

ALLISON, KATHERINE T. M.F.A. *Be My Neighbor: a studio practice review.* (2022)
Directed by Professor Barbara Campbell Thomas. 33pp.

My work over the past 2 years of grad school is a collection and reimagining of place, specifically communal and residential areas of Greensboro, North Carolina. After sitting with my sketchbook, bag of fabric scraps, watercolors, and pens, in different patches of grass throughout parks, gardens, and porches, I realized I was amassing a catalog of the city. I used these intuitive, timed, and observational but abstracted images to explore various ways of interpreting the shapes, colors, and patterns that I see daily. I walked out of my front door and into a new phenomenological world where my experience literally shaped my perspective. I thought about the best way to translate all these collages I had collected into textile/mixed media pieces and decided to try them all. I converted compositions into recreated quilts, combined observed elements into fictional invented landscapes, turned trees into giant "body pillows", and wrote about the reasons I chose to collage my favorite spots. All of this was done in an effort to explore community. After living through the isolation of the pandemic, and longing to reconnect, I learned a whole new craft: quilting. Since I knew quilting had an already established history and community, plus I was already obsessed with textiles, I thought the quilting community would be a good place to start. I found inspiring artists such as Coulter Fussel, Sanford Biggers, and non-quilters such as Ann Hamilton, Stuart Davis, Shara Hughes, and Sheila Hicks. My research of the Gee's Bend quilts also helped me understand the power that quilts can have. Certain media helped me understand that the way I view landscapes or worlds I build are a type of parallel magical universe/dreamworld, out of a DnD session or Star Trek season, where everyone has what they need and can competently collaborate and come together to both have fun and problem solve. The ways I intuitively and quickly respond to the landscape in a way parallels the world-

building or combat rolls of Dungeons and Dragons session as well. Readings that helped me understand the aesthetic and technical qualities of invented skill, learning on the fly, and earnest exaggeration include Susan Sontag's *Notes on Camp* and *Faux Pas* by Amy Sillman. I feel like these qualities make the work feel accessible, charming, and endearing. I made new friends at the Gate City Quilt Guild trading and being given materials, and met my neighbors, their dogs, and children, as I collaged their houses from the curb. Most importantly, I laughed, rested, and radically did nothing in an effort to not only have a sustainable art practice but a sustainable life. Thanks to the author Jenny Odell of *How to do Nothing* and also Andrew Simonet's *Making Your Life as an Artist* for guiding this endeavor. I did all this in my communal living space with my wonderful friends. I endeavored and still endeavor to ask how can we make every day anew, see the world as brighter, capable of being full of possibilities and playfulness, and reemerge in an effort to radically resist capitalist exploitation with art? I feel to answer this *Be My Neighbor* has become my newly constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed way of appreciating home.

BE MY NEIGHBOR

by

Katherine Taylor Allison

A Thesis

Submitted to

the Faculty of The Graduate School at

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro

2022

Approved by

Barbara Campbell Thomas
Committee Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by Katherine Taylor Allison has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair

Professor Barbara Campbell Thomas

Committee Members

Dr. Heather Holian

Professor Jennifer Meanley

Professor Sunny Spillane

April 8, 2022

Date of Acceptance by Committee

April 8, 2022

Date of Final Oral Examination

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: BACKGROUND.....	1
Early Life	1
Travel Abroad.....	2
Summer of 2020.....	3
CHAPTER II: INFLUENCES	6
Illustrations	6
Undergraduate Influences	6
Painters.....	8
Materialists.....	9
Quilters.....	9
Installation Artists.....	12
Phenomenology	12
CHAPTER III: PROCESS.....	14
<i>The Catalog</i>	14
Textiles.....	17
Invented Landscapes.....	18
Diorama	18
Concepts.....	20
CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION	24
WORKS CITED	25
APPENDIX A: IMAGES OF WORK	26

CHAPTER I: BACKGROUND

Early Life

“Practice” seems like a word that has been said to me, and at me, since I can remember. I grew up as an athlete, playing a variety of sports, and also a musician, playing the piano. I got a scholarship to play golf at Western Carolina University, where *practice* was drilled into me for hours and hours on end. When I realized that physical pursuit wasn’t for me because my entire self-worth was determined by how well I physically performed, and my ethical/moral/spiritual well-roundedness as a person was being totally neglected, I decided to learn about myself and grow. So I quit the team and started over. I decided to move to Greensboro and transfer to the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. UNCG is where I discovered how *practice* can mean something thrilling.

I have always liked drawing and I found myself spending a lot of time alone when I quit the golf team, drawing to fill the time. I kept drawing when I came to Greensboro and decided to change my major from journalism to art. There were a few classes that helped frame my new version of the word practice in particular, and they were: 1. *Variable Topics in Drawing*, where essentially it was a sketchbook practice experimental class, and 2. *Portrait of Landscape* where the class traveled to nearby areas and painted on site. The sketchbook class helped me understand that almost anything can be used as a material, or even to consider things other than drawing and painting as a way to make art. Collage was a huge piece of that class, and it is something that has influenced my practice since. Collage made me interested in fabric as well. One of the activities of our variable topics class was to customize our sketchbooks. Professor Barbara Campbell Thomas showed us examples of the ones her mother makes custom for her

and they were so tactile and beautiful. Wrapping my sketchbooks in fabric became a norm for me and would eventually be the catalyst for the work I do now.

Portrait of Landscape with Mariam Stephan helped me see the world as something to document, there were endless forms, colors, shades, and spaces that I could sketch very quickly and make compositions with. The main exercise from this class that really gave me ideas was the combination of landscapes. We would collect a catalog of sketches, pick 3, or 4 and combine them into a single composition. This is when I started thinking about the compression of space. So combining the impacts these classes made on me helped establish the art practice I have now.

Travel Abroad

Another event that has made a huge impact on my transformation of the word practice was my “study abroad” trip to Italy and Spain. I have study abroad in quotations because I actually went of my own accord, but the art department happened to also be there, so I got to tag along with them for some of the museum visits and projects. Apart from seeing so much Renaissance architecture and paintings, the time alone I spent reading, collecting materials, sketching, and traveling, helped me grow as a person. Everything felt new and precious. Train tickets, museum pamphlets, watercolor travel packs, receipts, and reading quotations went into my sketchbook. I generated A LOT of work. The work stemmed from observational sketches to abstracted experiments based on street signs and posts, to detailed micro contour drawings, and to mixed media collages.

Coming back from Europe (I almost didn’t come back to the U.S and I miss it terribly), getting a corporate office job to pay bills, living in a small house with no studio, and being incredibly lost post-graduation, I had to figure out a way to make art that worked with my resources. Printmaking and collage became the prime methods I used to continue my practice. I

had a little 3' x 3' space that I made woodblock prints in, and I collected EVERYTHING. Again receipts, ticket stubs, bank bag strips, but also a lot of images of downtown. I became fascinated with construction sites and more specifically, heavy machinery. Cranes that towered over the sky felt like titans with a godly backstory, bulldozers felt like giants, and even traffic cones around these sites had their own personalities. I documented these objects through woodblock printing and collaged them to create narratives. This body of work became the portfolio I submitted to the UNCG MFA program.

Summer of 2020

Through my experiences in undergrad, Europe, and graduate school, it's become obvious to me that my environment heavily influences my practice. It took me a while to realize that that is what worked for me because coming back to Greensboro I was finding it difficult to continue making prints of these objects because I wasn't surrounded by them. But what was influencing me was my neighborhood, and some specific areas surrounding Greensboro. There is a strong sense of community where I live, which I have never experienced. I'd always felt isolated in apartments or rural houses prior. There is a vast community garden, community events, a newsletter, and demographic diversity.

Community is a word I became interested in following the summer of 2020. We were so isolated from the pandemic, being in lockdown/quarantine, that I forgot how important talking to and growing relationships with people were. Not only that but that summer I participated in protests for months and learned about the BLM movement. Seeing how my community came together to support that movement and in particular, Marcus Smith's family, in a really big way helped me realize how important and vital community is. Marcus Smith was part of the homeless community in Greensboro, and downtown in 2018 he was murdered by Greensboro police

officers after requesting medical aid. Marcus did not get fair justice, but his family did reach a settlement with the city of Greensboro and now has a plaque erected in his memory downtown. The experience of supporting this movement gave me many things to reflect on. I felt anger as I marched through the streets of my home knowing that someone in my community was killed with impunity. I felt awe that so many people came together to hold police accountable and also support each other. It changed my view of how we are connected to this place, and in my opinion, the most powerful thing I've participated in. Since then I've joined the Triad's Standing Up for Racial Justice organization, continue to read books on how to be radically antiracist, check my privilege, and try to use my privilege for good. I wondered how best to capture the feeling of connection with the people of my community in my art practice. By knowing we were actually looking out for each other, I wanted to continue to feel connected to this place and people here afterward, in a way that was radical with art.

As I started my first year of graduate school at UNCG I became fascinated with quilting. Part of this is because I was tasked with making masks for the job I had during the summer. I quilted my first sketchbook cover with the leftover t-shirts I used to make those masks. This was the first time I used a sewing machine and I was thrilled. I was interested in how quilting as its own community functions. To me, quilting embodies community through its form and process. Quilts start at a single point with tiny pieces and scraps, those pieces spend a lot of time in the hands of and being cared for by people, and eventually, those scraps turn into this blanket of warmth. I started to build a community with a quilt guild in Greensboro and currently serve on their social media committee.

Then I started to think about what the word community meant to me on a more personal level. The main way I decided is based on the depth of relationships. I have different boundaries

for organizing community through depths of relationships in my head, kind of akin to quilt squares; with my communal living partners being the largest square, and eventually, strangers being towards the smallest, but still recorded and valued. My goal was to expand, overlap, and integrate at least some of these community quilt squares both relationship-wise and art-making-wise.

Now that I have this outlook and goal, *practice* has a very different meaning for me. I don't dread going to the studio. I look forward to practicing my art. There's repetition but my art practice is not monotonous, it's exciting. Consistency is the main thing that's carried over from my former athletic practice. I have to show up. I have to contribute to making art, contribute to this place, and I have to do it sustainably.

CHAPTER II: INFLUENCES

Illustrations

I didn't experience almost any art in museums growing up, but I did notice pictures of things my parents would let me read. I was very taken with illustrations as a child. The main outlet I saw these images in were ones from the SciFi stories I read, nature survival books, and a few illustrated storybooks. A few big ones were the *Charlie Bones* series by Jenny Nimmo, Willy Whitefeather's *Outdoor Survival Handbook for Kids*, *A Series of Unfortunate Events* by Lemony Snicket, and the *Captain Underpants* novels by Dav Pilkey. The main SciFi series with amazing illustrations that I still adore, and recently gave to my niece as a birthday present is Tony DiTerlizzi and Holly Black's *The Spiderwick Chronicles*.

The world-building of this series blew my mind in particular when I was younger because this world existed alongside/within our own. Jared Grace, the main character, comes to possess a monocle of some sort that gives him the ability to see creatures that were invisible to the human eye. He discovers this vast world filled with monsters, wizards, and friends just in his backyard. For a woods exploring kid, this was so exciting and made me feel like the world had possibilities and we could visualize them to bring them to life. Later, I came to appreciate and also become obsessed with the *Lord of the Rings* movies. This appreciation is more so for the lore and the world-building of Tolkein's universe from the ground up, starting from creation all the way to "present-day." A big personal goal I have post-graduation is reading the original trilogy by Tolkein! I can think of a handful of others but these are the ones that stand out the most.

Undergraduate Influences

Then of course there was undergrad art history. The Renaissance blew me away. A few of the later artists that come to mind are Pontormo, Parmigianino, Rosso Fiorentino, and

particularly Mannerism with a focus on color. In Fiorentino's case, shape really gave me a sense of wonder. There was a way he rendered figures that weren't entirely naturalistic, they were almost blocky, geometric even, but that made them so much more dynamic for me. Especially in the work *Deposition From the Cross, circa 1521*, Fiorentino bumped up the color, saturated the blocky figure's plains of the body, and dramatically altered the mood of the painting.

Parmigianino elongated his figures, especially in works like *Madonna and Long Child with Angels and St. Jerome, 1535-40*, or as I like to call it "The Swan Madonna." Mannerism to me is a shift in the dramatization of style both in rendering and in the structural design of figures that I was so down with. These exaggerated and dramatized choices in shape, color, and structure, are what influenced me the most from this period. I've tried to carry these techniques and attitudes into my current work through saturation, exaggeration, and an emphasis on shape.

I was wholly obsessed with the Medici and the thought process behind all of the subject matter and all of the design that was carefully woven into each painting commissioned by them. Medici heads of houses would weasel their image into a painting, they would commission the artist to depict propagandistic images of the family that reinforced their standing, or they might leave secret messages to not mess with them because look what happens (heads roll sometimes). I was very taken with representational works and the figure, but I started to explore more abstract and modern artists in my junior and senior years of undergrad. A few artists and concepts that come to mind are De Kooning, Kandinsky, Rothko, Mondrian, Helen Frankenthaler, Ellsworth Kelly, Julie Mehretu, Peter Doig, Cubism, and Abstract Expressionism. Collage within cubism was something that was a big staple. I remember seeing a random Picasso collage and wanting to make works that felt like them. After seeing Helen Frankenthaler's work I remember being in the

senior studio, pouring concoctions of oil paint trying to get the beautiful atmospheric effects that she made.

Painters

Shara Hughes is a painter that recently inspired me. Hughes uses bright saturated colors to make almost psychedelic worlds. I don't make very many oil paintings anymore, but my invented landscape works (collage/paintings) have largely to do with building new worlds with references to reality. Hughes is the painter who made me realize how significant a simple mark can be. Her works aren't realistic but you can put yourself in this world, dive into a lake made out of candy-colored stones and see down a big hill with trees that look like noodles. It is magical and serious, but it's been done in a way that is genuine, referencing classical painters. It looks so fun!

Then there's Stuart Davis. In terms of collecting images of more residential and communal landscapes and also aesthetically, my work is very close to his. His work is almost illustrative. His paintings are graphic and a lot of his works are influenced by his musical interests. The colors he uses are saturated, and he works along with the concept of what is now called *Angle Theory*. "There are an infinite number of form concepts available. My own is very simple and based on the assumption that space is continuous and that matter is discontinuous... I conceive of form (matter) as existing in space, in terms of linear direction. It follows then that the forms of the subject are analyzed in terms of angular variation from successive bases of directional radiation. The phenomena of color, size, shape, and texture are the result of such variation." (Rylands 134).

I found certain elements of this theory that I don't and do align with. In terms of linear qualities, I agree that I do see lines in the landscape that connect forms through lines of sight,

where the eye naturally travels from form to form and links them. But in terms of space, I disagree. I see areas I observe more similar to containers. While there is in fact a container, making space limited not limitless, the forms within those containers are infinite. My mind instinctively chooses these boundaries in space and then I record the forms I see the most in them, simplified to be sure. This theory made me ponder the way I view spaces while I'm working. I do create a hierarchy of forms while making on-site. A lot of the time this hierarchy is determined by textural or shaped groupings of similar objects, groupings of colors, or specific objects that just catch my attention more. What's so great about viewing space like this is that Davis was right, there are an infinite number of form concepts available.

Materialists

There are artists who more recently inspire me based on the materials they use. Mark Bradford and El Anatsui are two of those. Collecting is still a big part of my practice, a lot of it has to do with commemorating experiences and identifying myself within space. Placing a ticket stub of a movie I saw with my friends, or a pamphlet of an exhibit that impacted me into my sketchbook, helps me remember my life. So collecting is a diaristic habit. But collecting also deals with the fact that I don't want to create more trash. I want to reuse everything. Both of these artists are also collectors, using mundane things in large quantities to make beautiful works. I found myself drawn to them while I was collecting plastic bags, dryer sheets, and receipts, which would eventually be what a lot of my soft sculptures would be stuffed with.

Quilters

Coulter Fussell and Sanford Biggers are the two textile artists that I have been looking at the most. Fussell's practice is the closest to my own, she collects used/recycled/upscaled materials from people all over the world through donations. While I don't have as big a network

as Coulter Fussell does, I am working with traded and donated textiles/reused textiles. But I am also collecting trash to substitute filling or batting, to create less waste, and also to make up for my lack of resources; plastic bags, dryer sheets, shredded paper, and cardboard, are some examples. I also have a fascination with things being used again, something once carrying groceries to the kitchen counter now filling a floor piece that you can rest your head-on. Fussell and I are both fascinated with old things becoming new because of the stories they hold and the journeys they have taken. I love using old clothes, to see the things that have been protecting people's bodies for who knows how long. I would like to think that this distinct collection of clothes used in art rather than in a landfill in protest of fast fashion. Also, talking to people about the things they want to donate or trade starts conversations and builds relationships; this is one of the greatest rewards of this part of my practice. One of my friends from the quilt guild recently gave me a bag of batting with fabric scraps, she began listing all of the projects she had used them for, where they came from, where I could get them at a cheaper price if I wanted more, and how the projects she had used them for had turned out. On top of that, since this is all new to me, solicited and very helpful advice springs from these trading encounters. One tidbit of advice was after being given a stack of fabric, she told me the way to make the pieces all align, so your patterns all come out with similar compositions, was through pinning. Coulter Fussell's quilts also resemble 3-D paintings. Her works verge on assemblage, holes are created, boxes are stacked on top, and quilted squares spin. I feel an aesthetic connection to her work because of this quality. While Fussell is very skilled and knowledgeable about her craft, especially when it comes to hand sewing, I am learning this on the fly. If a piece of fabric doesn't lay quite right, bunches, or is no longer clean and flat, due to my ignorance of being a beginner textile artist, I

understand now that it is okay for those things to happen. Coulter's work is unconventional in the crafting world, expertly done, not separate from quilting, and still so rich and beautiful.

Sanford Biggers has made a huge influence on me as a quilter/painter. His use of both quilting and painting in combination, as well as his way of telling stories about history, particularly within the African American community, has really stuck with me. His work makes me think about the surface of things. I recently was able to see a work of his up close and personal in the Weatherspoon which was made of Japanese denim, fabric scraps, and spray paint. While I'm sure he has a team/studio full of assistants to help him with his work, the surface of this textile piece was amazing. Threads were widely spaced apart, bits of fabric bunched up, and there were rips and tears clearly visible. The technique did not seem to be done by a master craftsman, but by someone wanting to use all of these materials with the clean quality of traditional quilts being a secondary concern. The fact that he is also an interdisciplinary artist, working in various mediums/industries like painting, metal casting, quilting, and even fashion, has given me reassurance for my own ADHD self. I don't just have to make one type of thing, they're all connected.

That brings me to the Gee's Bend quilts. Wow. I know that there are plenty of quilters and organizations who have used quilts for radical activism, I love a lot of them, but the Gee's Bend quilts take the cake. For my final art history research project in "Color & Culture: Histories of Hue and Perception," we were able to choose the subject matter. I chose to do a color analysis of the Gee's Bend quilts to see if there were any themes in the color palette, patterns, etc. I'm still reading and gathering research, but I've found myself looking at images of the Gee's Bend quilts when I feel stressed or anxious. They help calm me down.

Installation Artists

Ann Hamilton is kind of an outlier for me, one of the first installation artists that I adore. Her work is sensual and ephemeral, and very much about touch. The main work of her's that I've looked at is *The Event of a Thread*. A giant white sheet is suspended from wires, and connected to these wires are swings. Members of the audience sit on these swings, and the movement they make with the swing, in turn, moves the giant white sheet. Beautiful billows roll over the sheet as it softly moves in the air. This work creates community engagement but also doesn't lose the aesthetic sensual qualities that engage the tactile material of the work. This work is what gave me the idea to create a diorama so that the viewer can both engage with the space and material while creating a landscape or composition of their choosing.

Sheila Hick's work makes me have a very visceral, physical reaction. I find myself wanting to jump into her massive, wall-covered soft sculpture installations. Which is partially what I want viewers to feel when they see my work. I want people to not be able to contain themselves, that they HAVE to touch the work (at least the diorama).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is very ambiguously defined by Webster as "A philosophical movement that describes the formal structure of the objects of awareness and of awareness itself in abstraction from any claims concerning existence." (Merriam-Webster). I've been learning about phenomenology, mostly from Gaston Bachelard in *Poetics of Space*. I won't begin to imagine that I've understood all of the aspects of the philosophy he studied for a lifetime, but the idea that our experience shapes our perspective stuck with me. Every time I go out to collage I notice different things, even things I've seen before can look different depending on the day I've had. Those differences show up in my art. I could make the same collage of the same space 5 times

and all of them would have different compositions, color palettes, and lines. These differences come about from my mood, the things I learn about the places I observe, the people I meet while collaging, also my childhood/past experiences, and what my outlook of the world is at the present moment.

CHAPTER III: PROCESS

The Catalog

I think my Health Points are at their maximum when I'm making work on-site, a spell of greater restoration if you will. Walking and looking, finding the landscape that is exciting, sitting on a curb, on a patch of grass, or front porch with my sketchbook in my hands, holding pages of my neighborhood on my lap, and collecting those moments feels very important. So I made a lot of those moments to create a collection, thinking that their future use would be unknown but very much linked. *The Catalog* is a group of mixed media collages. These collages are abstract, with references to reality. You may see a more accurately portrayed birdbath, window, or telephone pole, but the collages are not naturalistically done. The materials of these are fabric and thread in combination with watercolor and ink on paper. I adhere the fabric to the paper either with thread or glue, whichever one makes sense for the situation. These materials are so easily accessible and on hand that it makes sense to travel with them. I also travel with a bag of scraps. Every small bit of fabric I have in my studio gets tossed in that bag. Scraps turn into shapes, just like the watercolors, and shapes are magical. They float in space, they are unlimited. Shapes are color, shapes are structures, shapes are textures, and everything in between. Lines usually come after. Shapes have their place, lines connect them or cross over, and that has more to do with the line of sight. I try to pull out the color from the shapes into their most saturated state most of the time. The catalog collages made on-site are mostly made in communal or residential spaces, where community engagement is high and recognizable. Examples of these spaces are the Dunleath community garden, Dunleath Park, Lebauer Park, The Bicentennial gardens, Fisher Park historic neighborhood, and the Dunleath historic neighborhood.

Linked to a dream world, which is a world where my neighborhood exists parallel or almost adjacent, the collages/drawings are where this dream does and does not exist, and is being created. Star Trek is probably the universe that aligns closest to this dream world, and my neighborhood is the closest to Star Trek that I've seen in my life so far. In the Star Trek universe, poverty and hunger are no longer problems. Currency isn't a thing, (they've obviously kicked capitalism to the curb), and people can be whatever they want. Their basic needs have been met, and while there is still conflict both in Star Fleet and between other planets/organizations, everyone has been able to pursue what they're passionate about, and use the skills and knowledge they've amassed from a fair society to do their passions and jobs competently. They do this as a team, they collaborate, and problem solve, with everyone having their basic needs met, anything is possible. Star Trek has in a way made me search for spaces where I feel like anything is possible, where people are working together, using their knowledge to sustain themselves, or even just have fun. In my neighborhood, between the vast community garden, an on-site library book trade, mini art galleries, community board, huge yearly block party called "Porch Fest", and newsletter, they're getting closest to everyone's needs being met and people coming together with competence to live and work.

Next to Star Trek is Dungeons and Dragons. While this universe is imagined, the relationship building, problem-solving, and on the fly response to conflict is not. I've found that the sessions I've had with DnD have done so much to build my friendships, but also build my confidence in intuitive response. Working together to figure out the best solutions, pretending to be characters that have specific types of skills, and also figuring out the funniest way to go about doing all that, is my ideal version of play, and it's something I wish our world reflected more of. I think that that intuitiveness has ultimately helped me in the on-site work, responding to the

landscape in the way that I do. I'm glad that I've had the opportunity to play in such amazing campaigns with new friends over the past 2 years.

I've asked myself why am I drawn to depicting these spaces, specifically why aesthetically? Honestly, this has a lot to do with walking and the historical architecture of Greensboro, NC. When I was in undergrad I walked all around the historic district of College Hill. The school was just a couple of blocks away and I also have a dog, so this made the easy walking paths convenient. Now that I've moved to another historic district in Greensboro that's even closer to downtown, I walk even more. I love walking around Greensboro. I love the mismatching of styles, how on one street you can find a completely flat-faced brick building group of apartments made in the 50s and the other street will have a historic Neocolonial/Queen Ann Revival/Gothic revival style house with a wrap-around porch, random Rapunzel towers, a stained glass window thrown in, maybe even a set of columns, made over 100 years ago (Brown). I've come to realize that if I could live in any of these houses it would be in a Tudor Revival style house, where I can be my true gnome-like self. I love coming up with narratives for these places, again my own type of world-building. I thought about these a lot when I went back to the places I collaged for *The Catalog*, took reference photos to compare the collages and the images, side by side, and wrote about them. Some of the writings are vague, some are sweet and sentimental, and some contain maybe a 3-word sentence.

But another reason why I loved doing the collages on-site was that it gave me the opportunity to interact with my neighbors. The more I sat outside a specific house, the more likely it was for the resident to come outside and speak to me. Most of the time people are at least interested, if not thrilled. Meeting my neighbors, learning their names, their occupations/hobbies, their dog's names, and meeting their children, is another way I've been

able to build community. I want my neighbors to recognize elements and be able to see themselves in the work. I want my work to be accessible. My neighbors being part of my process feels like a way I've aided that accessibility.

Textiles

After collecting *The Catalog*, I thought about how best to translate these works into larger or more complex work, incorporating the fabric I have also been collecting locally. I couldn't land on a single thing so I tried everything.

The first was recreations and experiments in fabric. Quilting is a craft that I have been learning since starting grad school, with no previous experience. I felt, especially at the beginning of this journey, that I owed it to the community of quilting to try and make "real quilts," a term I realized later was holding me back (I don't need permission to try new things or to make something I have no experience in doing). I thought that the best way to start these recreations and also practice quilting was to make mini quilts. These mini quilts range in size from about 6" x 8" to 12" x 14". I tried a variety of techniques including applique, piecing, hand stitching, machine stitching, and embroidery. While some were recreations from *The Catalog*, I also experimented with freestyle textile collaging as well, to see how different shapes, patterns, colors, and varieties of fabrics were handled and looked side by side.

After practicing with these mini quilt experiments, I decided to also make enlargements of images from *The Catalog*. These started out as mostly appliqued quilts. Piecing takes a lot of patience and is tedious, and since these were still experiments, I wanted them to be quick, although I did eventually get to even larger recreations with piecing.

Invented Landscapes

While I did and still do enjoy making these recreations, I felt the intuitiveness and inventiveness that was so exciting while I was making on-site with *The Catalog* was lacking in the studio. This pushed me to make invented landscapes in the studio. These works are the most time-consuming, spreading over months of work. I decided to take vignettes, small scenes from *The Catalog*, even single shapes or colors, and combine them into a new image, a new, fictional landscape. All of the content of the invented landscapes directly refer to the catalog. I played with the size and scale of these vignettes and objects in transferring them to the larger pieces. Sometimes a shape from the collage would become smaller in scale, sometimes it would be the same, sometimes larger. I played with the positioning of the references as well. Shapes didn't have to stay in the same spot on the page as they did on the canvas, I could have a stone at the bottom of *The Catalog* collage floating in the air on the canvas.

Combining techniques was another tactic in these works that I experimented with a lot. Watercolor, acrylic ink, thread, fabric, marker, pen, yarn, and canvas, all make their way into these works. Part of this had to do with the fact that at times I was trying to duplicate the textures the collages had. Other times it was because I wanted to change the quality. Watercolor is harder to spread out over dry canvas, and the acrylic ink made a more opaque shape. I cannot seem to plan these works ahead of time, it feels monotonous and boring to do so. But this is partly because was trying to replicate the intuitiveness and responsive quality of the on-site works by spontaneously working on these.

Diorama

I still felt like there was a way for my work to connect and interact with the audience more, so I started thinking about ways I could make that happen. I want my work to be touchable, or at least want the audience to want to touch it, to feel the urge to know how the

surface of things felt. I also wanted the audience to be able to interact with the space that the work occupies. Ann Hamilton's *The Event of a Thread*, and also Kate Gordon's diorama titled *Alligator Naps*, gave me the idea of creating 3-D objects referencing *The Catalog*. I decided to make my own diorama. Pulling shapes, that are objects in the real world, constructing them into new objects on paper, and then reconstructing them into new objects again felt right, but also exciting!

I have never made soft sculptures before; I am not very familiar with the field of soft sculpture either. But I decided to jump in. There was a lot of trial and error, but also this part of my practice is where I was the most resourceful. Polyfill is so expensive and at the beginning, I wanted to use what I already had access to, so a lot of the beginning sculptures are stuffed with shredded paper and plastic bags. The shredded paper makes the sculptures have a great crunchy sound, similar to leaves, which was great because that sound was referencing where the shapes came from. I thought about how I could reference the source of the shapes of their origin, and in thinking about the garden, where a lot of my collages had come from, I decided the diorama needed a structure like a trellis. The second version of the diorama had 4 trellis-like structures where the shapes hung down from fishing line. I wanted the diorama to feel like the layering of drawing and collaging, to be able to see a pictorial image after making it. I also wanted the audience to interact with the diorama, feel the sculptures and hear different sounds of what they were filled with while holding them. The second version succeeded in the first but not in the latter. People were very concerned with the fishing line making the objects feel too fragile. They were afraid that the objects would fall down. So I ditched the fishing line. I also ditched the premade composition. What better way to engage the audience than to let them create their own

sculptural image? So I had to construct a way for the objects to be portable, have an easy and recognizable system of hanging, and have enough of them to fill the gallery space. I got to work.

I made a little over 100 soft sculptures, ranging in size from as small as a kiwi to as large as a tree. I made both hanging sculptures and free-standing sculptures, which both made me use my problem-solving and improvisational skills. The system of hanging basically came to be attaching elastic loops on the tops of the objects and using carabiners as the method of attaching. For the purposes of the thesis show, which would only be 5 days long, I decided to postpone the wooden structure of the trellis, although I still plan on building it. I thought about structures in the garden, in places of communal gathering, and thought about swing set chains, or pot hanging chains. While those are usually green or silver, I decided on white plastic chains that would hang from the ceiling of the gallery with screwed-in hooks, to be less distracting from the white walls and also contrast the colorful objects. It was crude and simple, but it worked!

Concepts

The diorama was fun, the sculptures are crudely made. I've become so comfortable with DIY as an attitude of resourcefulness. Once I broke out of the realm of making only 2-D works I started to think about the aesthetics of these sculptures. This led me to think about Camp. Again, I love Star Trek, and it doesn't get campier than that. But I wanted to figure out if my work fits into that category of Camp. Amy Sillman first mentions Camp in her book *Faux Pas* in the chapter titled *AbEx and Disco Balls: In Defence of Abstract Expressionism II*. She makes many references to Susan Sontag's Notes on Camp, where admittedly, she is picking and choosing ways in which her art aligns with Camp. Some of the qualities she picks are, "the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naive" (Sillman 118). She equates these qualities to a type of movement in the realm of invented skills. I would consider myself an artist working from

invented skills. She praises the people who work in this realm, "...other sloppy, enthusiastic things made by a lineage of do-it-yourselfers and refuseniks with a youthful combination of awareness and naivete. As Sontag says "In naive, or pure, Camp, the essential element is seriousness, a seriousness that fails." (119). I really connected with these descriptions and I wanted to read more of them.

I decided I should read Susan Sontag's *Notes on Camp*, to figure out for myself if my work fits in the realm of Camp, or if at least my attitude towards making did. I did end up picking and choosing as Sillman did. While my art doesn't truly fit into the realm of Camp, I do find things about Camp to be endearing and the way I think about making to be similar. Sontag says, "To start very generally: Camp is a certain mode of aestheticism. It is one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. That way, the way of Camp, is not in terms of beauty, but in terms of the degree of artifice, of stylization." (Sontag 4). This made me think of my diorama, and how my forms are stylized versions of things that exist in real life. Sontag continues, "Camp is a vision of the world in terms of style - but a particular kind of style. It is the love of the exaggerated, the 'off', of things-being-what-they-are-not." (8). Later she also says, "The hallmark of Camp is the spirit of extravagance." (16). Again, I am picking and choosing the things I feel like I can identify with. My work exaggerates real-life forms. I muddle through the material and figure it out as I go, which I feel makes the work endearing. But the thing that these artists don't really get at that I pursue in making is joy. In the first place, making *The Catalog* was an act of returning to joy, to make things that give me life. I wanted the diorama to have a quality of joy. The diorama is still serious, but it's playful and fun. The diorama provided a way for others to participate in this fun with me.

I've also noticed that I have created changes in pace. I need to have different speeds/methods of working that soothe my short attention span, and that sustain me. There are some days that I need to move around, sew and stuff and sweat, making soft sculptures. There are days that I need to sit outside and feel the sun on my face. There are days that I need to be on the floor piecing a quilt together. But there are also days that I need to do nothing. Through reading Jenny Odell's *How to Do Nothing*, I've been learning more and more about how radical doing nothing is, and how vital it is for me in continuing my art practice. One of the earlier chapters of the book mentions maintenance; she refers to the work of Mierle Laderman Ukeles, I see how the maintenance of my life is just as much a part of my practice as making is. Odell comments on the task of listening, "But beyond self-care and the ability to (really) listen, the practice of doing nothing has something broader to offer us: an antidote to the rhetoric of growth." Later in the same paragraph, she says, "Our very idea of productivity is premised on the idea of producing something new, whereas we do not tend to see maintenance and care as productive in the same way" (Odell 25). Taking care of myself, listening to the earth, and listening to my body, are requirements for the continuation of my practice. This feels like a radical way of self-sustainability in the midst of being in a capitalist society.

I've learned more practical ways of just making my life easier as an artist from Andrew Simonet's *Making Your Life As An Artist*. In the second section of the book titled *Our Skills*, Simonet speaks to the resourcefulness of artists, how we have to do ten jobs in one, but that part of continuing to be an artist is having sustainability. "Sustainable means your life can work over the long term. A lot of artists' lives are built for 23-year-old single, frenetic, healthy, childless workaholics. That doesn't last. Our lives change and our needs change. Sustaining is radical. (Starving is not)." (Simonet 77). Simonet goes on to say that sustainability within art practices is

making your life easier. Artists don't need to work harder. They shouldn't compare themselves to other artists and their success. They should alter their life so as to be something that they can realistically and practically do, with time for love, laughter, and rest accounted for. For me, apart from planning future art, this means I need to have fun. I need to have hobbies, and I need to spend time with people I love. I have to have separation from the studio, have friends that aren't artists, and have days that I really do nothing but watch Keanu Reeves movies with my housemates.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

Over the past two years, I've discovered a way of making art that works for me. The way that works is that I have to have more than one way. Working from observation and being physically in my community is one way. Another way is taking observations back to the studio and reinterpreting them into something new. But sometimes I need others to help me. Other people helping to create interactive soft sculpture works was a great way my community was able to participate in my work. I need to build community as part of my practice. I've discovered that other artists influence and inspire me. Those artists are painters, materialists, quilters (historic and contemporary), and installation artists. I found that research helped to clarify why I am drawn to places I collage. The research helped me understand the historic context of textiles. The authors I read from also helped me understand how to have a balanced, sustainable practice. What amassed from the past two years of my graduate studies is a body of work that I will forever be proud of and grateful for.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the wonderful people who traded and/or donated materials. I would like to thank my platonic partner Curtis Hoffman for helping install the exhibition. I would also like to thank the members of my committee. Thank you!

WORKS CITED

- Bachelard, Gaston, et al. *The Poetics of Space*. Penguin Books, 2014.
- Brown, Marvin A. *Greensboro: An Architectural Record: A Survey of the Historic and Architecturally Significant Structures of Greensboro, North Carolina*. Preservation Greensboro, 1995.
- Odell, Jenny. *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*. Melville House, 2019.
- “Phenomenology Definition & Meaning.” *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/phenomenology>.
- Rylands, Philip, et al. *Stuart Davis*. Electa. SIAE. Trustees of the Solomon R Guggenheim Foundation, 1997.
- Sillman, Amy, et al. *Amy Sillman: Faux Pas: Selected Writings and Drawings*. After 8 Books, 2020.
- Simonet, Andrew. *Making: Your Life as an Artist*. Artists U, 2014.
- Sontag, Susan. *Notes on "Camp"*. Penguin, 2018.

APPENDIX A: IMAGES OF WORK

Figure 1. Page 19-20 of *The Catalog*. Katherine Taylor Allison. Printed 2021.

Figure 2. *Catalog Collages 52/65*. Katherine Taylor Allison. Watercolor, Fabric, Thread, Ink, on Paper. 2020-2022.

Figure 3. *Mini Quilts 1-7*. Katherine Taylor Allison. Fabric, Thread, Batting. 2021.

Figure 4. *Welcome to The Garden*. Katherine Taylor Allison. Fabric, Thread, Batting, Wood. 2022.

Figure 5. *Invented Landscape 1*. Katherine Taylor Allison. Fabric, Thread, Watercolor, Acrylic Ink, Pen. 2021-2022.

Figure 6. *Diorama Installation (top view)*. Katherine Taylor Allison. Soft Sculpture Installation. 2022.

Figure 7. *Diorama Installation (mid view)*. Katherine Taylor Allison. Soft Sculpture Installation. 2022.

Figure 1. Page 19-20 of *The Catalog*. Katherine Taylor Allison. Printed 2021.



There was a wedding behind our beds. We strung lights and hung flowers above the concrete slab to make a canopy. We lit candles, walked the bride to the groom, and cried. We cut the cake on one of our goodwill coffee tables that had been sitting on the front porch way too long. We drank mimosas and champagne. We danced until our feet were sore.

We have fires back here all the time. We swing on the not so stable tire swing. We picked up the tire from the side of the road. Had to drill a huge hole in it to get the old rope through.

I love watching my dog run around and play in the leaves. The garden doesn't grow much. There are too many trees for sprouts to come up.



Figure 2. *Catalog Collages 52/65*. Katherine Taylor Allison. Watercolor, Fabric, Thread, Ink, on Paper. 2020-2022.



Figure 3. *Mini Quilts 1-7*. Katherine Taylor Allison. Fabric, Thread, Batting. 2021.



Figure 4. *Welcome to The Garden.* Katherine Taylor Allison. Fabric, Thread, Batting, Wood. 2022.



Figure 5. *Invented Landscape 1*. Katherine Taylor Allison. Fabric, Thread, Watercolor, Acrylic Ink, Pen. 2021-2022.



Figure 6. *Diorama Installation (top view)*. Katherine Taylor Allison. Soft Sculpture Installation. 2022



Figure 7. *Diorama Installation (mid view)*. Katherine Taylor Allison. Soft Sculpture Installation. 2022

