Quilts, Snapdragons, and Spoons

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines and shares my experiences during my time at OCAD, as I search for comfort and grounding through self-reflective awareness of objects and my physical surroundings. In the past few years, I have found in increasingly difficult to balance my mental health between coming to terms with adulthood, the looming threat of environmental collapse, the pressures of hyper-connectivity via the internet, and most recently, the isolation of COVID-19. The purpose of this research paper is to add my contribution to the archive of experience surrounding art and wellness and relay the methods and processes of self-soothing and grounding that I have discovered in my journey. I return to childhood memories and anecdotes that have defined my relationship to tangible materials like food, craft, furniture, collectables, and toys. Through research and studio investigations, this thesis conveys the importance of interaction with the physical world, promoting the adoption of daily tactile processes and self-reflection. Using artmaking as an analytic tool, I consider the relationships behind each object and the stories that have continued to influence the way I exist in the world today. I consider the past, my present, and how I might take steps towards the future.

Acknowledgements and Dedications

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Chapter One:

Introduction

I began my time at OCAD University in September of 2020 having just completed my BFA program at Western University in May. I had lost my last school exhibition, my remaining time with my studio space, and the chance to walk the stage in hat and gown to the COVID-19 pandemic. Like so many people, I assumed the crisis would all come and go, and life would continue as normal. As I approach the end of my time at OCAD University, having stepped inside my program's building all of three times, I have been working on accepting that my time here was not the experience I expected two years ago when I was sending in my application. Without access to a studio space or my cohort, and mindful of the trials that come with isolation, I am stunned to be approaching the end of this project. The strange times of the pandemic pushed me into directions I would not have expected. More than ever, I turned in cycles around my home and tried to self-soothe with the space and the objects to which I am bound. I tried new things and although I often felt disconnected from my peers, I held on to the connections I had tighter than ever. My work became entwined with the ways I found comfort and grounding when things seemed disastrous.

As a twenty-five-year-old trying to make sense of the realities of life, I have found it increasingly difficult to find balance and maintain my mental health. As a constantly confused and depressed teen focused so wholly on my angst, I could not imagine being an adult and having to live my life beyond what I knew then. The adult world into which I stepped was one run by fast-paced, productivity obsessed capitalism with the ever-looming threat of total climate collapse. However, I am no longer a teenager. I know now that it is my responsibility to find a way to care for myself. Being a self-destructive angry kid is not sustainable and it is in my best interest to find ways to feel whole and love being alive despite the conditions around me. It is within this context that I return to my own anecdotes and memories of childhood and adolescence to find comfort and grounding. I am looking for ways to solidify my existence by

finding connections to the materials that have defined my life and my relationships. By understanding the foundation on which I was built, I will better understand how to keep building upward.

Through my artistic practice, I am reflecting on the environments and moments that shaped me and reengaging with them through painting and quilting. I am contextualizing my current relationship to the objects that bring me comfort by considering the circumstances that originally brought them into my life. My research engages with nostalgia, sentimentality, and healing by grounding myself within the physical world. I foster conversation amongst my family, reminiscing together and sifting through photo albums and storage as I look for forgotten memories and references. In this search, details of the past resurface, and my memories of spaces and times long gone become crisper and more alive. As I consider pieces and practices in relation to people, feelings, and periods of my life a web of connecting points begins to arise. Through painting and quilting I manipulate the imagery into a visual representation of those webs. I aim to communicate that these objects, despite how random they can seem, have meaning to me and often reflect how I am grappling with complex feelings. For example, when I think of my grandmother, I think of the foods she cooked, her stuffed skunk collection she made sure to bring to her retirement home, her pet budgies (always named Peter), her quilts, and the souvenir spoons she left me when she passed. I will consider these memories and objects for the remainder of my life turns because of her influence on me. By recording them in my studio practice I speak to a complex relationship of grief, love, tradition, comfort, and much more. I investigate how my memory of objects can act as a reminder of my values and what has been and is still important to me. When immersing myself in the stories behind keepsakes, foods, collections and more, I am looking for spaces – symbolic and physical replete with things of meaning - for me to re-enter the narrative and continue a tradition or commemorate a feeling

through creating. In doing so, I add onto my existing relationship with those objects and leaving room for the next time I return to them.

I entered this program with an understanding of art history acquired from my time at Western University. While working towards my BFA, I took courses that attempted to summarize the canon of art history, as well as those which focused more intently on changes which occurred in 19th and 20th centuries. My professors introduced me to an array of painters, old and new, to consider in relation to my own developing practice. I have carried that knowledge with me into my graduate program. I contextualize my work alongside the history of still-life and interior painting, studying how objects and materials have been represented and how I relate to makers before me. As I turn towards quilting, I think about the history of the quilt and how my grandmothers domestic Mennonite traditions translate to my own interest in quilt-making as art practice.

My thesis follows my journey as a young adult dealing with transitional periods and the struggle of mental health through a lens of artmaking and objects. I ponder on the histories tied to the items around me and the practices that lead to their creation and entrance into my space. My research question is as follows: How might reflection upon objects from my childhood and a conscious engagement with my physical surroundings in everyday life and artmaking support a turn towards better health, wellbeing, and fulfillment? What can be gained by entangling myself with the matter all around me? The goal of my work during the creation of this thesis has been to contribute to the archive of experiences surrounding mental health, art, and self-reflection. I offer how I have been personally traversing an internal and analytical journey of identity. In the past few years I have explored a range of subjects, practices, and materials that have all served in helping find comfort and grounding in my daily life. While my experiences may not be universal, I encourage my peers and community to join me in pondering the intimate ways

materials have influenced and enriched their lives and how might they continue to offer that support.

In Chapter Two I introduce the methodologies that structured my research and making. I explain how I think through making and the types of idea that begin an investigation. What drives to me create is often self-reflective and this section of writing emphasizes the autoethnographic angle of my practice. I fight for sentimentality, deal with the ideological, cultural, and admittedly personal complexities of 'kitsch', reminisce with loved ones, and detail my search for means to maintain the relationships and memories I have with the physical world. In chapter three, I describe the theoretical frameworks and literature that has supported and inspired me on my journey. I describe what material culture means to me and discuss the ways existing writers have shaped my thought process in their own approaches to an object centered way of thinking. I focus on topics of nostalgia and personal history, entering the world of coming-of-age literature as I consider the transition to adulthood as a major factor in the creation of my research question. In Chapter Four, I offer a look at my studio work and reflect on the steps I have taken in the body of work I present for this thesis. I meditate on what painting is capable of within my practice, outline how I discovered a love of quilting, consider the histories, and compare what each medium does within my realm of thinking. Finally, in Chapter Five I conclude my paper and present my findings and feelings on the completion of my thesis.

Chapter 2

Methodology

My methodology in artmaking is spearheaded by my desire to use art as an agent of personal and social change. Art has the power to aid me as I become aware of issues within myself and occurrences in my daily life. I am spurred to make art when dealing with feelings of homesickness, nostalgia, or melancholy. When I am feeling lost, I find comfort in memory and investigating the stories that made me act the way I do and love the things I love. My discovery of subject matter and topics is organic, arising through my own curiosity, conversations with family, and a conscious awareness of my daily surroundings. I've found that the materials which move me is create are often what I need most at that moment and not something I can plan. The pieces of information that evoke the most poignant feelings, those that reveal a connection to the world that created me, are often dug up accidentally. In my search, I experience chance encounters with details that feel strikingly important. Moving away from my childhood home made me suddenly aware of the habits and traditions my family maintain in cooking. While searching for a way to replicate those familiar comforts I dug up old recipes and found inspiration in the quirks and comforts my family indulges in. Sometimes I feel like an archivist of my own history. Through the process of making, I record stories and feelings that have been lost to time, returning to them as the newest version of myself, capable of analysing where they sit in the timeline of my past. With this contextualization it becomes clear why they matter to me and how they can continue to support me today. I have found autoethnography and practice-based research to be the methodological frameworks that best suit my work and the ones it requires to be accomplished. These practices allow me to contextualize my work by self-reflecting on the path I am maneuvering through. With their aid, I develop a stronger understanding of my existence through the analyzation of my surroundings. Each process, hobby, or interest I adopt serves to support my thinking despite how mundane it may seem.

Autoethnography

Two issues sit the center of my thesis work. One is a very personal investigation of how I interact with the physical world, meaning make sense of buildings and objects. The second is how I interact with knowledge and feelings meaning how I navigate that information I collect in the course of everyday life and I use the memories I retrieve because of the comfort they afford me in my daily existence. In terms of studio practice, everything I make and everything I think about in my practice is a product of reflecting on my own memories and stories. At the end of the day my art is for myself. It is the outlet I use to express feelings that otherwise I struggle to communicate. I have found more value and benefit to artmaking by centering my own feelings and embracing the ability to be vulnerable and open with my emotions.

When I first entered art school, I finished assignments as they were given and although I enjoyed the creation processes I neither found myself moved to continue a line of thinking nor felt any sense of fulfillment. While I would feel pride when I received positive feedback and might enjoy how my work turned out, it wasn't until I allowed myself to enter the frame that my artwork satisfied something within me. I began to center myself in my art, considering how I felt the moment I placed my brush to that canvas and making those emotions drive my creation. My feelings, when approached from a different, creative method, made much more sense. By communicating my thoughts and experiences my artwork became stronger when contextualized by my life. As stated by author Roxanne Doty, autoethnography "makes it clear that writers are part of their work, part of the story they tell, they are connected."[1] Although I have struggled with mental health since I was a child, I have never been capable of communicating my feelings to my friends and family. Adopting the practice of autoethnography has allowed my research to come from a place of vulnerability and share my experiences with my cohort in a manner that

[1] R. L. Doty, "Autoethnography – making human connections", *Review of International Studies*, 36 (4), 1048.

feels genuine and honest. In the context of interdisciplinary study, I am offering a sincere telling of my experiences, and the process I use to find grounding. My peers have each offered such unique and compelling perspectives, as a member of this discipline my work would be hollow without being sincere in the telling of my story.

Sentimentality and Kitsch

The conversations I have and the memories I dig through are selfish ventures chasing a feeling of purpose, but they have earned their place all the same. Despite my own concerns, in my time at graduate school, I have felt bolstered by my peers and professors who affirm that art which discusses the small, emotional, and the personal can be immensely valuable in the operations of selfhood. I believed for a long time that allowing sentimentality and my own life into my work was an unprofessional way to make art. It took many years for me to understand that my feelings were all rooted in the human experience; that a person need not have lived the exact same occurrences to relate to feelings of nostalgia and a desire for grounding. Even when making art with the express goal of aiding myself, others could see their own lives reflected in mine. Ultimately, I chose to center amenity and focusing on that which brings me solace in an otherwise arduous world. In *On Kitsch and Sentimentality,* American philosopher Robert C. Solomon argues in favour of kitsch and the value of unabashed emotion within art. Solomon provides the term ‘sweet kitsch’ and describes it as “art (or, to hedge our bets, intended art) that appeals unsubtly and unapologetically to the softer, "sweeter" sentiments.”[2] I feel a great kinship with the term as I don’t shy away from topics that illicit feelings one might call warm and fuzzy. This text further reassures the idea that art about the personal, which aims to sooth the small, specific aches in my experience has its place. Solomon outlines all that is ‘wrong’ with sweet kitsch, namely its willingness to lean into sentimentality and its ability to effortlessly evoke

[2] R.C. Solomon, “On Kitsch and Sentimentality”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *49,* 1.

positive emotions, before standing in defense of the term and arguing that the general distaste of it lies in poor respect for genuine emotion in general. To claim that kitsch and sentimentality in art is in bad taste is to reveal a deep suspicion of the most tender emotions Solomon believes to be the most humane.[3] While it may be true that the emotions evoked by the kitsch tend to be a simple and child-like, what is so wrong with relishing in those feelings, why are the feelings of a child less valid? To call sentimentality immature or naïve is dismissive and while cynicism and bitterness have their place, is there anything wrong with creating art that exists to bolster and heal, rather than reprimand? In my process, I aim to understand the composition of the building blocks that accumulate to my being. As I reminisce on the quirks and connections that made me who I am, I feel empowered to find old joys in my current state. "To be sure" Solomon writes, "we outgrow some of our emotions, but one of the purposes of art is to remind us of just those tender, outgrown sentiments, perhaps even to disturb us regarding their loss. Better yet, art can help us feel them again, and move us to action on their behalf."[4] Solomon's argument encapsulates my inclinations towards the past and my concept of nostalgia. The time I spend in the past searching for my emotional foundation is fuel for my progress forward. The work I create begins new pathways, new options for me to continue exploring. By realizing my connection to things like cooking and crafting, and interacting with them through art, I am laying down an initial interest to return to and continue to develop in the future.

Oftentimes the objects that I think evoke the strongest emotions may seem unlikely, even foolish to other people. Some of the items I've identified in my work as particularly evocative are what I regard as the authentic products of domestic labour and the rituals of home: quilts made by hand, meals and home cooked foods, and the rhythms of gardening. Other objects that capture my imagination and attention exist in opposition to quilts and meals and flowerbeds.

[3] Ibid, 2.
[4] Ibid, 5-6.

These entities tend to be mass-produced and, it needs to be said, often cheaply made and sold. One of my favourite things I owned as a child was a necklace of a fish. It was on a fabric cord tied in a knot and was made of cheap, soft metal with a marble for the body. I wore it every day and when I slept, I placed it around my bed post so I could hold it in my outstretched hand at night. I found great satisfaction in gently rolling the marble in its metal frame and brushing my fingers over the smooth glass. It reminded me of holding my dad's thumb back when my hands were only large enough to grasp a single finger. I would place my thumb atop his and rub his much wider nail for comfort. Without understanding my own history to it, crying over a cheap fish necklace seems ridiculous, but this summer when I found it hanging in my parent's garage, I was overcome with emotion. I probably won it at an arcade, where it was one of thousands purchased in bulk to be traded for tickets, but it matters so much to me. Despite how silly it may seem to love and care for something so easily replaceable and cheap, I find myself valuing these items on the same scale as heirlooms and crafts.

My parent's house is always cluttered. As a couple, they are easily and equally charmed by cat shaped door stops, turkey saltshakers, and any brightly coloured, animal-themed items they find in décor shops. I was, at times a happy participant in their accumulation. At other times, I felt embarrassed by the abundance of decorative animals. When I was 18, I wanted to throw out everything I owned and replace it with well-made, expensive things that made my taste seem nicer, richer, and more adult to divorce myself from them. My understanding of the differences between the types of objects that populated our house and what I had come to understand to be better-made, better-pedigreed objects exist at the heart of my current consideration of the ways that objects are given meaning, whether by virtue of being original works of art imbued with aura or mass-produced goods that are sentimental, aspirational, and nostalgically evocative. Where some objects possess "aura", emphasizing the time and space context during the

creation or discovery of an object, while others carry sentimental value which arises from the experiences shared and applied in the object life.[5]

My first year at university was marked by nothing less than culture shock. For the first time in my life, I made friends with people who did not belong to the same background as me and I came to realize the realities of economic order and the implications of class difference. My new school peers joked that one must avoid "E.O.A." (slang for anything 'east of Adelaide', a major street in London, Ontario, which divides the middle-class neighbourhoods from the working-class neighborhoods). According to them, that side of the city was run down and scary; it was where you went to get robbed and it was where I lived along with everyone I had ever known. I felt ashamed of my economic and social class – of what I intrinsically understood as my underprivilege – and decided to rid myself of my old things and remake my material life in ways that reflected 'good', sophisticated, mature taste. When I realized that this was making me miserable, I was forced to reckon with myself and the conditions of economic difference and class-based aesthetic judgements. I found that, although I was suddenly aware of how the circumstances of family might appear to those financially above us, I wanted to retain what I considered my old comforts and enjoy these possessions wholeheartedly because they were central in my sense of self. To replace these objects because of the opinions of others was a betrayal of my family and the bonds that defined it. Ultimately, I am a product of the environment I grew up in. The things my parents valued and considered beautiful are the base line for the way I consider my own relationship to taste. Despite the possible feelings of disdain that someone of ostensible higher social standing might hold about the objects with which I grew up the cute animal figures and the host of like objects brought me real joy. The happiness I felt in the moment remains unquestionably valid. Although I understand the social mechanics that

[5] Walter Benjamin, & Jennings, M. W, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility", *Grey Room*, *39,* 14.

attend hierarchical structures of taste and aesthetic judgment – and here I am reminded of the work of Sam Binkley on the operations of kitsch and sentimentality - I am content in knowing the objects that I admire and want in my life.[6]

In this light, it is necessary to acknowledge the concept of kitsch as the proverbial elephant in the room (and a cute, lovable figural elephant no doubt). My use of the term to describe the objects in my life for which I have affection and my critical fondness for the concept of kitsch is based around the realization that its aesthetic character reflects my own experiences of class and pride. This is my act of resistance against the elitist, socially constructed and often malicious evaluations which call such objects shallow, simple, and predictable.[7] When I try to imagine what my childhood home might look like if my parents had not spent what money they had on the things they loved I see cold, grey, and lifeless rooms. Having made this realization about my material and aesthetic sensibilities I know that I do not want the house that is made for tidy utility and sleek appearances. I tried being the sophisticated modernist, but I could not do it. There are things in my house that are kitschy (copies of things, ersatz entities that turn on sentimentality, cuteness and nostalgic) that I think are beautiful. There are things that I love because of the emotions they encourage and support in me. And there are things I love because I'm charmed BY their kitschy-ness. By this I mean the ever-growing collection of frog memorabilia is my house is not my ideal image of beauty, but I laugh every time I am gifted one. I may not have identical tastes to my parents, but my saltshakers are silly little cats and they please me. My girlfriend collects porcelain clown dolls. Our mug collection -full of novelty shapes and those adorned with cheesy one-liners- has grown beyond our cabinets. I want to embrace all these aspects of kitsch and speak for the joy they have brought me because to my

[6] Sam, Binkley, "Kitsch as a Repetitive System: A Problem for the Theory of Taste Hierarchy," *Journal of Material Culture 5,* no. 2 (July 2000): 134.
[7] John Morreal & Loy, J. (1989), "Kitsch and Aesthetic Education", *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 23 (4), 68.

mind people reveal their own prejudices and biases when they use the category to judge, demean and differentiate themselves from others likely considered their social lesser. By whose authority should kitsch have power as a negative thing when it can bring joy to people in a multitude of ways.

As I have grown older, I have placed more value on understanding my family and my own history. I want to know about the events and feelings that accumulated to the person I am today and by understanding steps in the process of my creation I believe I will feel stronger, steady, and whole against the pressures and faults in my being. A section of my research that has been fulfilling but also illuminating is the exhumation of my childhood home. In the search for subject matter, I have been on the hunt imagery, objects, patterns, and places that feel familiar from my past. I acquire these details through my parent's storage, photo albums, and the fostering of conversation between loved ones. Early in my search for imagery that spoke to nostalgia, I painted entirely from memory while trying to think of objects that had been passed along or thrown out of my childhood home. I painted the mini trampoline my brother and I used to launch into the couch, the old lounge chair that (when flipped on its side) made the perfect fort walls, the cow print stool with a wooden udder my parents received as a wedding gift, my barbie beetle, and the wall accent in the bathroom I would rip up when no one was looking. As I have continued to work that practice has evolved into flipping through photo albums and digging through old storage containers and the corners of my home where things have been resting, unused for years and years. One of the strongest aids in my search for imagery has come from conversations with my family. The more I search through the contents of my childhood home and ask for the whereabouts of old folders and boxes the more my parents are eager to share. My dad laughs remembering how many times he accidently elbowed me in the head due to my habit of silently trailing behind him. When I update him on the snake plants and pothos currently fighting to survive in my basement apartment, he reminds me of the childhood favourites I'd

demand he include in his garden. Snapdragons were a must since you could pinch the flowers to open and close the petals like a mouth. Lamb's ear was a close second; I loved to sit in the grass next to the plot and gently pet the fuzzy leaves. He felt guilty about using film to take pictures of his flowerbeds, so as a small child I would pose amongst the plants since he said I made it worth capturing. When I visit home these days, my parents are quick to show me their latest finds and walk me through the stories that exist behind the albums and objects. It seems that nostalgia is contagious. When I began to look backwards in time, I was swiftly followed by my parents who seem to find the exercise just as rewarding. I often think of the duty involved with sharing stories. At twenty-five years old, I've lost all my grandparents many of which before I was old enough to really know them as people. I can remember my dad going to my grandmother's side as her health declined hoping to get context of photos and hear the family stories she hadn't yet passed down. He felt it was his responsibility to hear it all and feared he had run out of time. I believe that the conversations I instigate with my parents now make us all the closer as I understand them, our family, and my own past better and better. A simple benefit to my research methods has been that I'm talking to my family more. Having moved away I don't get to see them often, usually only visiting once ever few months. My methodology is both aiding in the understanding of my past and maintaining my connections.

Figure 2. Sitting amongst the flowers, photograph, 2001 (Image by David Culbert).

Changes in Daily Life

In my excavation of self, I work to incorporate my findings into my daily life through the adoption of habits and hobbies. The self-reflective analyzation of my surroundings has seeped into every aspect of my life. I find myself changing how I go about mundane activities after having spent time ruminating on the experiences and conditioning that led me to my current state. In my home growing up, our relationship to food was incredibly important. My dad always believed in eating together every night, sitting around a well-made table, to share in a meal and each other's presence. He had taken it upon himself to learn how to cook as a young man, and it was always his intent to share it with his family. I grew up spoiled in that department. At the center of every tradition, we hold is a meal. His dedication has placed my own standards for what a home-cooked meal should be much higher than many of my other newly independent friends. When I prepared to move away from home to a whole different city my parents gave me a recipe box, handwritten by my mom whose script is significantly more legible than that of my dad. The gift held all our notable classics from my Mennonite grandmother's chicken casserole to the legendary *Christmas Morning Wife Saver.* Flipping through the pages is rich exercise in history, with each card listing ingredients and cooking instructions triggering memories. In the first week at my new apartment, I made banana bread from my dad's recipe (one so constantly present in my mind that I associate the smell of the dough baking with stepping into my childhood home, being hit with a wall of warmth on a cold day). Being the first week in my new place I didn't own a loaf pan, and I was unfamiliar with the temperament of my oven, so my bread was not a picture-perfect replica, but it served its purpose. While feeling homesick, I had searched for something that reminded me of a more familiar place. I reflected on my history with this loaf of bread, considering all the times it was present in my life and its relation to my dad. In a new context, in a new space, I made it myself and it wasn't the identical to the version I remember but I was different too. This experience is something I have worked to capture in art,

painting objects like the banana bread and considering the versions of myself that have interacted with it and the people I've shared it with. These days I cook almost every single night and I am constantly calling my parents and asking them how to make the foods I grew up with. What began with a sting of homesickness encouraged me to reflect on my childhood and utilize cooking as a conscious engagement with my surroundings. Carrying on the habits my father imbued in me strengthens our relationship and I feel closer to him when I sent him pictures of tonight's meal and he responds with his own. It is emotionally fulfilling and physically nourishing, and the reason I can reap the rewards of my new habits is because I examined my tendencies with food with the intent to find meaning and sentiment within an aspect of my surroundings. This development of new habits and connections to materials is an example of how my methodology of self-reflection and practice can illuminate the past, but also open possibilities in the future.

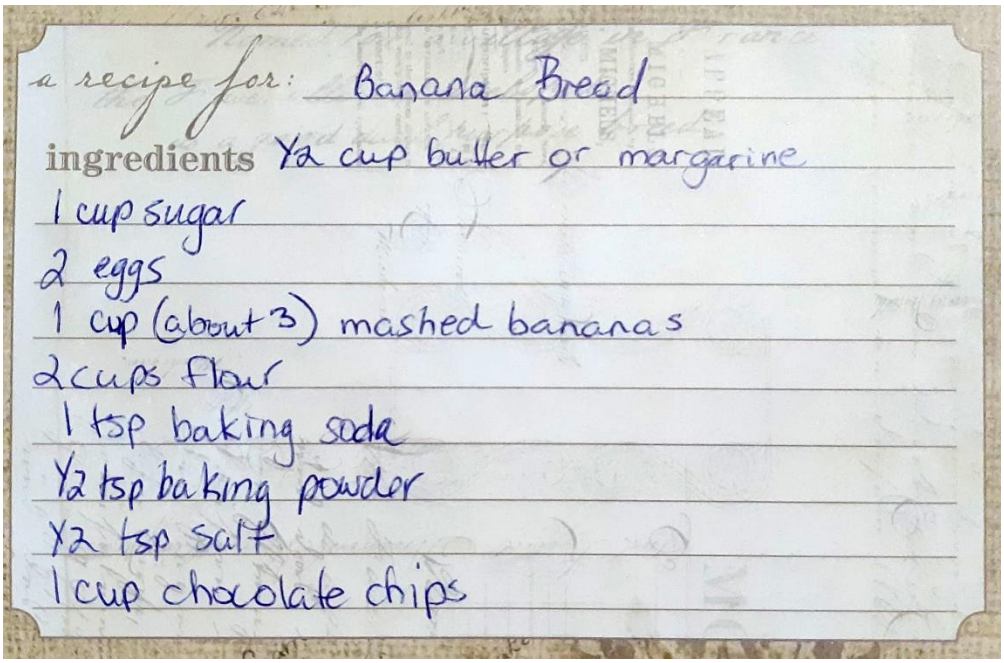

Figure 3: Dad's banana bread recipe.

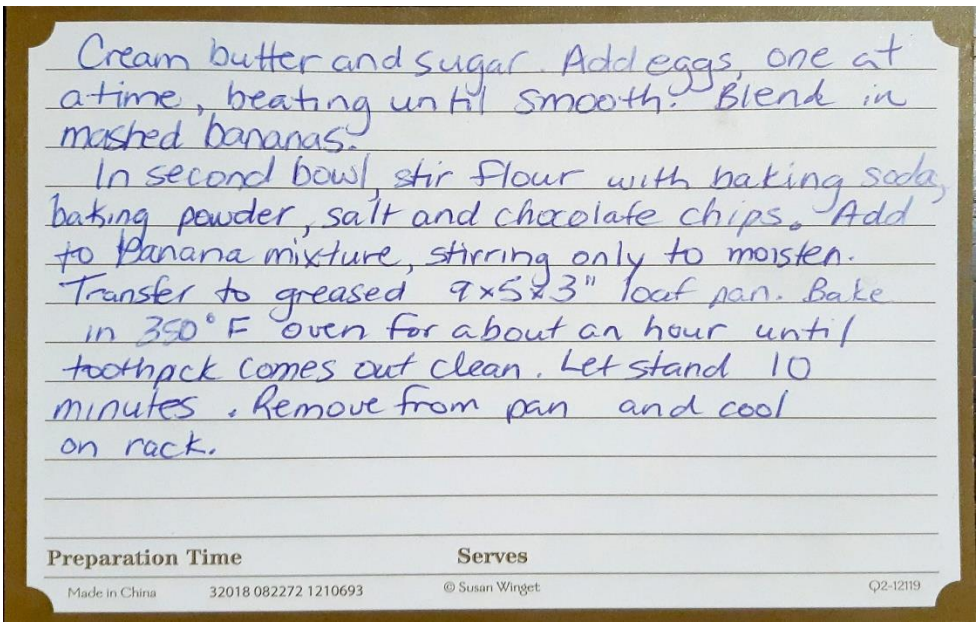

Figure 4: Dad's banana bread recipe (backside).

Figure 5: *Christmas Morning Wife Saver*, 2021, 24” x 18”, acrylic painting on wood panel.

Chapter 3

Literature Review/Theory

While my thought processes are often anecdotal, this section of my thesis focuses on the wide variety of writers, artists, and other creators who have helped shaped the theoretical structures which support my practice. The early approaches to the body of work I've produced in my time at OCAD University were tackled instinctively and emotionally. Initially made artwork by blindly following what elicited feelings of nostalgia and comfort without analysing my drive, but in the past couple years I have honed that into a self-reflective study of self. I have placed effort into finding pillars of existing knowledge both through research and within my family to support and inform my thinking. The work that I have produced responds to events in my life during a period of growing into adulthood. The process that I have undertaken in the creation of the artwork is based upon a conscious engagement with and visual analysis of objects from my childhood and family history. The following section touches on a constellation of ideas which have helped me conceptualize my process and my goals with this project. I will consider my practice in the context of existing disciplinary conversations involving studies in material culture. The discipline of material culture focuses on the role that objects play in human life (how they come into being, how they are used, given meaning, discarded and so on). As an area of study, it is vast and offers a valuable and immense ocean of information to traverse and find touchstones to aid and frame my thinking. As my own practice is focused on objects, I have worked towards finding a methodology that allows me to communicate how objects are about stories and identities. Importantly, my work can also be situated within the genre of coming-of-age literature to better understand the intersectional factors that contribute to my research question, and to understand my project's contribution to an archive of experiences. My transition to adulthood is blatant in the work I present for this thesis. I have taken the opportunities I have at OCAD to focus on self-reflection and consider my standing in the world. Through my

engagement with this existing literature, I find myself drawn to themes of nostalgia, familiarity, identity, and growth. I am interested in the ways these authors have utilized them in their own unique fields of interest. The research I include in this chapter offers a glimpse into the ways people have examined topics through the study of objects, storytelling, or artmaking, and describes how their processes have helped provide pathways for me to walk in my own journey.

Material Cultural Studies

Before I can describe why I situate my work in the context material culture studies I must first offer my understanding of the term. In *Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method* author and art historian Jules David Prown offers the definition "[m]aterial culture is the study through artifacts of the beliefs – values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions – of a particular community of society as a given time."[8] At the core of the theory is that human-made or modified objects act as a reflection of the individuals who "commissioned, purchased, or used them".[9] Every object represents a list of decisions made by those who have engaged with it from creator to owner, and each of those decisions reveals something about the lives and identities of those people. Material Culture is a manner of investigation that scholars utilize as an approach to understanding a wide variety of material, so wide that it cannot be limited to a single field. This notion of viewing a topic through the lens of an artifact is interesting and reveals information and potential solutions to existing problems that may have otherwise gone without further study. American political theorist and philosopher Jane Bennett offers something akin to this in her book *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things.* She considers how the realm of political theory could be improved by recognizing the participation of the non-human by adopting vital materialism and a mindful awareness of the physical world. How might analysing the existence of these materials provide clarity? Bennett recalls a Tuesday morning in June

[8] Jules David Prown, 1982, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method", *Winterthur Portfolio,* 17(1),1.
[9] Ibid, 2.

when she peered into a gutter and noticed a discarded plastic glove, a chunk of pollen, a dead rat, a plastic bottle cap, and a piece of wood and was overcome with the realization that these things, even having been after being thrown away came alive again to communicate the complex circumstances that lead them to their position in the street.[10] The theorist offers her own term, “Thing-Power,” as “the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle” and presents her belief that studying a materials ability to cause reactions and emotions offers new means of approaching existing concepts.[11]

When I began making art that centered the objects from my childhood such as beloved toys and familiar furniture, I didn’t understand why it felt so important and so honest to me. My first venture that led to my current practice was a painting of my parents’ bedroom. I was in my third year of undergrad, stressed by school, stressed by the job I worked between classes, and stressed by my mother’s sudden worsening health. She was experiencing a recurrence, her lymphoma, which had been in a passive state for over a decade suddenly returned to cause tumors concerningly close to her spine. I am someone who has always struggled to communicate their feelings. Every day I would go to school, do my assignments, take tests, go to work, then come home to see her weakened form lying in bed and then later to see her absence, as she was in and out of the hospital. For nearly two years, while she went through chemo and then stem cell treatments, I told no one. It felt useless to tell my friends or even my partner since in my mind nothing they said would help her. I kept it to myself until the fall semester of my junior year. The inside of my brain felt like sludge. I was overwhelmed by everything. I felt pulled tight enough to snap, and I was unwilling to address the fear I had for my mom, forcing myself I continue my life as normal. I had truly no idea how to parse the emotions that were weighing on me. Then, for a class, I did an oil painting of my parent’s bedroom. I

[10] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, United Kingdom: Duke University Press, 2010, 5.
[11] Ibid, 6.

stared at their bed and thought about being a little girl and laying my head on my mother's chest as she read, I thought of the decorative strip of wallpaper that surround the room I would rip at when no one was looking, I thought of her laying there becoming frail, and I thought of her absence. The old bedframe became representative of the emotions I was struggling to understand. I was scared for my mom, I was thinking about how much had changed, I was longing for the innocence and ignorance of childhood, and at the same time I knew I was an adult now and had to face it. Why did painting things like the furniture in my home seem to fulfill me where other forms of investigation had failed? The items I painted communicated something complex that I struggled to address in any other means. They revealed the emotions I had struggled to sift through. Even now, the bed continues to absorb new memories and connotation with my, thankfully, now cancer-free mom.

As complicated as my feelings were, everything got easier when I considered my emotions through an object. By picking the bed as a conduit for my thinking I found a way to approach a previously perilous topic. Bennett describes German philosopher Theodore Adorno's concept of non-identity as a force that hangs over all pursuits of knowledge, a haunting "nagging, painful feeling that something's being forgotten or left out." [12] This force relates to the complex nature of all concepts but, according to Adorno is something we can never truly understand, we can only try and play the fool but must ultimately reconcile with that which we cannot comprehend. In *Vibrant Matter,* Bennett posits that her thing-power, the recognition of the vitality of the material, might allow us to study new facets of a problem. Through engaging with and analysing objects from my past I am looking for processes that might promote better wellbeing and healthier living. Acknowledging my physical surrounding as I tried to parse through the dense fog of my emotions exposed the foundation of my turmoil and allowed me to, at the very least, understand what exactly I was feeling. With this newfound

[12] Ibid, 14.

awareness of a piece of the world around me I found a means of comfort in artmaking and by developing this practice I felt better prepared to face the world.

Sentiment, Nostalgia, and Personal History

The aspect of material culture I am most interested is the one that speaks to the value of sentimentality and how visions of oneself are reflected in the material world. With this body of work, I investigate my relationship to objects and what they reveal about my experiences and my history. Through this I acknowledge how the connections between objects and experiences/history can provide clarification of my emotions when I am overwhelmed both by the world around me and the fog in my head. I cherish the materials that have given me joy in the past and I want to honor the people and experiences that brought them into my life. By finding ways to do so in my daily life, I find myself feeling fulfilled and grounded in my identity.

In *Mind In Matter*, Prown defines the wide but defined range of objects that fall into material culture by creating the following list of categories**:** art, diversion (by which he means games and performances and so on), objects that adorn (earrings, tattoos, clothes), modifications of the landscape (architecture, civil planning), applied arts (furniture and furnishings), and devices (ranging widely from machines and technology to musical and scientific instruments).[13] The beauty of material culture is that no matter how simple or complex they are, each of these categories has the inherent ability to reflect the identity of those who have taken participation in their creation and continued existence. In *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* writer and psychologist Sherry Turkle presents a collection of essays which describes the inseparable relationship humanity has with the physical world and emphasizes "objects as companions to our emotional lives."[14] The contributions to the book consider all of

[13] Jules David Prown, 1982, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method", *Winterthur Portfolio, 17(1*), 3.
[14] Sherry Turkle, *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*, United States: MIT Press, 2011, 5.

Prown's categories: from paintings to radios, photographs to apples, and ballet slippers to trains. And while the texts are authored by a variety of each hold fast to the idea that the objects that mean the most to us can act as a conduit and a partner in how we think. In her introduction Turkle describes a facet of her own childhood: a kitchen closet at her grandparents, too high for her to reach that held a treasure trove of family keepsakes. Searching for clues about her absent father, a young Turkle would dig through boxes of memories searching through artifacts of her family's past for any information on him. It is this pastime that she believes informed her method of thinking:

> If being attentive to the details of peoples' lives might be considered a vocation, mine was born in smell and feel of the memory closet, and its objects. That is where I found the musty books, photographs, corsages, and gloves that made me feel connected. That is where I determined I would solve mysteries and that I would use objects as my clues.[15]

Her described connection she experienced when interacting with artifacts from her family's history is the same emotion that I have made central to my explorations. The objects that matter to us become a part of us. The kinship we feel with the items in our lives become inseparable from our understanding of ourselves and our memories. I am thinking of French novelist and essayist Marcel Proust's discussion of a madeleine in his novel *In Search of Lost Time.* In the text Proust emphasizes sensation to mean both the sensory experience of the object and the experiences connected to it. He recalls taking a bite of the small decorative cake and being overwhelmed with joy, unsure of its origin at first but the "sensation having had the effect, which love has, of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it was me."[16] He chases the feeling, eating more and trying to understand why the pastry awakens these emotions until he is thrown into his childhood. He remembers his aunt sharing a madeleine dipped in her tea and "immediately the old grey house upon the street, where her room was, rose up like a stage set to attach itself to the little pavilion opening on to the garden

[15] Ibid, 4.
[16] Marcel Proust, *In Search Of Lost Time Vol 1*, Modern Library, 1927, 60.

which had been built out behind it for my parents."[17] Proust continues to recall relationships, settings, and activities he had experienced, but forgotten in long nostalgic paragraphs, all with a sweet, shell-shaped pastry as a catalyst. This material holds the power to awaken glimpses into his history and allows him to briefly revisit a moment of joy and love and comfort.

Food is matter that can have an immense impact on us. One of the pieces of my story I have explored during my time at OCAD is the importance of a beloved recipe. Having just moved away from home for the first time I realized how comforting eating something you are familiar with can be. My father's banana bread recipe is a tried-and-true speciality of his, and the smell of it baking seems ingrained within the walls of my childhood home. I believe by making it in my little basement apartment I am continuing my entanglement with it, connecting both my past and my present selves. This recipe that I have grown up eating holds pieces of my life at many different stages, and by interacting with it I return to those moments and the memories I share with those I have shared it with. When I make it, eat it, and share it with those around me I am returning to a warm and comforting part of my past and tying the newest version of myself to its lineage.

One of the essays in *Evocative Objects*, shared by American composer and inventor Tod Machover, discusses his relationship to the cello. He begins by reminiscing about his childhood, pinpointing the beginning of his music career as the time he spent exploring his home as a toddler with his mother, experimenting with the sounds household items made. As he got older, he kept this experience in mind, wanting to choose an instrument that could compare to "the feel of those natural, malleable objects around the house" and found the cello which reflected the shape and size of his body and required a full body engagement to play it.[18] For Machover, his cello represents his origins and becomes a pillar to return to as he thinks through

[17] Ibid, 64.
[18] Sherry Turkle, *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*, United States: MIT Press, 2011, 14.

his compositions, develops inventions, and raises his daughters. Towards the end of his contribution, he states the cello "remains for me the perfect gauge of complexity, of how much an individual human being can shape or master, follow or comprehend" and how it acts as "the intermediary I use to reconnect to the forces and feelings that drew me to music in the first place". [19] His cello embodies his complex and nuanced feeling towards his family, his processes, his music, and his identity. In my art I am searching for the objects that represent complex personal and remembered histories that define me and my relationships just as Machover's cello and Proust's madeleine do for them.

Coming of Age and Transitional Periods

An aspect of these complexities I am trying to translate is the passage of time. My relationship to objects shifts as I have different memories with them over my life; they have been companions as I grew from child to adult. A key component in why my parents bed evokes such strong feelings in me is the realization of change; from being a little girl sneaking into my parents' bed to seeing my mother laying weak with her illness. My thesis work is autobiographic, and aims to make sense of the feelings that have arisen as a twentysomething who is still trying to find their footing and understand how exactly I got to where I am. In her journal article *Constructing Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty,* sociologist and professor Jennifer M. Silva describes the shift in defining adulthood towards a therapeutic and self-reflective model. She opens her piece by stating "traditional markers of adulthood - leaving home, completing school, achieving financial independence, getting married, and having children - have become increasingly delayed, disorderly, reversible, and even forgone." [20] Through data collection of both working-class and middle-class respondents Silva found that young people facing the state

[19] Tod Machover, "My Cello", In *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* eds. by Sherry Turkle, United States: MIT Press, 2011, 20.
[20] J. M. Silva, 2012, "Constructing Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty", *American Sociological Review*, 77 (4), 505.

of the economy and expectations of gender "increasingly made use of a therapeutic model to narrate their coming-of-age experiences." [21] As I write this, I am 25 years old. I rent the cheapest one-bedroom apartment I could find and only manage afford it by splitting the costs with my partner. I pay tuition and rent with the money I saved by working non-stop throughout high school and my undergrad at a fast-food restaurant. The idea of ever owning a house or having kids is not something I can see for the future. I define my success through self-exploration, constructing a healthier, happier identity, and finding way to be fulfilled in the space I occupy now.

It is important to me to compare my own journey with existing coming of age narratives. How have others documented, defined, and questioned their shift from child to adult? One source I have read is Canadian writer Sheila Heti's *How Should a Person Be?*, which follows the quasi-fictional protagonist as she tries to find grounding and solidify her concept of self. The content of the book swerves in and out of reality, featuring real letters, emails, and transcribed audio recordings from the authors life as she uses her own experiences to tell the story of a young woman trying to find her way. In a chapter that only lasts one page the fictional Sheila summaries the mysteries of the world through the eyes of a child:

> When I was little, and thought that children grew up and their parents grew down, so that one day the child became the parent and the parent became the child, I had in my head such and impressive idea of what an adult was. My father seemed to know everything. My mother had such an assurance and command. Inside my head was a little square of awe, compact and complete. The seemed as far away from me as a spaceship from the earth, orbiting in some darkness I could not comprehend.[22]

The book perfectly captures the absolute mess being a young adult can be, miles from what I envisioned adulthood to look like as a child. Heti's writing doesn't shy away from that. The protagonist is often selfish, and unmotivated. She goes through long bouts of avoiding her craft, indulging in escapism, and not considering her friends feelings. My own avoidant nature has

[21] Ibid, 506.
[22] Sheila Heti, *How Should a Person Be?,* United States: House of Anansi Press Incorporated, 2010, 256.

bitten me many times before, and I found myself relating to her desires to just give up and find a new less fulfilling but simpler way to live. Everything is confusing and overwhelming and knowing what the right thing do is seems impossible. Sheila (the protagonist) seems to always want quick answers for massive problems, she wants to be told exactly what she wants to hear and have everything work out even if she quits halfway through. By the end of the book the writer finally writes, she sits down and uncovers everything she has ignored or tried to throw away within her: “I threw the shit and the trash and the sand, and for years and years I just threw it. And I began to light up my soul with scenes. I made what I could with what I had. And finally became a real girl.”[23] Heti’s version of coming-of-age is accepting of everything it takes to get to the end and acknowledging that there isn’t always an answer. The final line of the book is a comfort. The aimless confusion of adulthood and the entirety of the book is summarized as Margaux and Shalom play squash while the rest watch in the final line: ‘“I don’t think they even know the rules. I think they’re just slamming the ball around.” And so they were.”[24] *How Should a Person Be?* is a forgiving narrative that reminds me that my faults and missteps are part of the story. Through romance and sex, friendship and peers, Sheila’s outlook is an accumulation of the people she interacts with and the experiences she’s gone through. I think many of the objects and topics I choose to focus on are my version of slamming the ball around. There isn’t any right way to construct the identity that will make me feel the most whole and good. I don’t know if the lines I follow will result in success, but they will be a worthwhile exploration all the same. What I have managed so far has soothed some of the homesickness and the terrifying prospect of adulthood. My adoption of self-reflection and artmaking is something I need to just keep trying to do, keep slamming the ball around, as I grow and change.

[23] Ibid, 277.
[24] Ibid, 306.

Chapter Four:

Studio Work

Painting

When I began my art education, I was not expecting the medium to which I return most often to be painting. Given I had entered art school with my eyes set on printmaking I was surprised to find myself graduating from my BFA with a portfolio full of works in acrylic and oil. The process of painting is both a means of communicating my ideas, and an example how I am finding ways to engage with materials which I have history. These things said, I am not the first painter in my immediate family. My childhood home is dotted impasto lush landscapes lovingly painted by my dad when he was my age. Although he does not paint much these days, he has always been a pillar of support for me, encouraging my artistic inclinations and eager to talk about my latest endeavours. Indeed, I believe painting is a language I picked up from him. Although my methods have changed and my work looks so different than that of my father, I am still inspired by the time I spent surrounded by his art and its influence on me has contributed to what I make today.

In this thesis I have talked about how centering an object as a conduit for emotion has allowed clarification and translation of feelings that are otherwise too complicated to dissect. I have found equal importance in the artmaking language I choose to discuss these items and found my first successes in painting. In her doctoral dissertation – written in 2018 while at the University of British Columbia and titled *Painting as Thinking,* artist Allison Shields shares interviews with Canadian painters as they discuss their experiences with painting as a means of learning. On the topic of painting as an encounter, artist Ben Reeves explained his thinking to Shields:

> Art is probably one of the most, if not the most useful vehicle for me to think about things, and for me to understand my place in the world. That's essentially what it is. So,

> it's a way of investigating things. It's a speculative way of thinking, theorizing, philosophizing, and exploring things.[25]

Reeves articulates the limitations of language and suggests that artmaking can embody thinking; that "making a mark with a brush and paint on a surface can be incredibly analytic."[26] As I work, I lay down many overlapping layers of washes, adding and scraping away, deliberating on how I might represent the subject matter. The shapes of the brushes, the ratios of paint to solvent, and the material I use to remove pigment all becomes a tactile way for me to think through my relationship to the object and what about it I want to emphasize. Beyond simply representing the appearance of the item, I take into consideration the ideas that attracted me. I go back and forth both in my mind and on the canvas as I try to communicate my inner thoughts and feelings. The resulting works are hazy, colourful, and containing the marks left behind from each layer and shifting idea like a map of my considerations.

[25] Allison Shields, 2018, "Painting as Thinking ; Painting as Conversation : An Examination of Learning through Painting through Studio Visits with Canadian Artists," *Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) 2008+*, T, University of British Columbia, 140.
[26] Ibid, 141.

Figure 6: Collage drafting *under the stairs/amongst the shelves* painting.
Figure 7: In-progress *under the stairs/amongst the shelves* painting.

My paintings combine still-life with collage through the manipulation of both existing photographs and images from my memories. The handling of the imagery is loose and washy, depicting shapes and patterns that captures my process of recollection rather than realistic studies. The objects I choose to represent may seem entirely random, but my choice in each item is specific and driven by an idea or feeling. When, for example, I think about the relationship I had with my grandmother, I instantly and vividly recall her behaviours and her possessions. I think of the objects with which she surrounded herself and the implications of their presence in my memories of her. She was born in New Hamburg, Ontario, in 1922 and lived her entire life in the township, passing away in 2016 at age ninety-four. She had worked at a Schneider factory during World War II, had my mother, kept a cozy house and lost my grandfather in 1996, a year before I was born. Grandma Alice was incredibly sweet and kind to everyone, but by the time I was born her mind had already begun to deteriorate. It was hard to understand what she was trying to communicate and where her thoughts were going. She was often confused and unable to remember details of her life, but she always wanted to know about me and the things I liked, even if she could never wrap her head around my interests. I remember hearing her slowly make her way down the stairs to see what my brother and I were doing, and instantly pausing the video game we were playing as not to shock her with pixelated violence. We would greet her, and she would sit with us and stare at the pause screen as if it were the most interesting show on earth before saying it looked like we were having fun and hobbling back up the steps. She was an avid part of the Mennonite community in her hometown, and every May we would drive up to take her to the yearly relief sale they held. We would walk the fairgrounds together, making sure to stop for tea balls (a speciality of the event) and she would demand we pick up a shoo-fly pie before traversing the booths and quilting auction. She loved budgies. She collected skunk plushies and souvenir spoons. For my 5th birthday she bought me a boombox and I thought that meant she was a millionaire (though that was far from the truth). She blew up two of my parents' microwaves. She could not remember

the word for guinea pig and called my beloved little creatures 'cucumbers'. She fell asleep with a crossword puzzle on her lap every day. She was an incredible quilter. I connect these materials into a depiction of my relationship and memory of her. It is important to say that my memories of my grandmother are so central to my sense of self and to my work. In real ways, when I recall her, I do so by way of mental pictures of her material environment and, by implication, what I regard as our bonds. Put another way, my recollections of my grandmother are visual and exist in my mind's eye as portraits of meaningful places and things. This reality goes far in explaining my attraction to the broad and constant (western) genres of still life and the depiction of interior spaces.

Contextualizing Painting

When I approach the painting of objects, I am aware of the long history of the depiction of the seen and experienced world into two dimensional images. I am both intrigued and inspired by generations of artists before me who felt a desire to represent objects in their craft because of the challenges of such work, the symbolic operations of such representations and the roles such images played and continue to play in society and culture. In my work, I understand the ways that inanimate objects have been represented through the ages from Egyptian wall paintings of 15th century BCE which transcended literacy to communicate memorials, the cosmic hierarchy of the deceased, and their desired offerings to the visual practices in 17th Century Holland where Dutch artists created alluring images of domestic goods and consumables as exercises communicating the bonds between bounty and mortality. [27] The latter is a particular point of interest I have considered. Referred to as "vanitas" – Dutch still life painting from the so-called 'Golden Age' sought to visualize what has been described as the

[27] Betsy M. Bryan, (2009), "Memory and Knowledge in Egyptian Tomb Painting", *Studies in the History of Art*, *74*, 19.

"inevitability of death and the transience and vanity of earthly achievements and pleasures."[28] The objects depicted – food, instruments, flowers, and more - symbolized status, wealth, science, death, and life. In capturing them, artists reminded their viewers of the passage of worldly pleasures and the fragility of life while also appreciating and celebrating the beauty of life, tackling the complexities of being in and departing this world. [29]

My paintings of material goods (family possessions) consider the vulnerability and transience of relationships as well as the dissonance between my existence as a young adult and the child I once was (or remember myself to have been). I aim to represent the fluidity of time and memory in my work and the manner at which certain objects have existed in my awareness and have influenced me. The objects on which I focus on have aged with me. My understanding of what they represent or offer my life has as well. By painting them I aim to represent their dynamic and transient presence in my life. In her book, *The Art of Describing Things,* American art historian Svetlana Alpers notes the Dutch Still life practice "of opening, in order to reveal to out sight, the making of the objects."[30] These painters revealed every angle of surface of an item they could as Alpers notes "Cheeses are cut into, pies spill out their fillings beneath the shelter of crust, herring are cut to reveal flesh as well as gleaming skin".[31] Their representations of objects reveal their dedication to presenting a comprehensive and complete version of the object rather than a single view that attempts to summarize its existence. I feel a kinship with this notion of "opening" to reveal the insides, to dissect an object into pieces. When I identify an object, I want to work with my process begins considering our story together. I try to imagine notable times we have interacted with and pick apart what it means to me and what it

[28] T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Vanitas," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/art/vanitas-art
[29] Paul Barolsky, (2007), VANITAS PAINTING AND THE CELEBRATION OF LIFE, *Source: Notes in the History of Art*, *26*(2), 38.
[30] Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 90.
[31] Ibid.

has brought to my life. The object becomes isolated from its original context and becomes a symbol of relationships and events I have experienced. This process is my version of "opening," to reveal the true significance hidden within.

As I have developed my painting language and have come to recognize the influence of still life, I have become increasingly interested in the work of American painter Wayne Thiebaud. His paintings often feature objects such cakes and pastries, gumball machines, saltshakers and napkins depicted in bright colours on flat planes. In an interview in the *Leonardo Journal* Thiebaud commented on the ability of objects to speak to issues of nostalgia and the transient character of modern life: "Commonplace objects are constantly changing and when I paint the artists I remember I am like Chardin tattling on what we were. The pies, for example, we now see are not going to be around forever. We are merely used to the idea that things do not change."[32] Thiebaud's painterly engagement with questions of life and is course from birth to death reveal as much a longing for the past as an appreciation for the forms that exist within his memory. In this way, I relate to the notion of the painting of an object as it is remembered and the likely, perhaps unavoidable nostalgia for times past, and, in turn, being faced with the reality of the impermanence of all things.

As a student of art, I have been exposed to a wide variety of movements and discourses which have helped develop the way I think about making. In my undergraduate studies, much of my painting education at Western University came from Canadian painter Sky Glabush, whose thrilling and enveloping obsession with the world of painting was infectious. I credit Professor Glabush for introducing me to a critical and wide-ranging catalogue of artists both past and present. In reflecting on my interests and the movements and artists to which I am drawn, I have a particular affinity with the French Impressionists who strove to paint the

[32] A. LeGrace G. Benson, David H. R. Shearer, & Wayne Thiebaud, (1969), "An Interview with Wayne Thiebaud", *Leonardo, 2(1),* 70.

intimate world in which they lived. They searched for beauty in their everyday and decided the world they saw was worthy of appreciation. My work, like theirs, communicates my adoration for the objects, settings, and relationships I experience each day. In *The Aesthetic Idea of Impressionism*, the historian and art critic Lionello Venturi describes the subject matter choice of impressionist painters as "peasant cottages instead of palaces; plain girls instead of great ladies; working-men instead of noblemen."[33] Following the fall of the Second Empire of France, artists looked for beauty beyond the monuments and nobility, now free of their influence on French life. This sensibility arose from an expression of comradery, sympathy, and a desire to celebrate their fellow working-class as they felt "human dignity in humble personalities" was worth praise.[34] As a result of this mindset, impressionists often painted domestic spaces and interiors as they were lived in. I think of the work of French painter Pierre Bonnard, who, in creating the post-impressionist movement known as "La Nabis" made immensely colourful compositions which, at times, moved almost into abstraction and depicted gardens, kitchens, and spaces meant to be lived in and shared. As art collector Duncan Phillips has remarked, the power of these domestic scenes reflects the artist's deep fondness for "the intimacy of the bourgeois home and the little joys of every day."[35]

In thinking about my practice, it is important to note that I share not only an appreciation for the simple objects which fill the shelves and give life and personality to a home but also the visual and emotional opportunities afforded by painting in their depiction. The bright and whimsical character of Bonnard's work came from "observing and creating pictures from remembered moments he had experienced in the innermost intimacy of his home or on the pavements of the Boulevard Clichy."[36] The artists usage of memory is not unlike my own, as I

[33] Lionello Venturi, (1941), "The Aesthetic Idea of Impressionism*", The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 1(1),* 41.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Duncan Phillips, (1949), "Pierre Bonnard", *The Kenyon Review, 11(4),* 695.
[36] Ibid.

too try to depict spaces and objects as they have existed in my mind. A more recent contemporary worth noting in relation to my work is Canadian painter Margaux Williamson. In a recent exhibition at McMichael gallery titled *Interiors,* Williamson explored her understanding of space, unfiltered and honest in her depiction of rooms and the objects within. Concerned with ideas of time, Williamson captures several different moments in time and therefore moods through misaligned perspectives and unusual angles that collaged different viewpoints and stages in a single image. In an article in the Toronto Star titled "*the homes of others",* journalist Ruth Jones writes "Williamson's interiors are as alive as we all are inside. Her cakes get eaten, her chairs get moved, the bottles are where they landed after the party. "Interiors" is a place you can live in."[37] Williamson's work depicts her attention to detail, ignoring spatial reality in favour of relaying her true experience of a space. My own paintings make similar sacrifices in the pursuit of memory. I feel allied with her depiction of experience. I make objects float, patterns melt, and walls wonk and irregular. These choices – strategies – turn on my aim to capture, represent and convey the way these objects and settings exist in my mind, made fluid by the passage of time and the lens at which I experienced them.

During my time in this program, I have come to understand what exactly a painting offers me. I put time and effort into laying down pigments, pushing and pulling imagery, and spend hours frustrated staring at it on its easel. Painting is an investigation of the way these objects have made me feel, and an attempt at representing a personal story. It is both my thought process and my way of honoring the mundane materials that are important to me. Placing my grandmothers spoon collection on a canvas, painting it like a portrait, is my way of saying thank you for both what it represents and the joy it has given me. These objects have helped me

[37] Ruth Jones, "The homes of others: Margaux Williamson's brilliantly disordered 'Interiors' at McMichael are a rare glimpse into people's inner lives," *The Toronto Star*, April 3rd, 2022, https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/analysis/2022/04/03/the-homes-of-others-margaux-williamsons-brilliantly-disordered-interiors-at-mcmichael-are-a-rare-glimpse-into-peoples-inner-lives.html?utm_source=share-bar&utm_medium=user&utm_campaign=user-share

grieve, provided companionship, fed me, and comforted my homesickness and sadness. The least I can do is paint them and treat them with the importance that they hold for me.

Figure 8: Untitled, 2022, 24” x 30”, oil and acrylic painting on wood panel.

Figure 9: *under the stairs/amongst the shelves*, 2021, 30” x 24”, oil and acrylic painting on wood panel.

Figure 10: untitled, 2021, 10.5” x 7.5”, watercolour and gouache on paper.
Figure 11: *fifth birthdays, purple duvets, and a dead persons spoon collection*, 2021, 10.5” x 7.5”, watercolour and gouache on paper.

Figure 12: *a very important meeting,* 2021, 10.5” x 7.5”, watercolour and gouache on paper.
Figure 13: untitled, 2021, 10.5” x 7.5”, watercolour and gouache on paper.

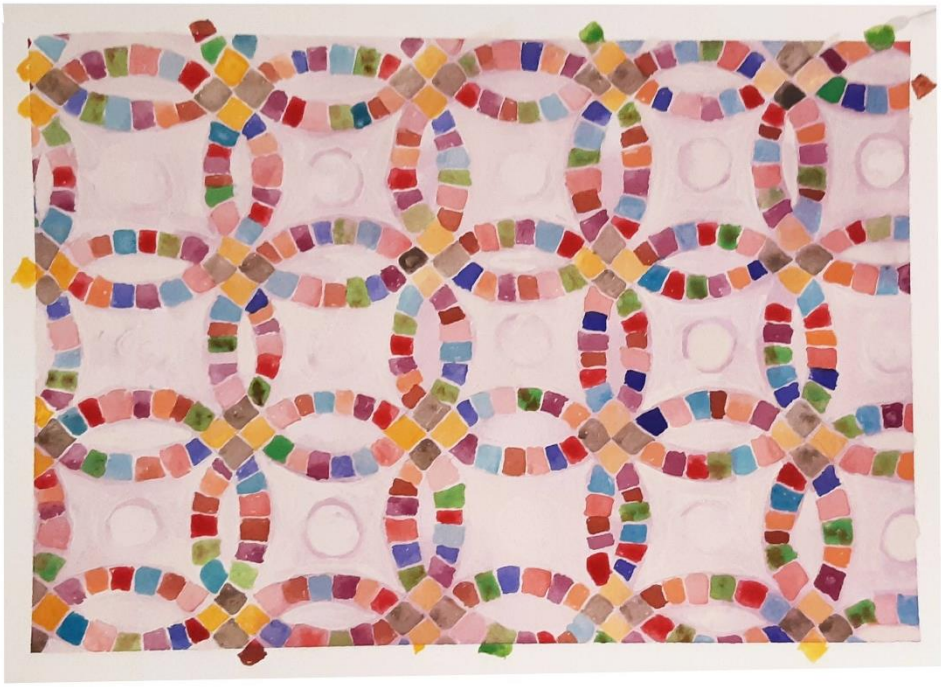

Figure 14: *clamshells,* 2022, 10.5” x 7.5”, watercolour and gouache on paper.
Figure 15: *orange peels,* 2022, 10.5” x 7.5”, watercolour and gouache on paper.

Quilting

On one of my many visits home, while trying to unbury photo albums and boxes of keepsakes like a historian of my own life, I came across grandmothers' quilts that had been stored away in an old chest in our basement. The trunk functions as a portfolio of her many projects, housing a wide stock of her work neatly folded away. Each quilt was gifted to commemorate an important milestone in our lives and featured complicated colour schemes and patterns, completely unique in style and shape. To celebrate my birth, she crafted a king-sized blanket of purple and white, embroidered with elegant women in long dresses and lacy umbrellas. It warmed my bed until high school when I decided that I was "goth" and the 19th century-inspired feminine and 'parasolled' imagery no longer fit the sharp black aesthetic I was curating. The quilt was dutifully folded and stored away to join the surplus of others that lacked the space to be displayed. Going through the chest with my parents I could picture the places each had rested in my life. I remembered using one long, dark brown throw with patchwork triangles as my number one choice of the roofing for pillow forts. I was enamoured with how each colourful pattern related so clearly to a time in my life and a wide range of memories I shared with each one. Initially, I did not consider picking up the craft myself, instead eager to replicate the shapes in the surfaces of my paintings. Looking back, it is as if the stars aligned for me to take the step into textiles. That summer I had enrolled in *Thinking Through Making*, an elective course offered by OCAD that encouraged students to expand on the artmaking processes we engaged with and consider what other forms might thematically suit our driving questions. Our major assignment was to try something new and present our findings over the course of the semester. It was as if quilting had fallen into my lap at just the right moment. My friend and peer, Max McKerlie, was kind enough to offer his sewing machine and knowledge of textiles and fabrication. With his help, despite my complete lack of skill, I made a comically small, poorly constructed quilt and I loved every minute of it. Ultimately, the decision was made

on whim to suit the curriculum of a class, but it felt so right. The more I worked on my quilt the more I realized how much I enjoyed it; it satisfied my creative interests, provided a connection to my family, grounded me, and opened my practice from individual to social. Later, when I had devoted myself to my next larger quilt these thoughts grew from initial warm feelings to developed ideas. For this thesis, I had been searching for ways to build relationships to my physical surroundings and the answer seemed to be resting in a chest in my parents' basement.

Figure 16: First attempt at quilting, 2021, 25" x 16", cotton scrap fabrics and thread.

In many ways, quilting feels akin to painting. I still think about my work in terms of shapes and colours, utilizing collage to patchwork different images and patterns into one piece. I love painting immensely, but it is something I have been taught my entire life, through my parents, and later (albeit informally), my undergraduate program. The construction of a quilt is something I have never attempted until this program and I'm bad at it. I am constantly sewing things together misaligned, upside down, and wrong sides out. Yet part of the fulfillment and joy I have found comes from my sloppy, but genuine attempts reconnecting with my family history. If painting was a language I learned through my father, quilting is a language I learn now in

honor of my grandmother. My dad often laments that my grandparents could not pass on their skills and trades to me before they died. When I was in undergraduate, in order to save money, I began making my own wooden panel canvases in the school woodshop. Dad beamed with pride, telling me every time I came home with a painting that my grandfather (who taught woodshop as a young man) would have been so happy to have me show an interest in his craft. My recent delve into quilting has my family smiling ear to ear, wishing I had been able to learn from my late grandmother, but overjoyed by my interest in continuing the tradition.

Unlike the ideas and visual influences that inform my painting practice, my quilting work does not originate in a specific art movement or set of material techniques. I am aware of the rich history surrounding the use of the quilt and the processes of quilting by artisans and textile artists, and activists. I think of the AIDs memorial quilt, conceived by Cleve Jones in 1985 as a memorial and call to action, where each panel – made of anything quilters could get their hands on - was dedicated to a life lost.[38] I admire the work of the Gee's Bend quilters whose distinct patterning speaks to both necessity and the history of the African American women who made them.[39] However, I find my inspiration and connection in the community of makers whose work introduced me to very idea of a quilt. The blankets that I have created are an integral, arguable inseparable part of the material and critical explorations around identity and memory that are central in my thesis work. That I do not consider the quilts as singularly aesthetic objects to be admired in a gallery is of central importance because although my textile works are compositions and have aesthetic power, the process of making them was of equal significance as the goal of their being completed and seen. My quilting practice is an integral part of my intellectual work and emotional wellbeing and their presence in my life – their existence in my

[38] Gregg Stull, (2001), "The AIDS Memorial Quilt: Performing Memory, Piecing Action", *American Art*, *15*(2), 87.
[39] Vanessa Kraemer Sohan, (2015), ""But a quilt is more": Recontextualizing the Discourse(s) of the Gee's Bend Quilts", *College English*, *77*(4), 295.

life as utilitarian and aesthetical is a valuable reminder of how human-made material things are always the culmination of processes of labor, represent semiotic operations in the context of culture, and always represent the collision of time or the ways that the past and the present and can and do co-exist in every object. My quilts warm my body and my heart. Their value is most clear to me during the fabrication (where I used my hands to create an object and shared a space with my friend) and now, when I rest them around my shoulders on cold nights. I have spoken about my grandmother and her penchant for quilting complicated and beautiful blankets as gifts and indeed, there were quilts for every holiday in our family.

But at this juncture, I must pivot to speak of the community from which my grandmother hails because her story is striking and goes far in explaining why her quilting and quilts are significant and influential. As I have noted, my grandmother was born in 1922 in New Hamburg, Ontario into a family of Alsace-Lorraine Mennonites. Her community in her hometown was defined and bonded by rituals of faith and daily life. And yet, despite the importance of faith and routine to my grandmother, there were few aspects of her Mennonite upbringing that my mom maintained and instilled in my brother and me. We did, of course, drive back to New Hamburg every year for the annual Mennonite Relief Sale, a massive gathering of southern Ontario Mennonite communities run and operated by an estimated 2000 volunteers who donate their time and skills to the event.[40] As of 2016, the sale has raised $14 million for refugees and hunger since its origins in 1967.[41] Of the many trades, products, and foods offered on the fairground, the central event of the weekend is the quilt auction. I have fond memories of walking through the aisles of blanket in awe of the craftmanship presented in each.

[40] New Hamburg Mennonite Relief Sale, *About Us,* https://nhmrs.com/content/about-us.
[41] Kate Bueckert, (2016), "Love and quilts: 50 years of the New Hamburg Mennonite Relief Sale"*, The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/new-hamburg-mennonite-relief-sale-steckley-quilts-1.3603181

When I began considering quilting as a piece of my practice, I turned to the memories of the auctions, the quilts in our family and the communications of the sale organizers for inspiration. The official event website includes an online catalogue of every quilt contributed to the sale since 2016. Each contains over 200 contributions of varying sizes and designs with the 2022 collection featuring a whopping 274 donations.[42] I found great joy in scrolling through the images of the individual entries as I pondered the question of what I wanted to create. The variety of forms was striking. Some quilts had simple patterns, and some were so complicated that I could not begin to understand what techniques were required to create them. Each submission includes the names of the people who made them and the details of its fabrication, but also a title given to the blanket and occasionally a story behind its making. Many of the quilts were pictorial, featuring such things as smiling cartoon dogs, seasonal plants, and little comforting cottages, simple but happy designs. While most present their imagery without comment some entries described the reasoning behind their subject, revealing intent and personal meaning. “Preppy the Whale,” a submission to the 2022 sale by Gwen Van Netten is accompanied by a small block of text sharing the origin of the materials, her interest in the pattern and a sweet detail: “This is the second quilt I have made with whole blocks - the first was made to welcome my grandson into the world - his home is in Vancouver Island, so the whole theme was appropriate.”[43]

The quilters of my grandmother’s community are experts in their craft. Their artistic abilities are valued, and these objects exist as both aesthetic and functional. Participants in the auctions look on them with awe, appreciating the craftmanship, skill and creativity of the individuals who made them. They are carefully displayed before making it to the bedrooms and living rooms of their buyers. My desire to quilt came from my desire to reconnect with an aspect

[42] New Hamburg Mennonite Relief Sale, *2022 Quilt Catalogue*¸ https://nhmrs.com/quilt-catalogue/2022
[43] New Hamburg Mennonite Relief Sale, *Preppy the Whale,* https://nhmrs.com/quilt/8261.

of my family history and my memories at the Relief Sale. With these women as my inspiration, I entered the world of quilting prioritizing the domestic tradition I had been raised to appreciate and celebrate. During the fabrication process I have deeply considered colours and shape, translating my knowledge of collage and painting to a less familiar medium. I consider the quilts I have made a part of my artistic practice worth aesthetic consideration, but I also appreciate the warmth and comfort they offer me when laid across my bed.

My research question going into this project focuses how reflecting on objects from my past and engaging with my physical surroundings support a turn towards wellbeing, grounding, and fulfillment. My journey into the world of quilting has shown me how entangling myself with matter can answer that question. The process of making a quilt has been an all-encompassing venture, one that demands I go out into the world and submerge myself in learning, community, and my own history. With my minimal textile knowledge even brainstorming what images and shapes I will create is a long and detailed discussion. When searching for precedents and tutorials I was overwhelmed by technical terms and perfected procedures these internet experts shared, but Max reassured me. We forged ahead together, forgoing the traditional styles for our own makeshift fabrication. I am certain no professional quilter would agree with our methods, but we put our heads together and problem solved each step along the way and felt rewarded when things went right. On our pleasant walks through Queen Street Max shared with me his favourite fabric stores and directed me on which blends work for each purpose, when to choose to stretch and when I should lean towards something stiffer. The material sourcing becomes an entire day's event as we hop from place to place and discuss my plans. We talk about projects we could collaborate on and with each stitch I get more confident in my abilities, branching out to try my hand at mending and clothing construction. The finished blanket is great, but the true benefit of quilting for me and this thesis is how the act of creation has seeped into multiple facets of my life.

Figure 17: Quilt in-progress: cutting the shapes, 2022.
Figure 18: Quilt in-progress: pinning the shapes, 2022.

As with painting, I found the making to be a tactile experience, where the movement of my hands and the interactions of the materials were necessary and allowed me to express myself creatively and emotionally. In an article titled *The Relationship Between Quilting and Wellbeing,* public health journalists Emily L. Burt and Jacqueline Atkinson conducted a study on the benefits of the craft. The authors found that it acted as a creative outlet, but also felt productive, challenged participants to problem solve, strengthened social bonds, and boosted self-esteem.[44] Quilting feels rewarding. To hold the materials in my hands, folding them, readjusting the fabrics, pinning, and unpinning pieces together situates my body and mind in my environment. It sometimes feels like everything I do is on a screen; be it work or leisure. I am uncomfortable and ashamed by how often I realize that I have lost hours of my day scrolling on my phone, tiring my eyes, and gaining practically nothing from it. Dr. Tyler Johnson, an oncologist working in California, offers his experiences with the hyperconnectivity of the internet in *Reclaiming Reality: Doctoring and Discipleship in a Hyperconnected Age.* Johnson warns that

[44] E. L. Burt & Atkinson, J. (2012), "The relationship between quilting and wellbeing", *Journal of Public Health*, *34*(1), page 56-57.

the internet distracts from the world around us and that the average adult is pulled away from reality and into their phone 80-160 times a day.[45] And in the current state of the world where COVID-19 has forced communities to find alternative, internet-based means of operating, I am humiliatingly guilty of having witnessed and participating in such behaviors. Of everything I have tried, quilting feels the most grounding. To be able to touch and interact with it at every stage of creation, from purchasing fabrics to piecing it together, reminds me of my body and my place in solid reality. When I stab myself with a pin, there is no denying it.

Without a studio space, my quilting sessions take place in Max's apartment, mostly on the floor. His sewing creations are incredible, but he's entirely self-taught and his methods are very trial and error. Early on, I laughed at the difference between my grandmothers quilting circle and my own. Even though our situations feel so divorced from each other we are doing the same thing. My grandmother participated in a long-standing Mennonite tradition, trading patterns, tricks, and techniques with the women from her church and providing warmth and beauty to their farms. Every year, during the last weekend of May my grandmother took part in the Mennonite Relief Sale; an entirely volunteer run event that raises money for charity. Community members donate time, food, and goods, but most notably, they hold a massive quilt auction. Circles of women like my grandmother, gather every year to bond over their craft and contribute hundreds of unique quilts to the sale. It is a noble cause but not a completely selfless one. The meetings are equally an excuse to meet with friends, share food and drink, and bond over a common goal, forming smaller coteries within their larger community. Through quilting they form life-long relationships forged in thread and fabric. Unlike my grandma Alice, I did not learn proper techniques or patterns, but the parallels in our experiences remain. I meet up with Max regularly to quilt. In the time we spend together, we eat and socialize, chatting incessantly

[45] Dr. Tyler Johnson, (2018), "Reclaiming Reality: Doctoring and Discipleship in a Hyperconnected Age", *BYU Studies Quarterly*, *57*(3), 15.

as we work. We approach problems in our respective crafts together, offering opinions and support. Quilting feels like I am acknowledging this lineage and history within my family, while making it my own. I am not in my grandmothers little religious farming township. I am a young queer person, building my own little community in Toronto and I am not good at quilting, but I do not need to be. Where painting has been an individual process, one defined by introspection, quilting has opened my practice and revealed how I can tackle my research question in a social manner. By working closely with Max, I have found immense comfort and comradery in the ability to tackle a goal together. The introduction of a routine that forces me out of my head and home and into an environment that encourages creation. Always discussing and chasing the next project has done great things for my mental health and desire for selfhood. I want to develop my skills and find areas to excel in. I am thinking to the future and craving the next step forward. In *Creating an Artistic Self: Amateur Quilters and Subjective Careers,* American sociologist Marybeth C. Stalp writes about the intersection of leisure and culture, describing how the adoption of quilting helps women redefine their identities and how they experience success and leisure. In one section, Stalp offers the following on the quilter identity:

> Quilting can be understood as a hidden identity, similar to the hidden minority that a gay/lesbian identity has been characterized. As quilters become more engaged in the activity of quilting, they also begin to take on the norms and behaviors of quilters, including developing subjective measures of what quilting means for them. Quilters identify their notions of success with societal expectations of quilting (e.g., artistic and economic success) and negotiate such societal standards with their own, personal notions of what successful quilting is for them as individuals.[46]

I am charmed by the idea of the quilter's identity. Ultimately, the way I create is representative of who I am and what I find important. What quilting means to me comes from a multitude of experiences, from my Mennonite grandmother to my queer circle of friends. Being lesbian, my identity and existence does not necessarily match up with the quilters in my family tree, but that does not mean these aspects of my identity need to be completely divided. I'm embracing a

[46] M. C. Stalp, (2006), "Creating an Artistic Self: Amateur Quilters and Subjective Careers", *Sociological Focus, 39(3),* 201.

familial tradition but acknowledging my identity and the environment I exist in. Like my grandmother, I am a woman who is seeking warmth, comfort, and community through textiles. A seasoned pro-quilter can accomplish intricate patterns, organized through careful calculation and practiced techniques, but my quilts feel successful despite their amateur appearance. I am proud of what I can accomplish, even more so knowing my creation speaks to me and my friends approaching a problem together and solving it on our own terms. When I hold the finished quilt in hand, I glide my fingers along the seams and remember my grandmother, but also my body, the conversations I shared with Max, the failures along the way, and the satisfaction of each step in the process. Through quilting, I am continuing my entanglement with an object and recontextualizing my understanding of them every day.

Figure 19: Finished quilt, 2022, 66” x 42”, mixed fabric patches and thread.

Chapter Five:

Conclusion

Although attending graduate school and undertaking thesis research in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic represented an unexpected and upending turn of events, the unavoidable conditions of isolation in which I was required to work resulted in a particular frame of mind that aided me and fuelled what I regard as my critical creativity., in retrospect, I realize that the forced realities of the pandemic afforded me an opportunity to consider the tenets of my practice and to advance my work in significant and consequential ways. While locked inside my apartment, separated from peers, friends and family where the comforting routines that brought structure to my life were largely, if not overwhelmingly absent, I embarked on a mission to find comfort and fulfillment in my physical surroundings. I set out to find meaning connections to objects in my daily life, to reflect on the circumstances and experiences that shaped my character and contributed to making me into the person I am today. At the same time, and importantly, I found critical and creative stimulation in the forced intimacy of the isolation of the pandemic. The work that I produced – thematically united but marked by differences in materiality and fabrication processes – constitutes both the intellectual, tangible, and affectual results of my focused concerns about connection, memory and well-being.

This thesis constitutes a multidisciplinary effort to address longstanding questions I have had about the operations of memory and the representational capacity of art objects to serve as mnemonic devices. Although deeply personal in character and marked by my open acknowledgement of the importance of sincerity and vulnerability, my application of the autoethnography and practice-based research, result in a thesis that attests to the productive roles that self-reflection can play in knowledge production and self-actualization. My own stories - anecdotes and recollections from my experience of family – have been interrogated through the critical lens of material culture, coming-of-age narratives, and the critical precepts

and affordances of self-reflexivity. I consider my investigations of memory and identity through the depiction of objects – paintings, drawings, and watercolors in the traditions of still life - and the making of functional textiles – quilts – to reveal broadly experiential truths.

In my investigations and studio activities, I have used mediums and methods that were both familiar and new to me. The variety of these material and critical practices offered the ability to explore objects and themes of childhood by way of my own pictorial painting language, and the opportunity to engage (and re-engage in ways) with a world of domestic quilt making traditions. I created an interconnected studio practice that functioned as an interdisciplinary map of my relationship to objects based around the premise of how continuous reflection upon such entities can reveal hidden meanings and therapeutic properties. By adopting quilting as a part of my studio work, I have been able to embrace a form of making long connected to family, identity, community, and the realities of nostalgia. By creating my own quilting circle here in Toronto, I expanded my textile practice far beyond myself. The process of making quilts – heartfelt gestures of remembrance and exercises rooted in contemporary sensibilities – encouraged me to be social as I left my apartment to work with my peers. In addition, and importantly, these productive gatherings resulted in the creation of an artifact that both represents the experience, links my material practice to the past, meaning my grandmother and her circle of friends and provides comfort and warmth both literally and figuratively.

When I began this thesis project, I asked how might reflection upon objects from my childhood and a conscious engagement with my physical surroundings in everyday life and artmaking support a turn towards better health, wellbeing, and fulfillment? What my body of work revealed to me is the value of building consistent processes which allow tactile ways to feel connected to the world around me. The paintings and quilts I have made are tangible expressions of my experiences. Each tells the story of their own creation and of the objects featured within them. In these ways, my works exist as exercises in the processes of memory

and as meaningful records, mementos and triggers of memories and experiences. Indeed, I know that I succeeded in finding the fulfillment for which I was searching and which now powerfully defines my relationship to things through my material and studio practice, thinking, hobbies, community, and the daily domestic activities that beneficially define my life.

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Appendix A: Progress Images

Having learned the value of the process, I offer a behind the scenes making of the work presented in this thesis. My studio practice is an ongoing venture that begins long before paint touches canvas. First, I source imagery. I flip through my parent's old photo albums, and search for objects of importance or note. If I (or my family) still have access to an object, I'll take reference photos of them. At this point, I must have hundreds of pictures saved to my computer for my collection.


Figure A1 and A2: Family photos circa 2000.


Figure B1 and B2: Reference images taken in my family home. On left: clutter atop fridge in storage room. On right: an example of one of Grandma Alice's quilts.

When inspiration strikes, I pick through the images I have saved and isolate objects and patterns of interest. I use Photoshop to cut out my favourites and save them as PNGs I can later arrange into compositions. To help me visualize what I want to paint, I edit the objects into rough, digital collages to practice how I want each item to fit together. This method of creation is something I have continued when designing quilts.

Figure C1 and C2: Examples of isolated PNGs edited from family photos and reference images. Above: my childhood Barbie jeep. Below: my grandmothers souvenir spoon collection.

Figure D1 and D2: Examples of digital collages. Top: collage made in preparation for the untitled chair painting. Bottom: collage made in preparation for *under the stairs/amongst the shelves.*

Figure E1 and E2: Digital collages made during quilting process. Top: pre-production quilt plan. Bottom: updated plan mid-production.

From there I crack open my sketch book. I draw the same shapes over and over, until I am happy with my ability to represent them. My sketchbook acts like a journal and records my different attempts at combining objects and playing with shape.

Figure F1: Sketches planning space and colours of Untitled chair painting.

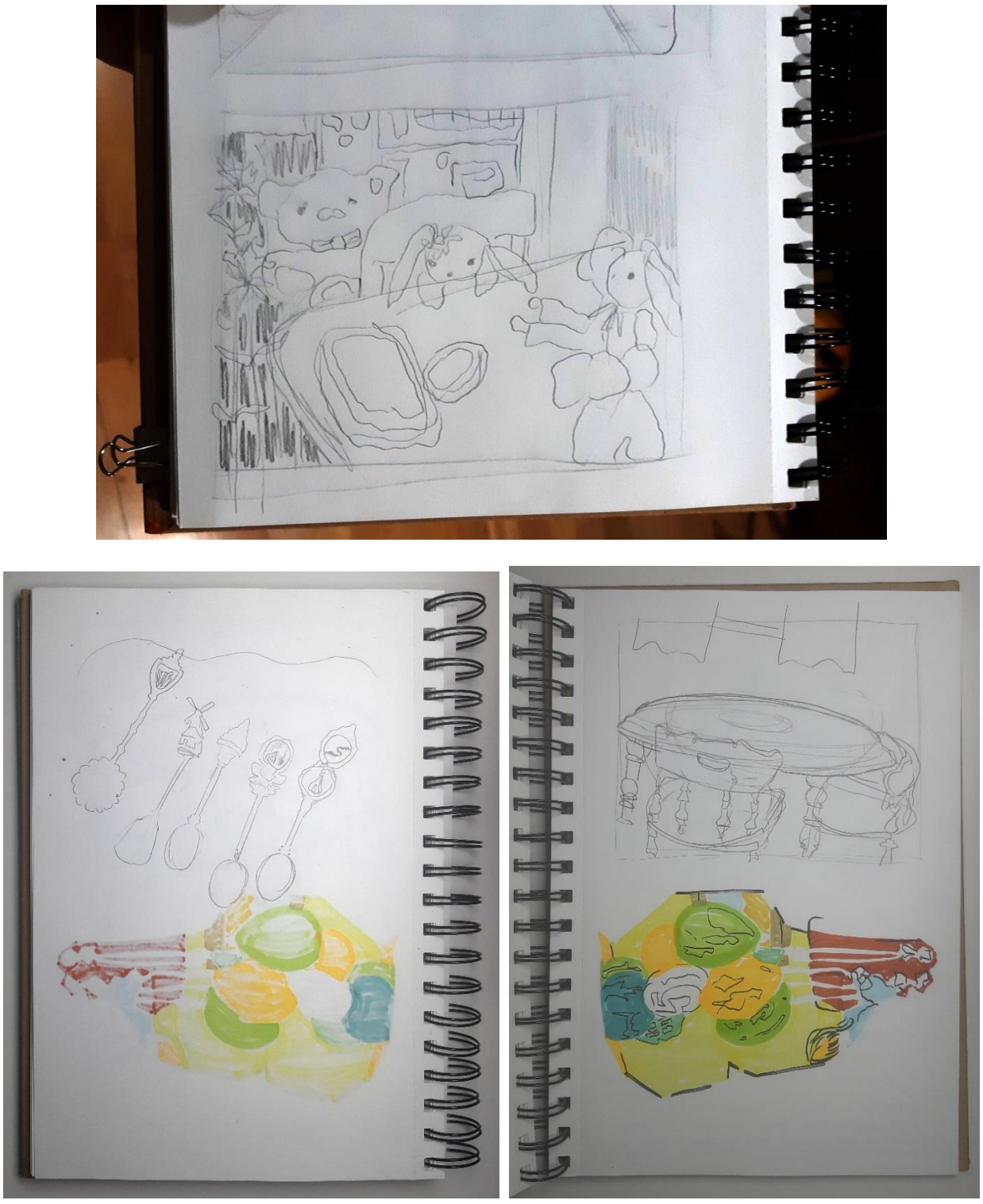

Figure F2, F3, and F4: Various entries in sketchbook. Above: planning sketch for *a very important meeting*. Bottom Left: practicing spoon shapes. Bottom right: drawings of balloons and dining furniture.

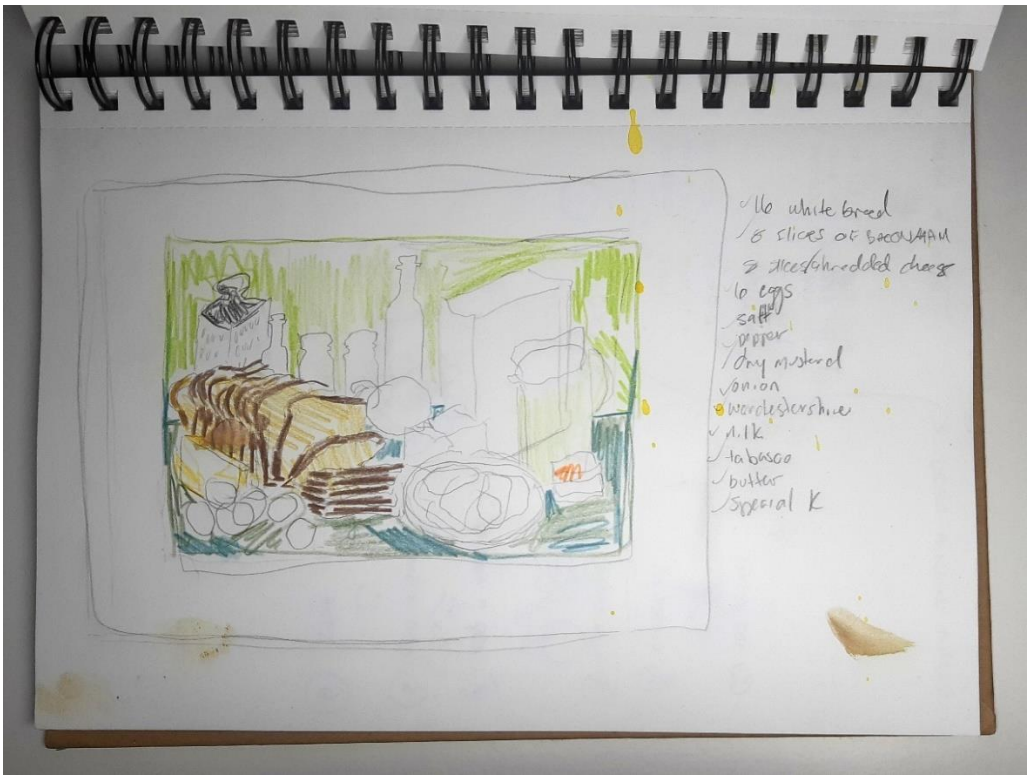

Figure F5 and F6: Additional sketchbook entries. Top: Sketches of balloons and Barbie jeep. Bottom: Sketch plans for *Christmas Morning Wife Saver* painting.

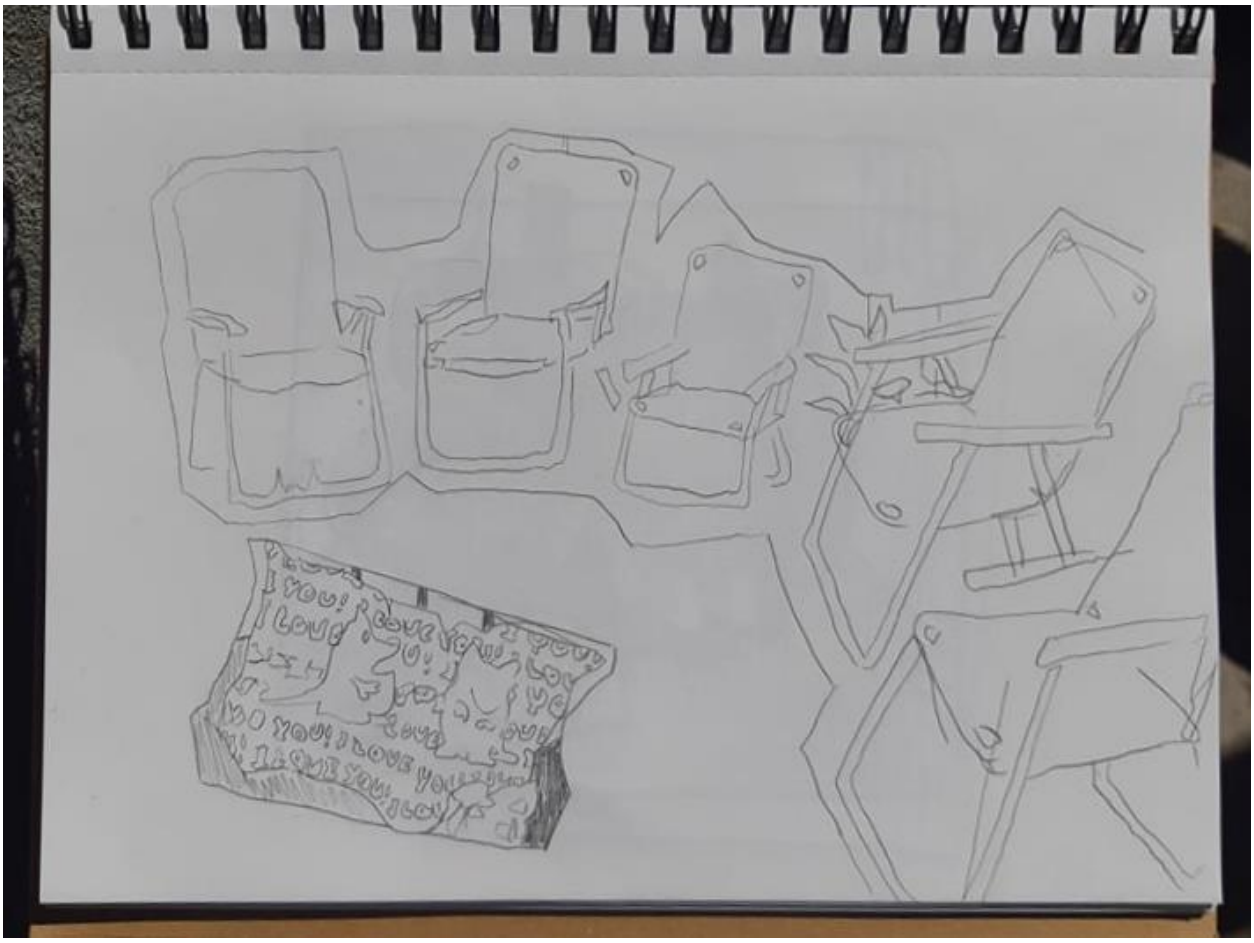

Figure F7: Sketchbook entry featuring lawn chairs and pillow.

By the time I begin painting, I have spent hours invested in the creation of my work. When I finally lay brush on canvas, I work in increments. I lay down multiple layers, stepping back between each one to think about how they are interacting. Due to my lack of studio space, the process is also a matter of time and place. The initial layers of acrylic paint are done in my apartment in Toronto, but I hold back on oil painting until I am in my parent's garbage in London, Ontario, where it is safe and ventilated.

Figure G1: In-progress image of untitled chair painting. Initial layer is pencil crayon and acrylic paint.

Figure G2: In-progress image of untitled chair painting. Beginning to layer oil paint in safely ventilated area.

My quilting process was an exciting new venture for me. As mentioned above, I used my photo editing knowledge to conceive the design of my quilt. Together with my friend and peer Max McKerlie, I bought fabric, cut shapes, and used a sewing machine for the first time. We met multiple times a week to tackle each aspect of the process. On the larger quilt, I cut of image of objects and top stitched them over the patchwork body to complete the blanket.

Figure H1, H2, H3, and H4: Images of first quilt process. Top left: Cutting out squares. Top right: Organizing shapes in pattern to be sewn. Bottom left: squares sewn to muslin. Bottom right: Posing with finished quilt.

Figure I1, I2, I3: Progress documentation of different shapes cut out to be included in second larger quilt. Top left: Skunk shape cut out of black and white fabric. Top right: Pile of fabric squares to make up body of quilt. Bottom: Spoon shapes cut out of three different shimmery fabrics.