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ABSTRACT

If the house is more elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated.

- Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

My work this semester focuses on exploring the connection and disconnection between the individual and the group. Interaction becomes my act of navigation through space, time, and memory as I explore the intersection of personal experience with public sharing.

Studying movement and function in my first architectural design course last fall I became aware of how important flow is within an architectural space. Interior spaces also stimulate subterranean memories. My work incorporates silhouettes created by architecture scale figures. They are used in architectural renderings and diagrams to represent average adults in scale. My figures, often cut, painted, or printed, are purposefully nondescript and repetitive. With this visual information the viewer is left to create a narrative based on his or her own personal experiences. With which figures or groups do nearby figures identify? My project draws on what I have learned from printmaking, sculpture, papermaking, and painting. My explorations mix varying print techniques, including monoprint, pochoir, and relief printing, with sculptural installation elements. I incorporate various kinds of handmade Japanese and western style paper.

My most recent work explores my own biography and memories. I draw on memories from my grandparent's home to show how connections with those around me change as ideas and opinions are handed from one generation to the next generation. Many years have passed since I have spent time in my grandparent's home but I still remember the spatial layout and the objects inside. My latest work is an exercise in recreating certain feelings and memories associated with my grandparents even though these memories have been obscured by time.

People:
Connectivity and Movement

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Last semester I took my first architectural design course with professor Thom Long and while studying function and movement I became aware of how important flow is within a space. More specifically, I learned how interior spaces become grounds to create and stimulate memory. This was particularly interesting for me because I wanted to further investigate the relationship between the individual and the group for my senior thesis project. Due to the constantly changing relationships I have with friends, family, and strangers, I often feel caught between observation and participation. Rehashing memory has become my act of navigation through space, time, and daily life. By bringing the past to the present, I am able to put myself in relation to others within a fabricated place of interaction. However, I have become increasingly aware of how the “past” I remember is not, in most cases, the past as it actually was. Outside influences such as time, conversation, and people continue to erode my memories, breaking them down so they are ultimately reformulated. This year has been part of an ongoing exploration of how personal memory can intersect with public sharing.

My work incorporates stencils created by cutting out architectural scale figures. Architects use these figures in models and diagrams in order to compare the size and placement of people to structures, so they can better understand scale and space. While my cutouts measure only about one inch long, they represent average adults in scale. By pushing paint or ink through my figurative stencils, the individual figures remain purposefully nondescript and repetitive.

The first piece I made last semester was a linoleum-cut that was relief printed in a grid-like structure created by many rectangular units (image 1). This large piece measures about four feet wide and three feet tall although the figures remain one inch tall. I cut the linoleum with outlines of figures that did not overlap. To transfer the images, I rolled ink over the linoleum repeatedly and pressed it onto the paper. I created blocks of figures and the overall impression of the piece is modular and rigid. Because I was printed on brown craft paper, the thickness of the paint caused the paper to buckle, an effect that, though textural, frustrated me. The buckled paper had a distracting effect on the overall image.

In the next piece (image 2) I incorporated overlapping figures, this time on smoother Lenox paper, and I used different translucencies of ink. Through the overlapping of figures I worked to imply a three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. By arranging the silhouettes in formations, each individual figure either gained or lost significance. The viewer creates his or her own narrative based on personal experience. With which individual or group do they identify?

System (image 3) is a series of drawn lines that make a maze-like pattern similar to the floor plan of a building. I placed discarded cut out silhouettes of the architectural scale figures from the stencils on top of the lines. Relationships and connections are constantly in flux. I wanted to show social systems as something that need to be navigated. I wanted to represent what it feels like to physically

move through space by expressing the complications and confusion that materialize. This piece appears overly rigid and complicated despite the deceptive simplicity of keeping a black and white palette.

Tug of War (image 4) is a continuous line of figures that appear to pull in the same direction. The silhouetted figures were cut from white watercolor paper and attached at the seams to create a circle. Because of the paper's stiffness, the paper stands upright, supporting itself, and shadows of the figures are cast on the floor. There are various formations of figures pulling, placed within each other to create concentric circles. When placed together, the circles could comprise a target. The meaning behind the work is not definite and is up for interpretation. The circle remains unbroken. Are the figures working together to pull towards a common goal or are they working against one other? Is the constant pulling futile since they will never be able to break from the circle or each other? Are the figures united or in conflict?

In *Tug of War* (image 4), I was influenced by the artist Do Ho Suh. His sculpture and installation work address the importance of multiple people and identity. In *Floor*, he questions individuality and constantly reminds his viewers of their existence within a larger network of people, how we relate to one another in a collective. Vija Celmins' ocean prints were also a source of inspiration because of their rhythmic repetition as well as her stark palette. Celmins' ocean prints are both calming and frustrating in their consistency. It seems that the

water continues off the edges of the paper and Celmins creates amazing depth of space on a two-dimensional surface. Like Celmins, I tried to suggest lines beyond the paper itself. My work does not exist merely on top of the surface, but exists as a part of the paper.

At this point, I knew I wanted to create a more personal space for others to interact with because I was frustrated with the rigidity of the work thus far. In a Frank Lloyd Wright seminar I am taking this semester at Mount Holyoke with Professor Michael Davis, we read a few articles about phenomenology in an architectural context. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard writes that we “experience the house in its reality and in its virtuality, by means of thought and dreams” (Leach 87). Because memories are rooted in both physical space and fabricated space, direct translation of memories into tangible material becomes impossible. It is inevitable that memory becomes altered and my work this semester explores the various degrees of separation between personal memory and the viewer’s interpretation.

After discussing this excerpt by Bachelard, I started thinking more about how memory is created within a space and questioning what spaces have been important to me. I wanted to explore memory through architecture. To do this, I chose a special space that I knew well but that has changed over time both in memory and in actuality. This space was my grandparent’s home. I hope that by attempting to formalize my memories, I can transition my personal experience

into a public arena. When I was younger, both my parents worked long hours and after school I would go to my grandparent's home, located in a nearby town, until my parents were able to pick me up. I found it amazing that their deceptively nondescript house can hold such an excess of memory. On the outside, whitewashed and paneled, their home was similar on the outside to most others on their block. It has become important to me, yet I was aware of its possible insignificance to others. This is something that I find myself worried about while sharing information. In creating a space inspired by personal experience, I need to learn to step back and let go to a certain extent. My work this year has been an experiment in how to release memory in order to create something new for myself. Although one of my fears with sharing personal experience is that people "won't get it," I have come to realize that misinterpretation is inevitable and not necessarily a bad thing. New avenues come from old pathways and everything means something different to someone else.

After spending many hours at my grandparent's home I came to know their house as well as my own. I knew the feel of the gnarly wall-to-wall carpeting under my bare feet, the woven yellowed lampshades, the fake flowers powdered with dust, the worn psychedelic-inspired terry cloth towels they would drape across each chair or sofa, and the cool smooth glass of the low coffee table on which I would arrange various plastic drink coasters into different formations. I realize now that I base large parts of my reconstructed memories on different

textures during my childhood experience. Perhaps I was unsatisfied with my previous work because it lacked the texture that is, in my mind, integrally linked to the experience itself.

Up until this point I had been using different kinds of paper—craft, printmaking, and watercolor. While I was happy with the stiffness of the watercolor paper for *Tug of War* (image 4), I still felt somewhat limited with the texture of the commercially manufactured paper. With the permission of Rie Hachiyanagi, I was able to use Mount Holyoke’s papermaking facilities to learn both Western and Japanese methods of papermaking. Through this opportunity I could incorporate handmade cotton, sisal, and kozo paper into my prints.

I enjoy the process of creating handmade paper. Taking the plant fiber and recreating it into flat sheets is similar to the reformulation of memory where information gets manipulated and compressed. Many variations are possible. The papermaking process also allowed me to modify the color of the paper specifically for each project. For example, in the prints *Side Room* (image 5) and *Sandscape* (image 6) I wanted a lighter shade than was used in *Stack* (image 7) and a mixture was created from both cotton and sisal fiber. The color of cotton fiber paper is a very bright white and sisal paper is a warm taupe. Through combining these two fibers in the beating process (in a 3:2 ratio) a light tan color surfaced. I enjoy handmade paper because it has a unique surface that is unlike any manufactured paper I had used previously. My memories from my

grandparent's home are closely linked to texture and touch. By using tactile handmade paper, my memories can interact on a new surface, created by the reformation of fiber. The varying and unpredictable thickness of the sisal/cotton paper becomes an active surface for the ink and I like that the edges of the handmade paper are often irregular. The paper is an integral part of each work because each unique surface demands a different reaction and result.

Although the biggest wooden frame, or deckle, to form sheets of paper measured 12x18 inches, I was not limited by the small standard sheet size. By joining many pieces of paper together with pH neutral adhesive, I could create larger surfaces. In *Sandscape* (image 6) and *Side Room* (image 5), instead of making a larger deckle out of mesh and wood, I opted to connect the individual sheets into one large piece. As discussed in critique with faculty, connecting the paper worked to the benefit of *Sandscape* because a visual structure emerged, created by the grid-like joins between each individual sheet. The connection between the small pieces of paper to the larger whole is similar to the relationship of the individual to the group.

In *Stack* (image 7), I placed many triangular units of handmade paper on top of one another. I printed each side of the triangle with overlapping figures that appear to walk around the triangle itself. Built up vertically, the figures depend on one another to balance and exist in a structure. I enjoy how the pieces can appear unstable. I wanted to create interior spaces between each unit but I also

became aware that a support system, a rod or dowel, running up the middle of the piece, was needed to stabilize the piece. The paper is very light and when built up, the piece sways if there is ventilation or jostling. Even though I like the unpredictability of the piece and its reaction to its surroundings ultimately, I decided to create a support for the piece because I did not want it to fall down.

I based many of my recent works on specific objects or movements within my grandparent's home. The first piece I did after deciding to focus on this particular space was a monotype print (image 8). On the clear plate I repeatedly painted my last name, Hu, in the style of Chinese brush painting. For a special activity when I was a child, my grandmother would teach me traditional brushwork techniques, as she knew them, which included how to hold the brush, mix the ink, and the various line weights used in each character. We would practice on the back of old Chinese calendars, the kind given away for free at Asian supermarkets, and she would show me how to grind the ink stick into water to create just the right shade of black. We would practice almost every time I would stay with my grandparents and although I was mediocre at best, the repetition of the movements to create the characters has stayed with me. On a monotype the image prints backwards onto the paper and I enjoy that the image is reversed. The printing process skews memory further and the mirrored image becomes farther removed yet still evocative enough of the original activity. In my mind, my *Hu* print is not finished. I do not think that I have repeated the *Hu* characters

enough. In the future, I hope to continue printing more layers on the image so the characters continue to build on top of each other. The new ink will gradually obscure the underlying layers as the image becomes denser and more saturated.

In *Sandscape* (image 6), I drew line upon line, each following the contour of the line underneath it. Nine individual pieces of handmade cotton/sisal paper compose this piece, joining together to create a large square. I based this piece on a specific object that belonged to my grandparents. It was made of two pieces of framed glass sandwiching green and black sand suspended in a clear liquid. This object was a decorative piece and they were popular in the 1970's. My grandparents kept this mysterious object in their living room on a small black stand. I viewed the landscape as a diversion and something to interact with on a daily basis although the glass was fragile. When turned upside down, the sand would slowly fall down and arrange itself into lines, creating an imaginary landscape. I would turn this object upside down again and again, creating a game out of it and tapping the glass to encourage the sand to fall in specific patterns.

I used the same cotton/sisal fiber mix for *Side Room* (image 5). I created a continuous circular pattern with the architectural scale figures. I used this circular movement to suggest the motion of a stationary bicycle wheel spinning quickly. I chose to use the scale figures because I find the movement of the bike wheel similar to the movement of people circling continuously around us in daily life. I also wanted to suggest a saturation of figures. However, in this print the

connected rectangles of paper work against the circular motion. I hoped that by layering more ink on the image, the grids of the joined papers would fill in and become less distracting. I also added more paper to the piece and the size increased to a larger rectangle of 55" x 42". The figures have more room to expand. I combined the stencils with linoleum-cut figures to give variation in their formation and texture. In this piece, it is important that the figures look like they are spiraling outward. The unpredictable edges of the paper suggest weathering over time.

Lanterns (image 9) is also based on a specific object in my grandparent's home. My grandparents kept dried physalis alkekengi, or Chinese lantern plants, in vases around their living room and dining area. These dried plants, a pale red in color (the color of luck), often fell from the stalks they grew from, littering the tables and floor underneath them. I have always been attracted to their vein-like, papery, and delicate texture. By painting handmade Thai kozo paper and forming it over wire frames, I hope to simulate the same experience I had with the fallen plant pods so long ago. I also printed architectural figures, representing outside influence on the memory, with a purplish color, blurred across the kozo paper. I altered the size of the lanterns, making some of them larger and some smaller because I am unable to remember the actual size of the plant. Those particular lanterns have probably disintegrated over time. By arranging my recreated lanterns over three suspended shelves, they appear to have just fallen from the

stalk. I increased the number of lanterns to echo the amount of time that has passed and the intensity with which I have thought about the subject.

My work is very much still in progress but these past two semesters I have tied together my reoccurring themes of architecture, memory, texture, and movement. By recreating altered memory, I hope to create something new for those who view my work as well as for myself. Although I cannot resist time's effect on my remembrance, I still carry the pieces of my own experiences that will resurface in different formations. I am aware that different spaces will trigger these memories, however altered they may be, and I will welcome them as they resurface in daily life. Through every piece I have made this year, I want viewers to create their own associations within the space I have provided. These associations are the ties that connect us to each other.

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<http://www.lehmannmaupin.com/#/artists/do-ho-suh/>

Leach, Neil. *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural History*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

“Vija Celmins Biography.” *Art:21 PBS*.
<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/celmins/index.html>.

CD-ROM Information

1. *Untitled I*
2009 linoleum-cut relief print 48" x 36"
ink on paper
2. *Untitled II*
2009 linoleum-cut relief print 24" x 30"
ink on Lenox paper
3. *System*
2010 drawing and collage 40" x 40"
ink on paper
4. *Tug of War*
2010 installation 49" x 27" x 6"
cut paper
5. *Side Room*
2010 print 55" x 42"
ink on handmade cotton/sisal paper
6. *Sandscape*
2010 print 42" x 32"
ink on handmade cotton/sisal paper
- 6a. *Sandscape*
2010 print 42" x 32"
ink on handmade cotton/sisal paper
Detail #1
7. *Stack*
2010 sculpture 11" x 60" x 8"
ink on handmade cotton/sisal paper
- 7a. *Stack*
2010 sculpture 11" x 60" x 8"
ink on handmade cotton/sisal paper
Detail #1
8. *Hu*
2010 monotype print 26" x 40"
ink on paper

9. *Lanterns*
2010 sculpture 23" x 23" x 9"
ink on handmade Thai kozo paper over wire
- 9a. *Lanterns*
2010 sculpture 23" x 23" x 9"
ink on handmade Thai kozo paper over wire
Detail #1