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This paper is about the close connection of home and family and how they have influenced me as a person and a maker. These influential ties have also created a shift in the exploration of materials in bringing my work into a sculptural perspective.

I CARRY YOU WITH ME

by

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PREFACE

Home is the smell of the hot wind kicking up yellow fragments of dried summer grass. Home is opening the crimson door and smelling the heavy aroma of garlic, cumin and chili powder absorbed by the air that fills every room in the house. Home is the morning smell of coffee brewing with sounds of mom clinking her spoon against her cup. It is sitting outside on the porch watching the morning sun casting jagged shadows across the lawn as the warm breeze brushes your face. It is the sound of siblings and nephews playing yard-ball in the backyard as my niece runs around aimlessly between the bases made of a sandbox, a flattened soccer ball, a broken piece of a sidewalk, and an old white lawn chair as home plate.

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CHAPTER I

HOME

For many people it can mean different things, but most have a place they call home. I did not realize how significant this word was until I moved away from my small little world I call home.

The first realization I was leaving home was saying, “goodbye,” to my mom that Friday morning in the stifling, cloudless Texas sun. You could see the heat waves rising from the glistening street. We hugged one last time before I made my journey across five states. The embrace of her hug was like an ocean wave swallowing me whole and as I drove my U-Haul away I didn’t want to let go.

My second moment of realization was hugging my friend at the drop-off of the Charlotte airport. The hot humid air was suffocating with the weight of knowing she was my last tie to home. I was in a new place with different smells, gigantic trees blocking the big blue sky, and old large crooked houses shaded by tree limbs were seamlessly tied together by their green foliage. Freeways shifted into chaotic curving roads looping into each other all of which seemed to get to the same place.

All this confusion was just like the state of my work at that time. My first week of school I found myself falling into the same comforting routine using charcoal, ink, and paint stains on flat surfaces to start my process. In my first studio visit we dove right into

the conversation of the trap I was falling into all over again. “You are making a lot of really well composed works, but they are all the same. Do they have more meaning than just being well composed? You keep wanting to work in a two-dimensional place and I don’t think that’s what your work wants.” There it was right in my face and I knew it. I was determined to evolve my skills and concepts.

Eva Hesse was one of my greatest early influences while I was an undergraduate at the University of Texas at Arlington. I was inspired by her journey from a painter to a maker. Her desire to explore materials as she transitioned to three-dimensional work was something to be admired. In the documentary of Eva Hesse, the film makers captured that, “She wasn’t manipulating the materials, she was the materials.” Considering every material like rope, resins, and ready-mades, her work was groundbreaking. Hesse crossed realms of painting and sculpture using light and space to capture moments of an ephemeral state. Her life seemed to merge with her art. Yet, she was fearless in her making always pushing forward. I am always in search of being fearless. I felt a need to find myself; I did not want to become a creature of habit.

CHAPTER II

LONGING

The first few weeks of school comprised one of the most challenging beginnings of this endeavor. It was my first time to live on my own and have no one I knew within an hour commute. The weight of home was impossible to escape. All of these moments from the past started to flood my mind. Morning coffee was not the same alone. I longed to be close to my family.

The second week of school I was asked, “What is it that you miss most about home? Not the place or the people but think deeper about what is you are feeling.” I had not thought about it in this way. It was a pivotal moment in how I felt about home. At the time, I was simply longing to see the physical place, my mom, dad, sister, brother, nephews, and niece. The question lingered in my head like the jingle from a Folgers coffee commercial. One day while contemplating this question I was cooking enchiladas and rice. I did not realize this moment would spark an awakening to my work, but when the steam rose from the browning rice as I poured the spiced water, the scent of garlic filled the air. The sizzling sound of the ground beef marinating in thickening sauce with the heavy, savory aroma of cumin and chili powder took me to the place I so desperately wanted to be. It was in that moment I knew what I was searching for. My mother has made this dish for me countless times and I had never experienced it this way. It brought me back walking into her clean house, the sounds of The Beatles played loudly, while the

muted TV displayed the Rangers game. The overwhelming scent of this normal homely act was invigorating. I knew what my work was missing. I wanted my work to have the same spontaneous effect that the unassuming scents had transported me to a place I had longed for.

As a response one of the first works I completed titled *No Gardening With You* (Fig. 1) communicated the idea of not being able to garden with my mom. I stacked flower beds made of pine wood two feet in length, seven inches in width, and eight feet height. I filled them with my mom's favorites of Begonias, Petunias, and Dianthus. The flowers were closed off by a transparent acrylic membrane suspending yellow buttercup flower petals I found everywhere I looked in North Carolina, and I sealed the front and back shut with wood lattices.

CHAPTER III

ENCAPSULATED

Thinking about using the materials that evoked these feelings of home was something I felt compelled to do in my work. I started to experiment with spices of cumin, chili powder, and garlic powder. I soaked fabric in them, mixed them in paint, and acrylic medium. It created colors resembling warmth while the acrylic medium dried clear allowing light to shine through these suspensions. The scent slowly dissipated as the medium dried into its solid form.

Playing like a child again, I felt a state of ease as I explored these new materials. Through this experimentation I found myself using acrylic medium as my vehicle for these spices. I could use it like paint, pour it out, spread it like frosting, build it up, and connect it to itself as it dried. It held these precious solid forms of scent like the sky weightlessly held the stars.

I also found myself working with patterns and repetitious compositional elements similar to quilt making. The act was unintentional through this resonance of home, but it was evoked through subtle scents of spices. In this process of making I thought of my mother teaching me to embroider a blue lined lamb image, iron pressed on a small, pink square piece of fabric. She said to me, “my mom never taught me to embroider but your grandma Mary taught me.” I could picture my grandma and mom sitting out on her large

whitewashed porch embroidering. Although that may have not been the place she was taught, it was the something to imagine.

As I made these new works the scent of spices filled the studio. I was enveloped by the comfort of its effect. I started to consider the feeling blankets give. We use them every night, we hold them close and they keep us warm. Just like people we love, we keep them close to feel their warmth. This is the start where my first iteration of *I Carry You With Me (First Iteration)* (Fig. 2) came about at the end of the first semester. I sewed components of acrylic pieces together and hung this assemblage from the ceiling to envelop the viewer as they walked through the space. The idea was to become immersed in the work while allowing the light to illuminate the space through the transparency of the medium. My technical concern was its weight against itself. It stretched like a plastic grocery bag holding too many cans. Although I felt the work was a success, I needed to find a better way to distribute the weight. The tension of the weight was dominating the piece, but I was getting closer as I stared at its luminous state suspended in the air.

CHAPTER IV

MY EXPERIENCE

At the beginning of summer, I started experimenting with wooden structural maquettes jutting out in random directions resembling abstracted architecture. These constructions kept falling short in my mind, but my ideas were important for me to get through this bump in the road. The graduate class traveled on a summer art history trip to the Venice Biennale and everything was new once again. There were tall crooked buildings leaning against each other, as we traveled by foot or boat with a body of water surrounding us everywhere we went.

On our trip to Venice I was able to experience the work titled “*Um Sagrado Lugar (A Sacred Place)*”, by Ernesto Neto. One thing stayed with me from experiencing Ernesto’s work. As I sat on a pillow chunks of cedar wood filled the floor in this multi-colored net like teepee and I was engulfed by the scent of cedar. It took me back to my childhood walking through paths of tall golden weeds my neighbor and I wore down with our Tonka trucks that we filled with pieces of wood for our secluded fort in the field. This flashback experience was intense, and the work had a strong effect on me. It was overwhelming and by the end of the trip I was wanting to explore what my work could do to give this same type of sensory effect. I wanted to know what my work was asking of me, and to challenge my piece of acrylic patterns sewn together. I wanted others to have a

similar reaction as the one I had experienced from his piece. I wanted the scent, color or constituent elements of the work to evoke the same response as Neto's work.

I continued my research with larger scale abstract sculptures created from architectural sketches made in Venice and Greensboro. However, they did not relate to the concept of what home meant, nor did they visually satisfy my vision or perception of home. I continued to branch out experimenting with materials and structures to hold these moments I cherished so. Through this I became more aware of what I didn't want. The harsh pointed lines of the wood and the cold color of the metal conflicted with the concepts and experiences I was trying to evoke. My surroundings, stress, and anxiety were affecting the outcome of my making.

CHAPTER V

THREADING IT TOGETHER

As the end of my third semester loomed I began to think of home in a motherly sense. I realized that throughout this MFA experience I found myself caring for others. I wanted my peers to feel at ease because it was what I was searching within myself. There was also a new question that came into play. “What do you want your audience to experience?” I had been playing around with the idea after seeing many installations in Venice.

I had been researching Ann Hamilton’s work, *Event of a Thread*, in which she filled an enormous warehouse with objects creating a beautiful installation. In the center of the room there was a large white flowing sheet, held up by ropes and pulleys connecting to swings placed about the room. Viewers swung tugging the ropes which gave the impression of weaving this billowing cloth in the air. The sounds of pigeons, ringing phones, conversations, and laughter filled the space. The work seemed to bring together a sense of comfort, warmth, ease, and reflection all in one place.

The way this work allowed the viewer to have an intimate moment within the space was something I was looking for in my own practice. I wanted my work to evoke a comforting, warm, and intimate place. I wanted the work to convey the essence of being held. Knowing that I did not want a sharp harsh edge, I found myself bending metal into the shape of a sphere. I started with long metal square rods, cut them down, shaped them

like half-moons and welded them together in fourths. I then welded fasteners to the sides and bolted the quarters together creating a large six and half foot sphere. Working on large sculptures was a new experience for me and represented a breakthrough in my practice.

A place to be held, a small world for the viewer, and a dwelling for contemplation. From that moment on everything seemed to fall into place. I had a strong foundation not only to carry these precious materials defining home, but a stable structure to hold the weight of the viewer as well. I painted the metal sphere a light-yellow color adding warmth. It also gave a fragile impression of wood and tied into the natural colors of home. I knitted twine and secured it to the lower section of the sphere. The twine gave the scent of dried summer grass, but also related to rest of work allowing light to flow through. I weaved the rope at the base of the sphere to hold the weight of the viewer with ease. The final product of, *I Carry You With Me* (Fig. 3) is a place where one can see the work as an object and enter the structure to create their own experience within its space.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE FINAL MOMENTS

Sometimes you want to keep memories close. A final push into my last semester brought about these fleeting memories. Not just of home but of the places significant to my upbringing.

One of the places was my grandparent's porch. My memory of their home now becoming fragmented by its absence, was a sensation I wanted to capture. I wanted to focus on these partial moments because they evoke some of the most important sensations from my upbringing. *An Old Door* (Fig. 4) was an opening into the place my grandparents spent their entire adult lives in unison. I found a door resembling the one leading to their room. With cut rectangular acrylic sheets I embroidered objects from the room, a partial bed, a dresser, an old ceramic brick space heater, and shelf that ran along the entirety of the room which overflowed with pictures of all the grandchildren and great grandchildren. These precious sewn objects are the focal point of the center windowpane of the door.

In *Joined* (Fig. 5), two partial gridded structures mimic the brick base supports to hold the porch of a house. One "L" shaped bracket was cut and welded together and the other made of wood was held together by dowel rods. I adhered brick red acrylic sheets and clear sheets which contained embroidered memories of my grandfather to brick voids, negative spaces within the metal framework. The wood frame had brick shaped

voids filled with beeswax encasing purple flowers and thin yellow tracing paper inscribed with phrases. These are materials and words that remind me of my grandma.

Drawing from the same source material of my memories the work titled *Mama's Swing* (Fig. 6) was the recreation of a glider my grandpa made for my grandma. This glider represents the most significant object from my memories of grandparents. It is the place where we had many conversations filled with laughter and coffee, as I hung off the back of its rectangular support. This swing maintained a strong place in my mind as it was always full of life.

Feeling lost as my grandparents are gone, I made this place the swing represented again to hold on to the history it contains. I hold onto the place I remember most giving new life to a recreation of the old. In my solo show *I Carry You With Me*, history has been made. I hold on to my family's moments with moments I remember from my past.

CHAPTER VII

LIFE CONTINUES

Throughout this two-year experience I have learned how to let the work evolve as I let process take place instead of trying to have a completely worked out plan. This allows the space to have a say in what happens to the work, like the final piece of my graduate career, *The Floor Of The Ephemeral*. (Fig. 7) This work presents a moment to keep with you, to make your mark in my world and take my world with you. The work consisted of lines on the floor made of white chalk mimicking wood grain. As people walked the lines faded away in real time similar to memories. This work needed active participation to succeed. I have been contemplating the role the audience plays within the interaction of the work and observing what kind of effect their reaction has. To see how they react and how it affects the work in question. I feel the work was a success in the viewer taking a memory with them and being part of the experience. *The Floor Of The Ephemeral (Post Exhibition)* (Fig. 8) also tied the sculpture in the exhibition together like a family unit co-existing.

During this two year process, I have been able to explore and expand my knowledge as a maker. For future sculptures I am thinking of implementing found objects into my making. Thinking of ways my work can be universal, these objects will bring a new way for the viewer to enter the work. I will continue to explore structural materials for future works as I see my work becoming larger in scale. I would like to understand all

of the structural options I can use to help find the best support for each idea. Public art is something I am also considering as I continue to make. I want to create worlds for others and places for reflection.

I will continue to experiment with other malleable materials that evoke the idea of holding onto a moment. There are many possibilities still untested in the exploration of acrylic polymers, waxes and resins. I have only scratched the surface of these materials in my ever-evolving process. I will continue to bring in influential moments of my past to stimulate my creative process in this new endeavor of work. I also want to incorporate current memories into my past creating a new challenge for my work. I want to bring these elements together to see how they can co-exist in my made-up world, and creating an entirely new place, like I explored in *I Carry You With Me*.

We as humans, cling to moments; they make us who we are. We remember to keep others close. We feel because the experience of life touches us in unexpected ways. I will hold onto those moments because our world is fleeting. We should stop and reflect on the things that are important, whether they are large or small. I will always make to never forget what is most important. I leave you with the words of E.E. Cummings:

here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life;which grows
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

i carry your heart(i carry it in my heart)

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CATALOGUE OF IMAGES

- Figure 1. *No Gardening With You*, Pine Wood, Flowers, Dirt, Wood Lattices, 2017
- Figure 2. *I Carry You With Me (First Iteration)*, Thread, Spices, and Acrylic Gloss, 2017
- Figure 3. *I Carry You With Me*, Metal, Paint, Spices, Acrylic Gloss, Twine, Fabric, and Rope, 2018
- Figure 4. *An Old Door*, Deconstructed Door, Acrylic Gloss, Thread, and Ink, 2018
- Figure 5. *Joined*, Metal, Gloss Medium, Ink, Wood, Beeswax, Flowers, Paper, Thread, and Purple Pencil, 2018
- Figure 6. *Mama's Swing*, Metal, Wood, and Paint, 2018
- Figure 7. *The Floor Of The Ephemeral*, Chalk on Concrete, 2018
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Figure 1. *No Gardening With You*, Pine Wood, Flowers, Dirt, Wood Lattices, 2017



Figure 2. *I Carry You With Me (First Iteration)*, Thread, Spices, and Acrylic Gloss, 2017



Figure 3. *I Carry You With Me*, Metal, Paint, Spices, Acrylic Gloss, Twine, Fabric, and

Rope, 2018



Figure 4. *An Old Door*, Deconstructed Door, Acrylic Gloss, Thread, and Ink, 2018



Figure 5. *Joined*, Metal, Gloss Medium, Ink, Wood, Beeswax, Flowers, Paper, Thread, and Purple Pencil, 2018



Figure 6. *Mama's Swing*, Metal, Wood, and Paint, 2018



Figure 7. *The Floor Of The Ephemeral*, Chalk on Concrete, 2018



Figure 8. *The Floor Of The Ephemeral (Post Exhibition)*, Chalk on Concrete, 2018