these works used photographic images, oral histories and the affective sound of the human voice to articulate affective histories in gallery spaces, yet remained profoundly ‘photographic’ in their values. To communicate such values is the challenge for museums.” (Edwards 2010, 30)

I concur with Elizabeth Edwards in the above quotation. It is a challenge to create a format and atmosphere that is palpable and accessible, and that can include photographs, in speaking of memory loss. Inspired by Cathy Caruth’s question in the article “Recapturing the Past: Introduction,” I ask myself: How does one capture trauma in the sincerest way when their memory is blocked? Is it truly blocked? For me, this line of questioning led to the creation of the dioramas of memories that, until now, have not been represented by any object or photograph, and my turning these memories into a concrete form. The dioramas, and the installation as a whole, became the vehicle to turn memory into my active reality.

I now return to my key research question: If the meaning of relationships, with people, objects, and ideas, relies solely on the memories that the person has of the

meaning, what happens when a person's memory changes or no longer exists in a cognitive way?

The above discussion of photography, memory and the family album is relevant to this question because our relationship with our world is about people and bonding with others. Consider a wedding, or the birth of your baby, for example. Time passes, and the specific memory becomes vague and distant; however, the photographs of these moments can elicit and conjure our senses, emotions and even smell. The family album can sometimes, as with my own family albums, serve as a mini-history lesson, bringing the viewer back into the 1800s and what life would be like then. One can even look at the traits, social patterns and personal resemblance of our ancestors. These bonds build relationship to the past, present and possible future. These relationships and bonds can even exist without the storyteller being present. One can live and remember the curators of these stories with photographs and family albums.

CONCLUSION: 159 DAYS

As a photographer, I see myself as a storyteller, finding narratives in our everyday life and bringing them forward to the viewer. This thesis exhibition contains many childhood experiences that are neither captured through a photograph nor triggered through objects; rather, I transform these memories into remembered history using a photo album and photographs.

Scared. Nervous. Anxious. Excited. Joyous.

These are the emotions regarding my own life's memories and my ambition to produce a project that not only speaks of dementia, but also reflects my own emotions towards memory loss and how memory can transcend time.

The exhibition is a platform on which I can discuss these social conditions through creative practice. It is a place and gathering where I can offer my views in a non-judgmental way by creating a space to allow the viewers to enter my thoughts, concerns and hopes through the discussion of memory loss.

The gallery is now transformed into three memory cells, each containing specific elements pertaining to its specific cell: constructed memories, documented memories and conceptual memories. The viewers will weave in and out of my memories.

My desire is for the viewers to see a more compassionate and non-judgmental picture of memory loss, and perhaps even activate some of their own childhood memories.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: THE ORIGINAL LETTER FROM THE LEWITT COLLECTION.

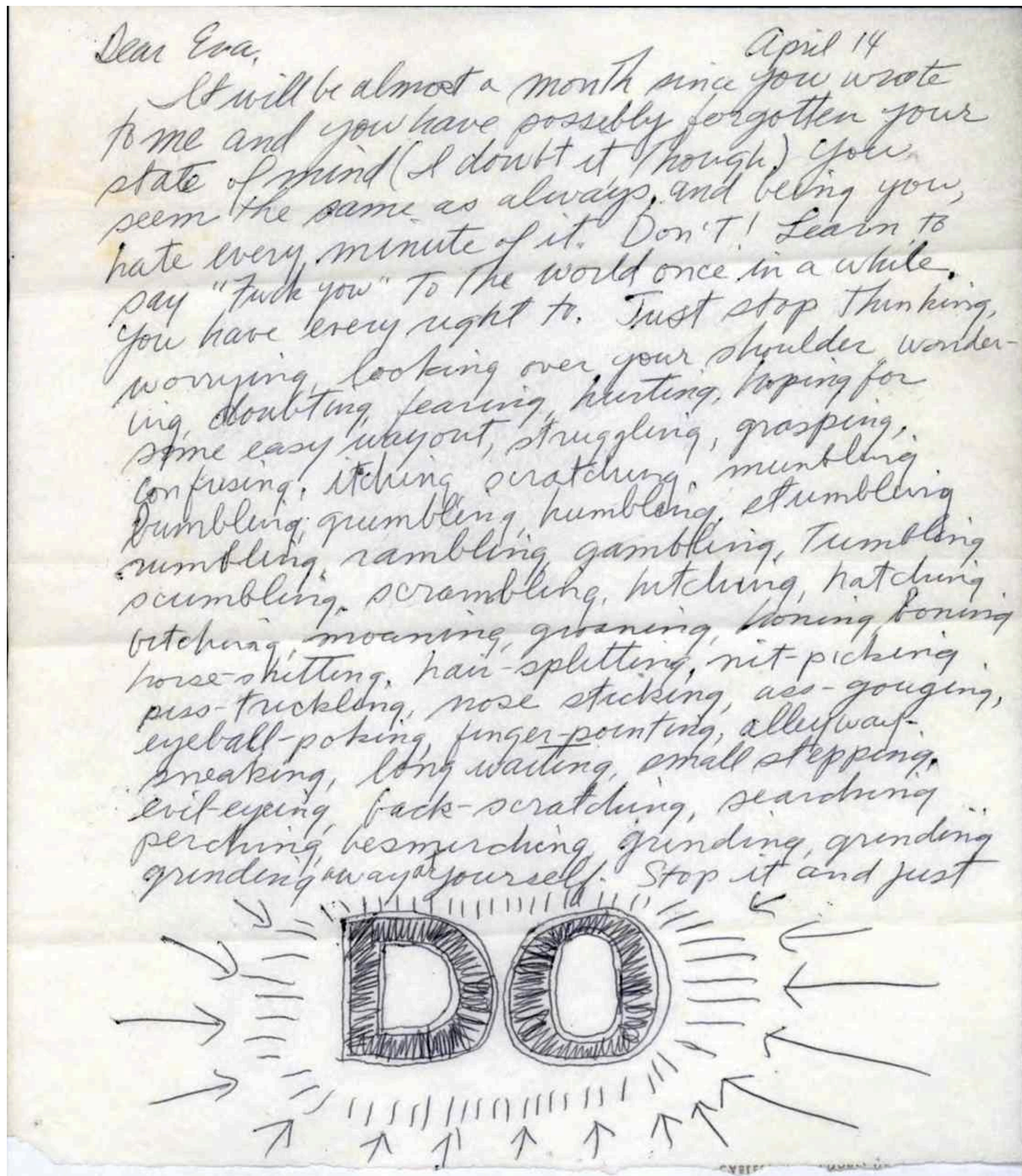


Figure 30: Page 1. Source: Art21 Blog

From your description, and from what ②
I know of your previous work and
your ability, the works you are doing
sounds very good "Drawings - clean - clear
cut crazy like machines, larger, bolder...
real nonsense." That sounds fine,
wonderful - real nonsense. Do more.
more nonsensical, more crazy, more
machines, more breasts, penises, cunts,
whatever - make them abound with
nonsense. Try and tickle something
inside you, your "weird humor". You
belong in the most secret part of you.
Don't worry about cool, make your
own uncool. make your own, your own
~~real~~ world. if you fear, make it work
for you - draw & paint your fear - anxiety.
And stop worrying about big, deep things
such as "to decide on a purpose and
way of life, a constant approach to
even some impossible end or even an
imagined end." You must practice being
stupid, dumb, unthinking, empty. Then
you will be able to:

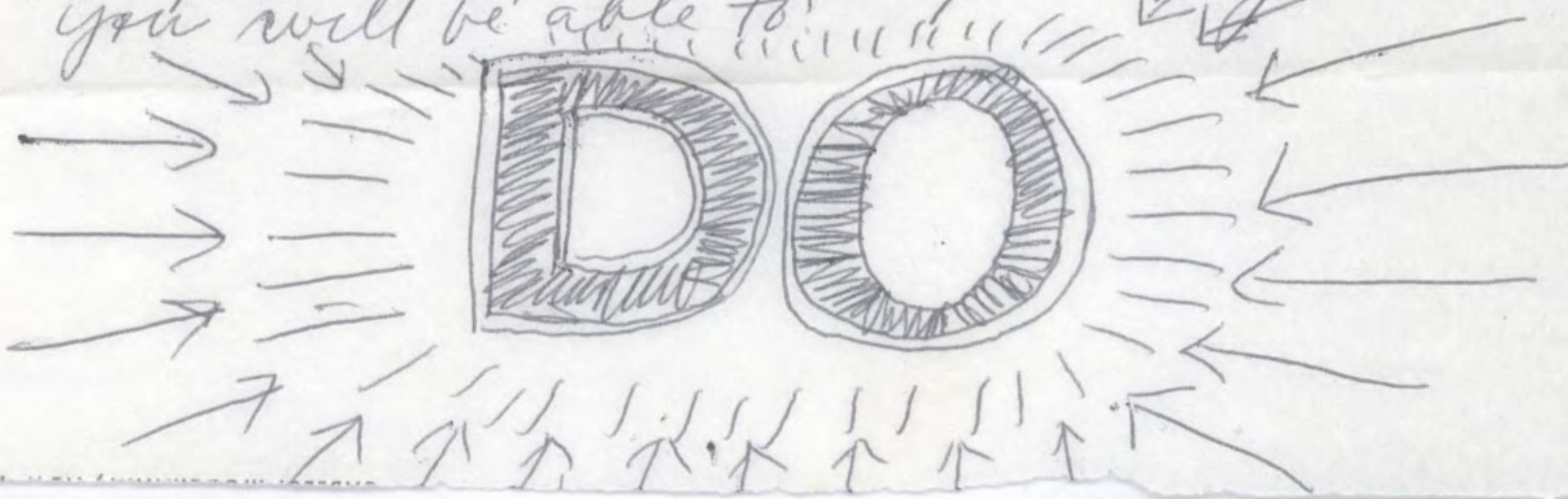


Figure 31: Page 2. Source Art21 Blog.

I have much confidence in you and (3)
even though you are tormenting your-
self. The work you do is very good. Try
to do some BAD work - the worst you
can think of and see what happens but
mainly relax and let everything go to
hell - you are not responsible for the
world - you are only responsible for
your work - so DO IT. And don't think
that your work has to conform to any
preconceived form, idea or flavor. It
can be anything you want it to be. But
if life would be easier for you if you
stopped working - Then stop. Don't punish
yourself. However, I think that it is so
deeply engrained in you that it would
be easier to



Figure 32: Page 3. Source Art21 Blog.

It seems I do understand your attitude ④
somewhat, anyway, because I go through
a similar process every so often. I have
an "agonizing Reappraisal" of my work and change
everything as much as possible - and hate
everything I've done, and try to do something
entirely different and better. Maybe that kind
of process is necessary to me, pushing me
on and on. The feeling that I can do better
than that shit I just did. Maybe you need
your agony to accomplish what you do.
And maybe it goes on to do better.
But it is very painful I know. It would
be better if you had the confidence just to
do the stuff and not even think about
it. Can't you leave the "world" and "ART" alone
and also quit fondling your ego. I know
that you (or anyone) can only work so much
and the rest of the time you are left with
your thoughts. But when you work or
before you work you have to empty
your mind and concentrate on what you
are doing. After you do something it is
done and that's that. After a while you
can see some are better than others but
also you can see what direction you are

Figure 33: Page 4. Source Art21 Blog.

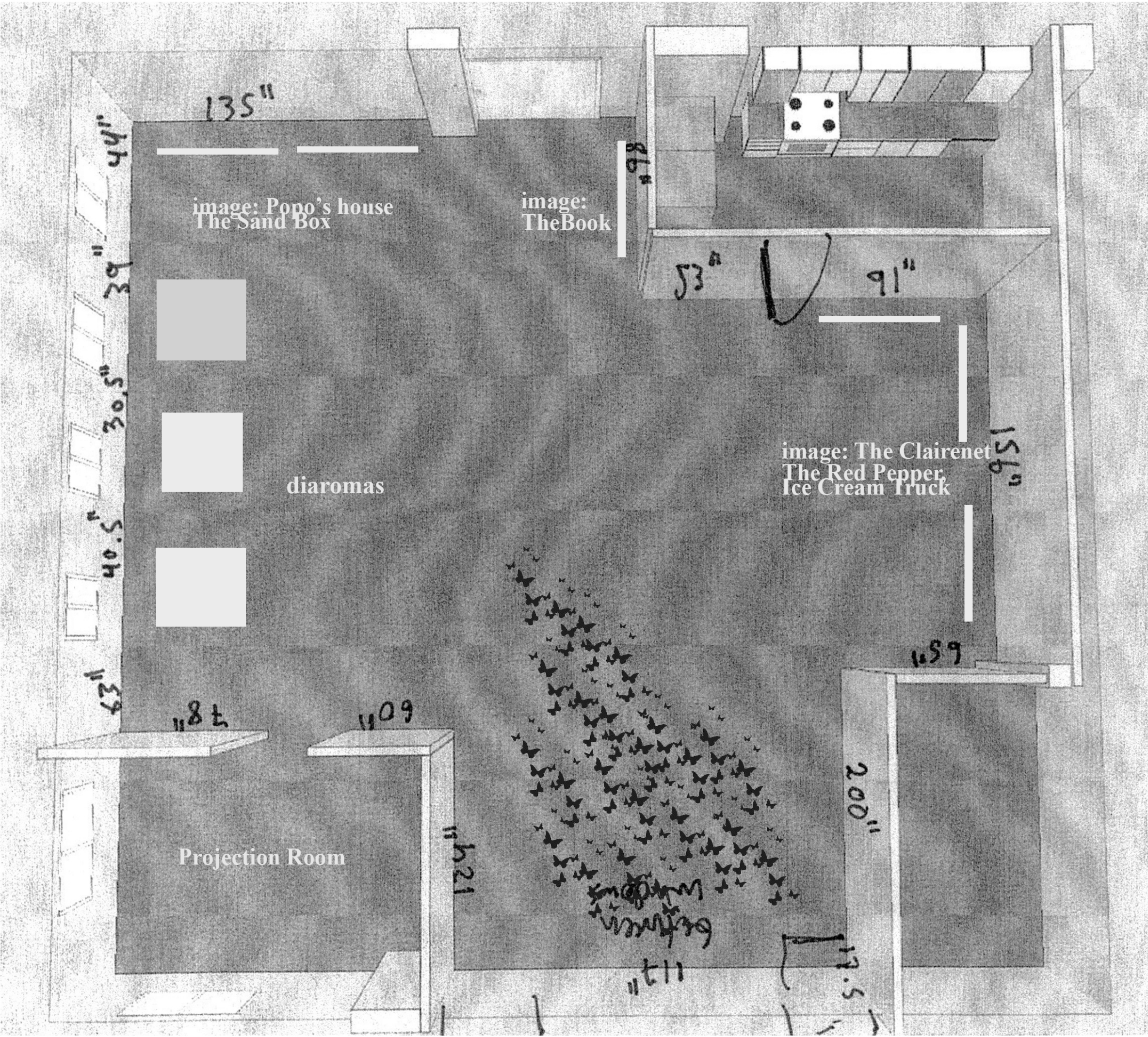
going. I'm sure you know all that. (S)
You also must know that you don't have
to justify your work - not even to yourself.
Well, you know I admire your work greatly
and can't understand why you are so bothered
by it. But you can see the next ones & I can't.
You also must believe in your ability. I think
you do. So try the most outrageous things you
can - shock yourself. You have at your power
the ability to do anything.

I would like to see your work
and will have to be content to wait until
Aug or Sept. I have seen ^{photos of} some of Tom's
new things at Lucy's. They are very
impressive - especially the ones with
the more rigorous form; the simpler
ones. I guess he'll send some more
later on. Let me know how the
shows are going and that kind of
stuff.

My work has changed since you
left and it is much better. I will
be having a show May 4-29 at the Daniels
gallery 17 ~~E~~ 64th St (where Emmerich was). I wish
you could be there. Much Love to you both
Sol

Figure 34: Page 5. Art21 Blog.

APPENDIX B: EXHIBITION LAYOUT

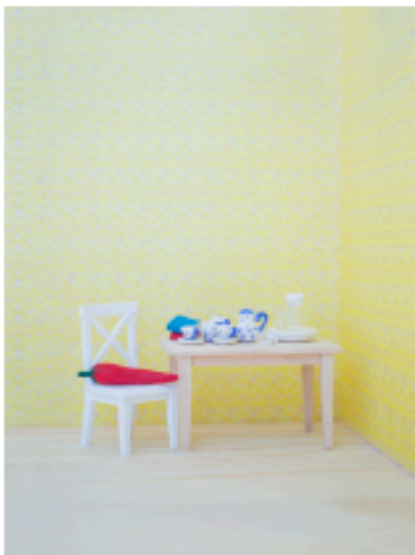


IX GALLERY
416.461.3233

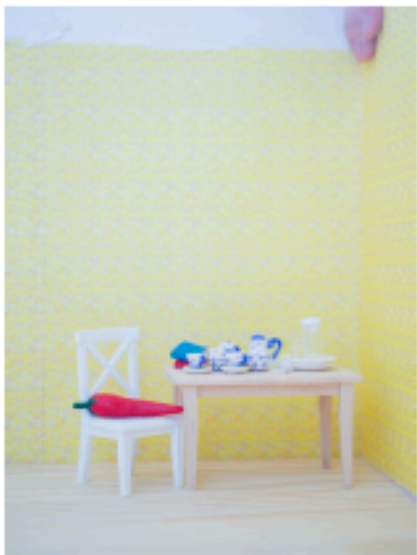
APPENDIX C: CONTACT SHEET – DIORAMAS



_DSC1589



final_pepper_30by40



_DSC1592



_DSC1596



_DSC1597



final_sandbox_30by40rgb



final_sandbox_layers



_DSC1599



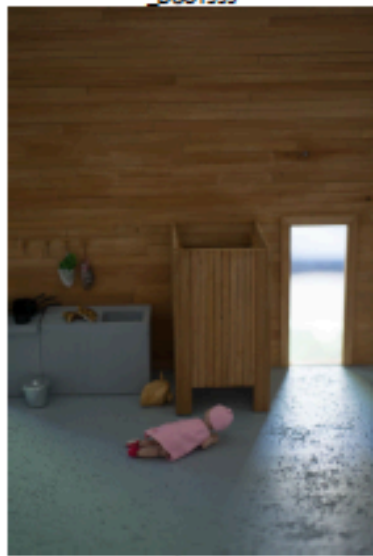
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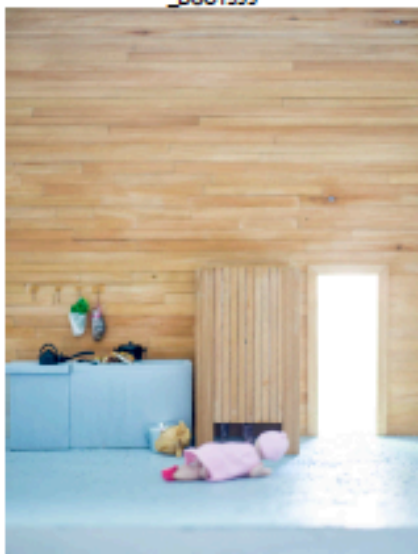
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_DSC1602



_DSC1605



_DSC1611



_DSC1617



_DSC1619



_DSC1620



_DSC1621



_DSC1494



final_redbook_pink_merged



final_redbook_black



_D8C1504



_D8C1533



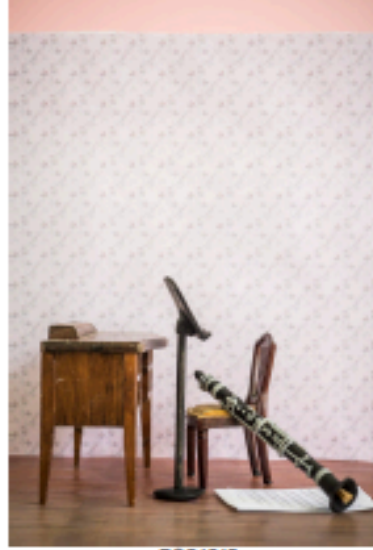
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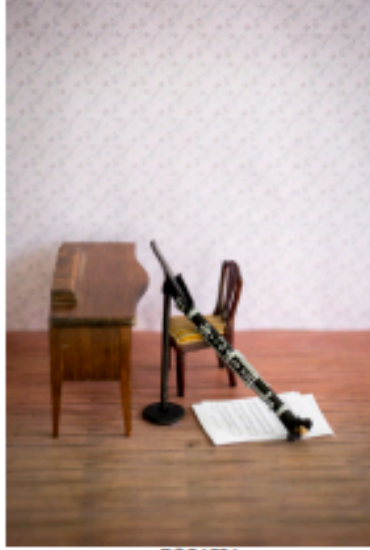
_D8C1511



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_D8C1513



_D8C1522

APPENDIX D: THE MAKING OF THE INSTALLATION



