

TRACES OF MEMORY:
AN EXPLORATION OF PRINT, FIBER, AND NARRATIVE

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partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts, Studio Art.

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ABSTRACT

TRACES OF MEMORY: AN EXPLORATION OF PRINT, FIBER, AND NARRATIVE

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Western Carolina University (April 2020)

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Traces of Memory is a body of work focused on the role of memory, personal archives, and place. Memories exist at the boundary of reality and fiction. All the works of art in this exhibition are related to my experiences in my hometown of Bassett, VA – both in my childhood impressions of the place, and the incongruities of revisiting the town as an adult. In my creative research and process, I am seeking to use the language of prints and fibers to indicate the layering of impressions and loss of information when moving from physical experience of a place to the memory of place, and abstract impression of memory to the final impression of the traces of memory. The works of art discussed in this paper all attempt to capture a moment in time that is not concrete, and the imagery has the appearance of disappearing or dissolving. In my art practice, I utilize a naturalist's approach of observing and recording in the field to explore interactions in our environments through fibers, sewing and cutting, drawing and prints, and writing narratives. The pathways of research, exploration, and creativity shift in this project as thoughts and memories refuse to stay fully within their vessel during the process of creating the work. Through the lens of creative research and art practice, I will mine my own personal archive of memories to trace paths of connection as I attempt to discover what impressions are left by childhood experiences and a sense of community.

PREFACE

In the studio, my art practice follows the look-and-see approach of a naturalist. I find a subject that piques my curiosity and then organically follow the trains of thought that come through observation and research, producing art along the way. This form of creative research comes from a place of always being curious coupled with a lifelong love of libraries and learning. My current body of work, *Traces of Memory*, grew out of a multi-year studio practice and research exploration on lichen and their environments. Over the course of my graduate studies, I began with an interest in learning more about my landscape. In particular, I was drawn to the microscopic world of lichen and mosses. Living in the biologically diverse mountains of western North Carolina has provided me endless access to breathtaking beauty in both the macrocosm and microcosm. My work began with photographing lichen (Fig. 1) and studying the photographs to create a series of drawings and prints that explored the shapes and colors of the specimens. (Fig. 2)



Fig. 2 Photograph of lichen colony at the Highlands Biological Station, 2018. Photograph by Sara Method. Image courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 1 Sara Method, Cultivation no. 10, 2016. Image courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 3 Sara Method, *Reclamation*, 2018. Image courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 4 Photograph of zones of incompatibility on tree, 2018. Photograph by Sara Method. Image courtesy of the artist.

In the summer of 2018, I was the artist-in-residence at Highlands Biological Station in Highlands, NC. While documenting native plant species throughout the station, I decided to take a lichenology course to learn more about the biology of lichen. Based on my photographs, observations, and drawings from the station, I began using fibers to create tactile sculptures of lichen, fungi, and moss forms. In *Reclamation*, above, found materials were incorporated into the piece and an element of narrative began to emerge as the soft form responded to the window on which it seemed to be growing. (Fig. 3) Thinking about the importance of narrative and relationships between the forms, I returned to my photography of lichen to explore the interactions between species of lichen and their environments.

As I furthered my study of lichen forms, I became interested in the dark lines, or what some lichenologists refer to as ‘zones of incompatibility’ surrounding species of crustose lichen on the

surface of a tree or rock.¹ These lines are barriers or borders separating incompatible species of lichen. As seen in the photograph above, the dark lines fully surround each unique lichen on the surface of the tree. (Fig. 4) The overall effect looks like a map with each lichen colony representing a territory. The ‘zones of incompatibility’ are areas of chemical warfare in which the fungal components of the lichen send out chemicals to keep incompatible lichen from entering their territory. The dark borders separate what is incompatible, yet the colonies still all exist on the same substrate.

Considering the relationship between ‘zones of incompatibility’ in lichen and borders drawn on maps, I began to explore zones of geographic conflict within the world. This line of inquiry led to an investigation of my own experience with incompatible zones in my history. Thinking of the personal narratives that created a sense of incompatibility or separation for me, I focused on my relationship with my childhood memories of my hometown of Bassett, VA. Memories exist at the boundary of reality and fiction. The discussion that follows considers the role of memory and how the organization of our memories create borders that effect our relationships with time and place.

¹ The term ‘zones of incompatibility’ came from lichenologists James Lendemer and Jessica Allen’s course at the Highlands Biological Station in 2018.

Place within Memory: Bassett, VA

*after all the jobs left, Bassett felt like a ghost town
empty, blank windows staring out at weeds growing through railroad tracks
rusted fire escapes casting shadows on cracked sidewalks
fields of parking lots returning to nature
grass reclaiming each parking space one at a time
not heeding the imposed order of faded painted lines
creating small islands of asphalt in a sea of tough grasses and dandelions*

-Sara Method, excerpt, “What Does it Mean to be a Ghost Town?”²

The works of art in *Traces of Memory* are all related to my experiences in my hometown of Bassett, VA – both in my childhood impressions of the place, and the incongruities of revisiting the town as an adult. For me, Bassett is a place full of nostalgia and memory that both repels and attracts. The nostalgic, familiar past memories of Bassett do not line up with what I can clearly see there now and what my current research reveals about what really was happening to the town over the past forty years. There is an uneasy push and pull as my memories seem like isolated moments surrounded by invisible barriers, pushing me away from the town but still beckoning me to return.

In a 1967 *Fortune* magazine excerpt subtitled “The Town the ‘Daddy Rabbits’ Built” Thomas O’Hanlon describes Bassett as follows:

The unincorporated town of Bassett, Virginia, is the headquarters of the world’s largest manufacturer of wood furniture. It is also one of the last examples of a dying appendage of industry – the company town dominated by a single family.... Employees of Bassett Furniture Industries enter the world in a Bassett-endowed hospital, are educated in the

² Portion of narrative exhibited and recorded as an audio component in the “Traces of Memory” exhibition. The narrative in its entirety is located in Appendix 2.

John D. Bassett school, live in Bassett houses, work in one of the six local Bassett plants, deposit their savings in a Bassett bank, and worship at the Pocahontas Bassett Baptist Church. (O'Hanlon 146)³

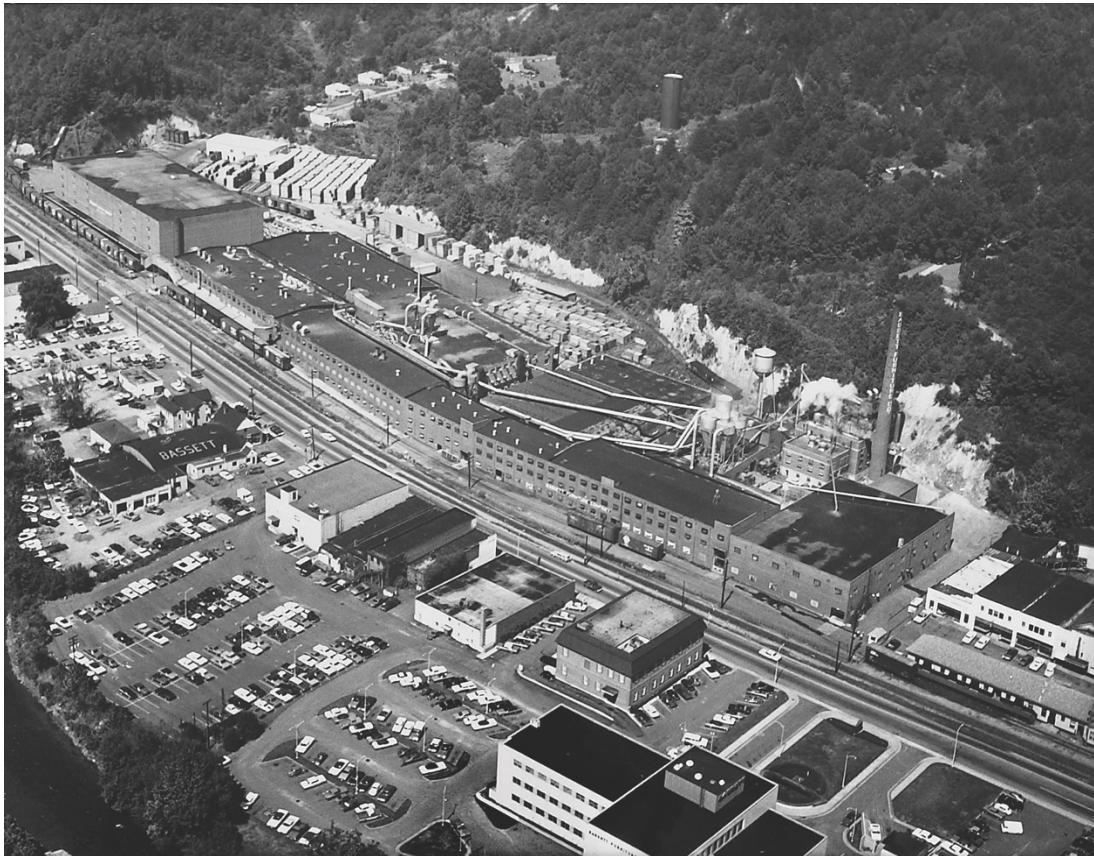


Fig. 5 Aerial view of Bassett Furniture Company, c. 1970s. Image courtesy of Bassett Furniture Industries.

My hometown of Bassett, VA and the surrounding county had multiple factories including Bassett Chair, Bassett Table, Bassett Mirror, and Bassett-Walker Knitting to name a few. I passed those factories every day in the school bus and any time my family went to town. My bedroom suite was a Bassett Furniture original and my grandparents' home had pieces of Bassett furniture as well. Throughout my childhood, game shows like *The Price is Right* would often

³ Thomas O'Hanlon, "5,350 Companies = a Mixed-Up Furniture Industry," *Fortune*, February 1967.

feature bedroom or dining room suites from Bassett Furniture and I would feel a little swelling of pride, sure that everyone in the world knew about my hometown.

In Barbara Ellen Smith's essay, "Transforming Places: Toward a Global Politics of Appalachia," she describes the power that comes from memories rooted in the emotions and stories of a specific place and the danger of conflating the emotional power of a past memory with the desire to preserve a nostalgic, familiar, homogenous version of that past place. Smith represents place as acquiring "human meaning and emotional power in large part because of the past: the traces of memory, feeling, stories, and relationships that circulate through and become attached to specific places in our individual biographies and collective histories." (Smith, 55) We are connected to the place of our origin and home. This attachment brings a sense of rootedness and emotional currency as we reflect on our favorite haunts of childhood or revisit our past memories. As Smith relates, it is difficult to sometimes separate the rosy reflection of nostalgia from the much more complex emotions and memories of the place. Looking back, it is getting harder to clearly see the factories with the sense of pride and nostalgia of my childhood. By 2007, most of the Bassett factories were closed, and as an adult, it is strange to revisit my hometown and see some of them missing or falling apart after fires and demolition.

In a series of prints titled "Production," the impressions of the factory building and smokestacks in each print are fading and the colors are muted, mimicking the fading transitions within my own memory. Each of the prints represent a negative and positive image of a factory building with windows and multiple smokestacks. The original pressure print of the factory on the left is hung beside the "ghost" print on the right. (Fig. 6) A ghost print picks up the residual impression left on the plate after the first printing. The multiple iterations of prints indicate the layering of impressions and the loss of information when moving from a physical experience of

place to the memory of place, and abstract impression of memory to the final impression of the traces of memory. Each print has a slightly atmospheric quality, removing the feeling of physical brick walls and windows. The structure has become somewhat transparent and soft around the edges with the shapes beginning to morph into childlike abstractions of a real factory.

In creating these prints, I consider the impact of manufacturing leaving the town,

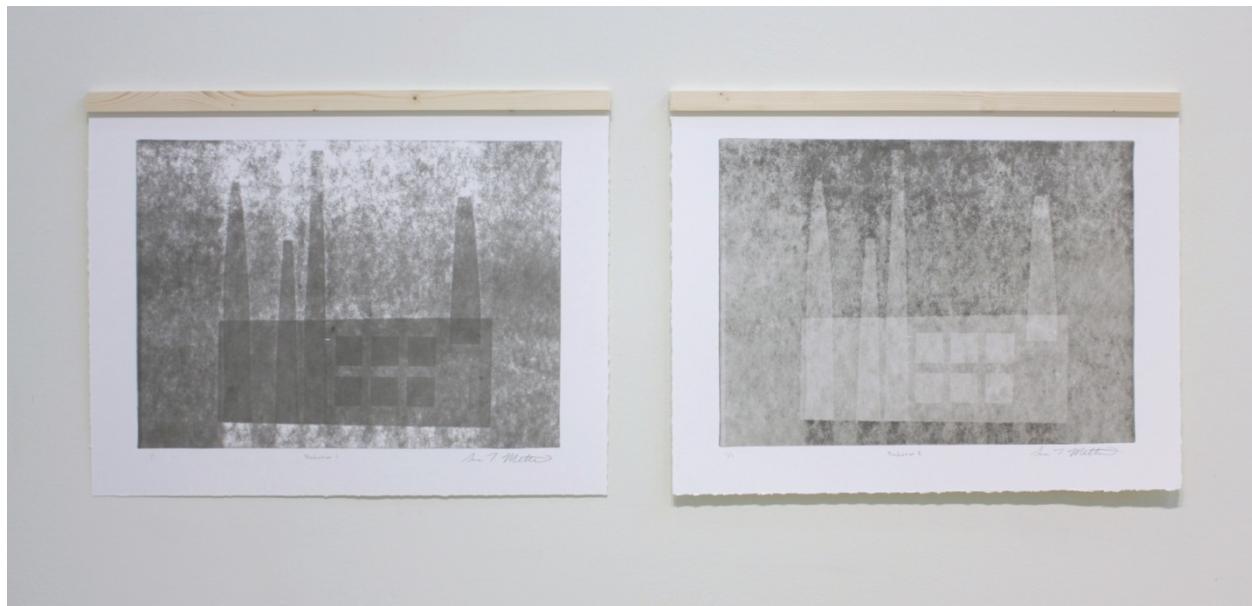


Fig. 6 Sara Method, Production 1 and Production 2, 2020. Image courtesy of the artist.

especially the impact on the workers who were left with no real substitute for lost jobs. What becomes of a factory town when the factories close? What happens when the paternalistic company that founded the town is no longer playing the main role of leader and caretaker? Who pays to keep the streetlights on, who mows the roadsides, who maintains the streets and building facades throughout the town? How does the town recover from these losses? And what does it mean to revisit these ideas through the lens of my own artwork?

While Bassett Furniture is no longer the main employer in Henry County, it must be noted that Bassett Furniture Industries is currently working in conjunction with community leaders and partners, the Smith River Small Towns Collaborative, and a grant from the Virginia

Department of Housing and Community Development to revitalize parts of historic Bassett and the county at large.⁴ In the vacuum left by loss of industry, the community is trying to find a new identity.

In addition to the series of prints, *Traces of Memory* also contains an abstracted wall mapping piece titled, “Bassett, VA: Age 0-7.” (Fig. 7) The map is created using colored strands

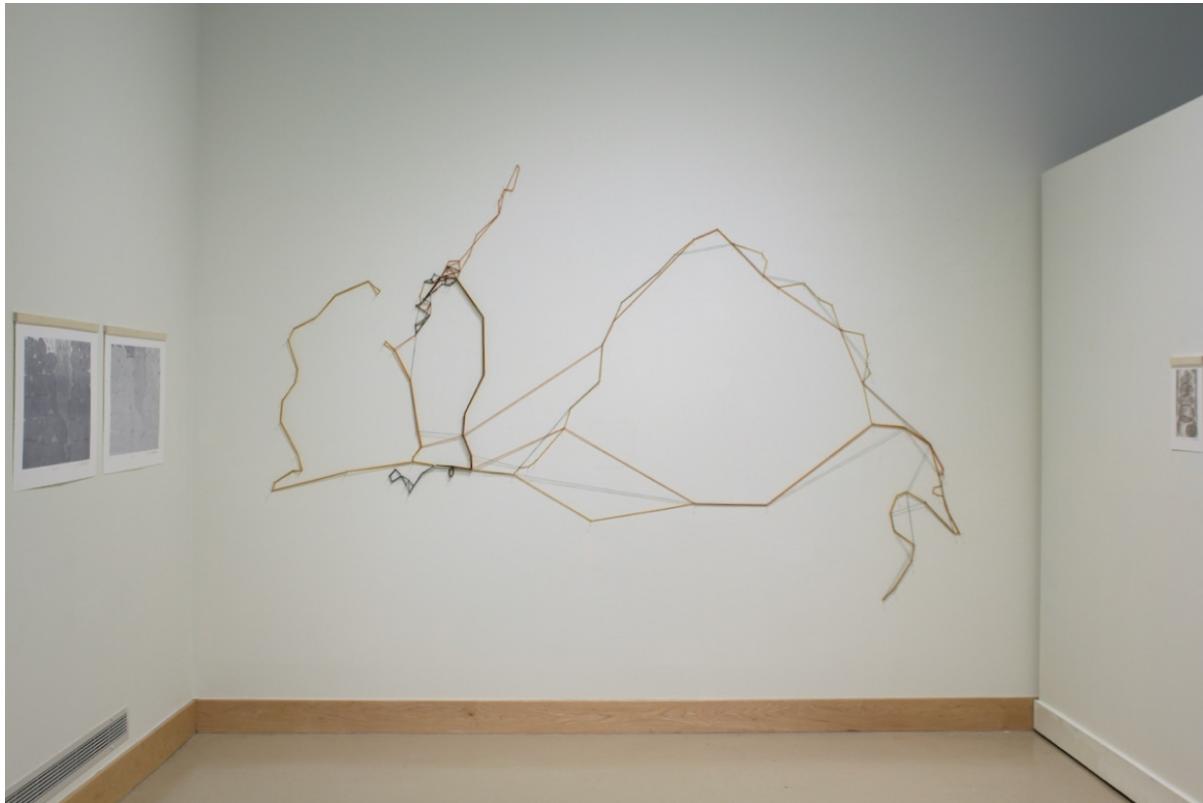


Fig. 7 Sara Method, Bassett, VA: Age 0-7. 2020. Image courtesy of the artist.

of yarn wrapped around specimen pins outlining the main routes I traveled in Bassett, VA as a young child. As I wrap the strands of fiber around the pins, I am revisiting the “traces of memory, feeling, stories, and relationships” Smith refers to in her discussion of the power of place. (Smith 55) She contends that “memory is fickle and stories change over time, these configurations of place tend to feature a past that is comforting in its familiarity and predictability,

⁴ “‘Small Towns’ project moves forward in Henry County,” *Martinsville Bulletin* [Martinsville, VA], 26, Sept. 2018.

and in that sense unchanging, timeless.”(Smith 55) The memories represented in “Bassett, VA: Age 0-7” are abstracted – the routes no longer clearly defined beyond the idea of the traced line of history and memory. They are familiar to me, and perhaps to those who might recognize the underlying map structure traced through the town, but by and large the memories are embedded in the fibers and in my own personal memory archive. The end result is a recorded memory produced by the artist’s hand as a moment in time. My hand tracing the familiar roads and stops along the way is a nod to the community of production and industry, but as experienced through my own lens of childhood, nostalgia, and art.



Fig. 6 Photograph of J.D. Bassett Manufacturing Company, October 1963. Image courtesy of Bassett Furniture Industries.

Accessing Memory: The Personal Archive

Approaching memory as a lived practice rather than as a reinvented tradition ... returns to the domestic origins of the archive. ... Unlike the museum, which offers a ready-made interpretation of cultural memory, the archive invites patrons to put the fragments together into meaningful and often divergent narratives.

-Susan Stabile, *Memory's Daughters*⁵

In the process of recording narratives and developing imagery in the series of prints in this exhibition, I am enacting the role of artist, archivist, and reader. My narratives and memories all come from my own deeply personal archive of memories. In the process of creating the prints, wrapping the fibers, and writing narratives, my memory is existing as a lived artistic practice. As literary scholar Susan Stabile explains above, the domestication of memory and the idea of memory as an archive takes place within a feminized, domestic space. My own artwork derives from this domestic archive filled with memories of community and family and of creating with fibers and stories. While her book *Memory's Daughters* references specifically the commonplace books of 18th century women in New England, many of her ideas are pertinent to my own art practice of journaling, note-taking, and recording of memories. Stabile refers to archives as "both a physical place and a metaphor for memory. A secure repository for documents and relics from the past, its organization reflects the ways an institution situates itself in relation to its cultural history." (Stabile 8-9) Having moved around a fair bit in my lifetime, I find I like to store things in sturdy boxes that are labeled and somewhat organized. The boxes move with me wherever I go, and I can presumably find the things I need when I am ready. I imagine my memory archive as stacks of cardboard boxes. The boxes have a sense of order in the arrangement, with the oldest shoved to the back or at the bottom of the stacks. Those oldest boxes of childhood memories

⁵ Susan Stabile, *Memory's Daughters*, 16.

have become slightly crushed and frayed, with the labels crossed out and re-written over time.

The older memories are not as easy to access. However, if the boxes are opened, or if the contents spill out unbidden, the memories inside—piles of faded and creased papers—might be shuffled out of order and blended together with other memories, but they are preserved.

Narrative plays an important role in my art practice. I come from a family and a culture of storytellers that regard history as important. Many of the works in the exhibition have stories embedded in them. While there are physically printed narratives and an audio recording of me reading “Musings on Bassett,” (App. 2) there are also implied narratives within the imagery of the prints and wall piece. The quilt blocks in the “Piecing” series evoke memories of quilting bees and the idea of community. I imagine the women sitting around the quilt to join pieces together and share in conversation and production. (Fig. 9) In “Bassett, VA: Age 0-7,” the narrative is implied through the act of revisiting the mapped routes, experiences and thoughts as I journey with the fiber through key moments and places in my childhood. (Fig. 7) Writing and telling stories is a way to capture a memory and relive it in the process.

In his treatise “On Memory and Recollection,” Aristotle describes memory like a picture or sensory impression, stating that “memory, even memory of the objects of thought, does not occur without an image.” (Bloch 29) Aristotle goes on to describe the storage of the memory in the soul, saying, “it is, then, clear that it belongs to the same part as imagination; and those things that are essentially the objects of memory are also such of which there is imagination.” (Bloch 29) The soul and the imagination serve as an archive in this sense, storing impressions and experiences as images. Aristotle relates the storage process of these images to impressions in sealing wax, saying “the movement produced stamps almost a sort of impression of the sense-impression.” (Bloch 31) This impression or image can later be recalled from within the personal

memory archive. The recollection of memory acts as a process in which an image or picture is called to mind from some inner place or archive and then ‘read’ as an impression of something that came before.



Fig. 7 Sara Method, Piecing I, 2020. Image courtesy of the artist.

Process: Materials and Making

In my artistic practice, I love to use paper and fibers in my work. Not only do they offer a tactile experience in the process of making, the material has its own history before the artist makes any alterations. The prints in *Traces of Memory* are all printed on rag paper. The paper pulp contains cotton rags that have been beaten down to their essential fibers and then re-formed into sheets of paper. The fibers weave together to form bonds and create a strong material. Traditionally, the cotton rags would have been used cloth that was cut down into smaller sizes. The rags had a former life, a history, before they were repurposed. The newly formed paper also has a memory of how it was formed and dried. Handmade papers are formed more gently, using moulds dipped into vats of pulp to make the sheets, while machine-made paper speeds up the process and can create large rolls of paper. Typically, the machine-made papers will tend to curl when dampened as the fibers recall being formed around a roll, while handmade papers will generally stay flat. While I have printed on my own handmade papers in other series, for these prints, I am using paper created by the hands and histories of others. The material itself becomes an archive.

Susan Stabile refers to Plato's wax-tablets as a mode of marking memory, or Descartes' discussion of memory in relation to the folds and creases of paper and fabric, writing: "Like the successive folds in a piece of paper, the brain's porous fabric changes its shape to accommodate the traces of sensory impressions and memory images once stored there." (Stabile 97) As a piece of paper is folded and unfolded, traces of the creases remain as a form of memory, marking what has come before. The fibers retain histories and memory, even before images are added. The same can be said for the way in which our own experiences, personal histories, and even dreams can leave marks or traces that are left behind as impressions in our memory, easily falling back

into familiar creases and folds worn over time. In my work, as I create the memory image in the print and select the configurations of shapes on the printing plate, I am creating a perception of the memory as a sort of map for the viewer to see and interpret. Each print relates to my personal memories and experiences of place, but the images are simplified enough they can serve as markers to guide the viewer to their own memory images to read. “Production” contains simplified shapes mimicking a factory with multiple smokestacks, but it is not a rendering of a specific factory. (Fig. 6) It is simply an impression or trace of a factory that can lead the viewer into a familiar crease in their memory of experiencing the sight of a smokestack or their own relationship to manufacturing and production. In the “Piecing” and “Semblance” series, I use the language of fabric and hand-stitching to reference a history of sewing, community gathering, and domestic production. (Figs. 11 and 12) For these prints, I first paper-piece the quilt squares by hand. The hexagon shape chosen was the first type of patchwork quilt I stitched as a child, and it also references community through the idea of a hive and honeycomb. The pieces are sometimes sewn together, and some have yet to be joined. (Fig. 8) My hand is represented through the subtle stitches apparent in the seams, but the idea of participation of others is obliquely referenced from the pieces yet to be attached. However, there is an inherent ambiguity as it is uncertain whether the separations are an indication of something soon to be joined, or an allusion to the dissolution of community, a ‘zone of incompatibility.’

The hanging mechanism for the series of prints in *Traces of Memory* adds an additional layer of meaning to the overall body of work. Each print is hung utilizing two pieces of pine clasping the prints at the top. This form of display is a classic technique used to hang quilts on a wall for display. The choice of wood was important as it relates back to Bassett Furniture’s long history as a wood furniture producer. Exposing the remaining edges of the paper in the prints allows the

viewer to contemplate the surface of the material more fully and consider all of the materials used within the exhibition.

As I build the layers within the prints in these series, it is a compilation of meanings, an acknowledgment of the relationship of the fibers and how the dreams, imaginings, and memories intertwine to create new frames of reference. This same layering also applies to “Bassett VA: Age 0-7,” in which the fiber-art piece utilizes specimen pins and assorted strands of yarn. (Fig. 7) The soft fibers were selected as a nod to the textile factories that played an important role in the history of my hometown of Bassett, as well as connecting to the history of fiber use within my own family. Fiber is often considered a domestic material and this archive of memories exists in a domestic space within a larger community. As the fibers are stretched taut between the pins, they overlap and cast shadows, adding layers of lines that follow traces of thoughts and experiences. (Fig. 10) The physical lines on the wall provide the opportunity for the viewer to relate to the work formally, or to experience it as a map following the folds and creases of memory within the mind. Each memory or trajectory is anchored through the use of the specimen pins, a naturalist’s tool for fixing a specimen to a surface for later observation and study. The pins are placed along the map, providing the shape, altering the course of the lines, and hinting to the role of the viewer and the artist as investigator and observer.



*Fig. 8 Sara Method, Detail of yarn wrapping around pins. Bassett, VA: Age 0-7, 2020.
Image courtesy of the artist.*

Prints: Quilting and Community

Although many of the anecdotal details are no longer at my grasp – the time of year, the weather that day – I do remember with complete clarity the first time I was allowed to join the group of ladies around the quilt. I was small, only four years old, and usually left to my own devices. But this time when I asked if I could help, my great-grandma decided to show me how to quilt. She was not one to take things too lightly, so this was a big deal – I was being trusted to help work on this quilt and to do my best. I carefully observed her technique. When it was my turn to try, I stood on my knees on the metal folding chair and poked my needle down through the fabric beside the seam where two colorful hexagons were joined. Then, climbing down from the chair and underneath the quilt, I looked up at the underside of the fabric. Lit from above by the lone light in the ceiling and surrounded by a sea of legs – both chair and human – it was a magical feeling, the kind you get inside a blanket fort when you are hidden and can only hear the murmur of the outside world and anything is possible. I scanned the canopy of fabric above for my tiny sliver of a needle tip and grabbing it, I pulled down until the thread was taut. Then I poked it up again right beside the thread, and climbing back onto my chair, I pulled the needle up through the layers of fabric, completing the stitch. I cannot say how long I sat or how many stitches I placed in the quilt, but I will never forget that feeling of belonging, of being trusted to join the circle and participate in this community of creative labor, and of both being invisible and completely integral to the process. I was hooked.

-Sara Method, excerpt from “Threads of Remembrance”

American philosopher Edward Casey refers to *place* as a vessel for memories and our lived bodily experience of those places as relative to nostalgia for a particular place. (Casey 185) This idea expands on Aristotle’s discussions of the vessel as place, in that the vessel serves as a boundary that contains an experience.⁶ The *place* defines the boundaries of experience but is separate from the personal interaction that occurs within the walls of the vessel. When I look at the memories I recall through my re-visiting of my childhood in Bassett, I find my vessel is bifurcated. There are the memories of the factories and a sense of nostalgia for a past of production and a thriving community – a time when people knew Bassett because of its

⁶ This discussion can be found in Aristotle’s *Physics IV*.

production. Then there are the memories of community in family – the more personal sense of community.

As a young child, I experienced that sense of community within family with weekly Sunday dinners at my great-grandmother's house, family meals with my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, and all of the holiday gatherings with both sides of my family. The print series "Piecing" and "Semblance" explore the sense of community and coming together, both in the broader sense of the small town, but more specifically in relation to the women of my family and quilting bees. (Figs. 11 and 12)

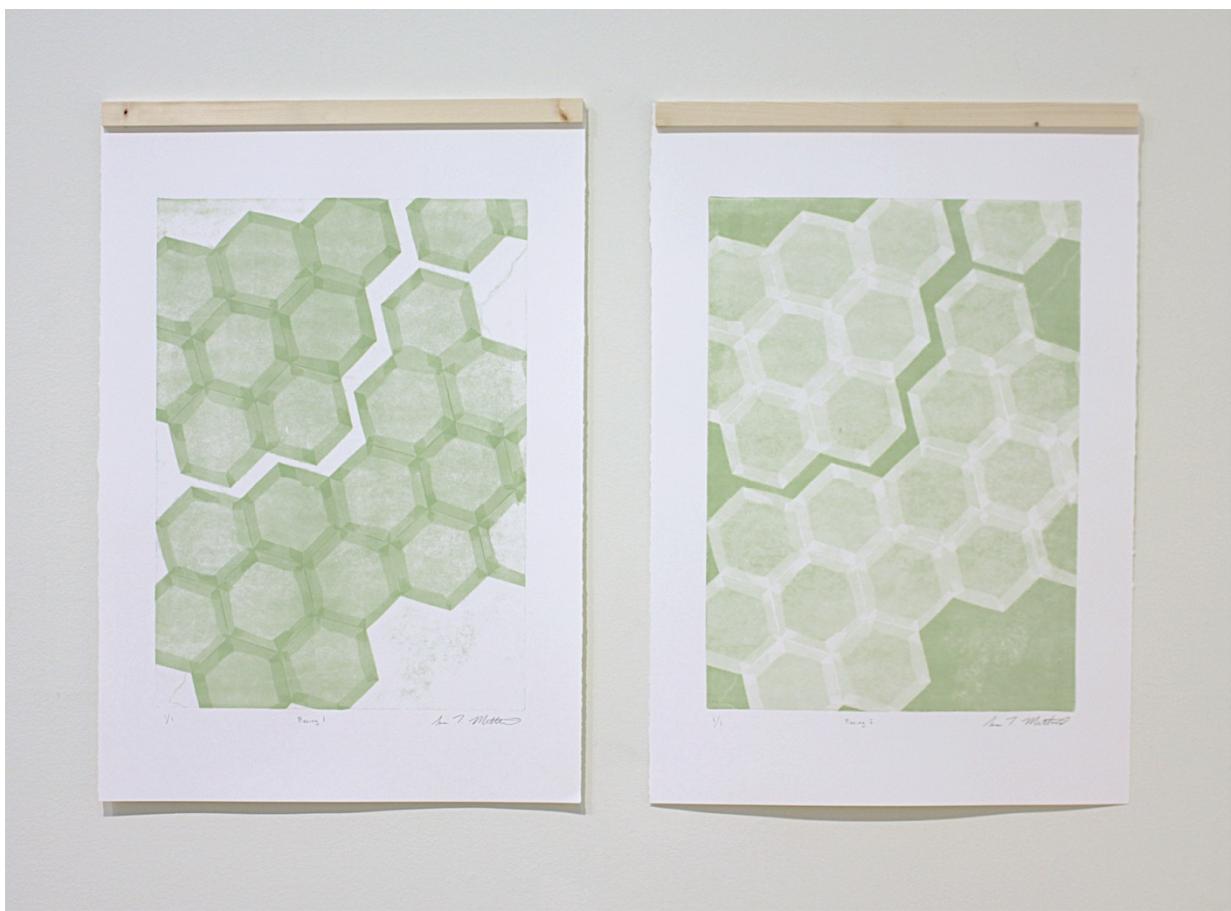


Fig. 9 Sara Method, Piecing 1 and Piecing 2, 2020. Image courtesy of the artist.

As a child, we gathered at quilting bees to hand-stitch quilts and spend time together. Those times were incredibly important throughout my life and I have recently begun to quilt again as a way of reconnecting with those memories. Each stitch I place serves as a connection through the generations of women in my family. Through the process of accessing those archived memories, I find myself often remembering my great-grandmother who first taught me how to quilt at the age of four, and all of the selection of fabrics and piecing of quilts that I did with my own mother throughout the years. My narrative excerpt from “Threads of Remembrance” at the beginning of this section describes those feelings of community and belonging in coming together to create a quilt. Impressions of that first quilting bee are deeply rooted within my personal memory archive.

The quilt in its wooden frame took up most of the space, barely containing the riotous colors of a honeycomb pattern hand-pieced by my great-grandma. Ora, a neighbor, joined my mother and great-grandma, to finish quilting the beautiful patchwork. Recently, I asked my mother if she remembered why we were invited over for this quilting bee, and she replied, “She probably wanted to get the thing done.” Ah yes, the gene of practicality runs deep in the women of my family.⁷

The original members of my first quilting bee have mostly passed and those memories have begun to fade. It was a time and place in my life that can no longer exist. The green of the prints in “Piecing” reference the green interior of my great-grandmother’s house, a house that is now storage for a seasonal farm stand operating in the front yard. (Fig. 11) The structure is slowly falling into disrepair after years of neglect. The passage of time and loss is also evident in the “Semblance” series as the solid hexagons at the bottom fade into the more transparent quilt

⁷ Excerpt from my narrative “Threads of Remembrance.” 2019

pieces at the top – the memory and image fading slowly away with a fainter impression left behind. The creases of memory are still apparent, but less so than when they were originally formed. In the process of creating a quilt, in this sense an impression of a quilt, the original cloth or memory is cut apart and rearranged to create something new. With each stitch joining the pieces together, the quilt becomes its own archive of experiences and memories

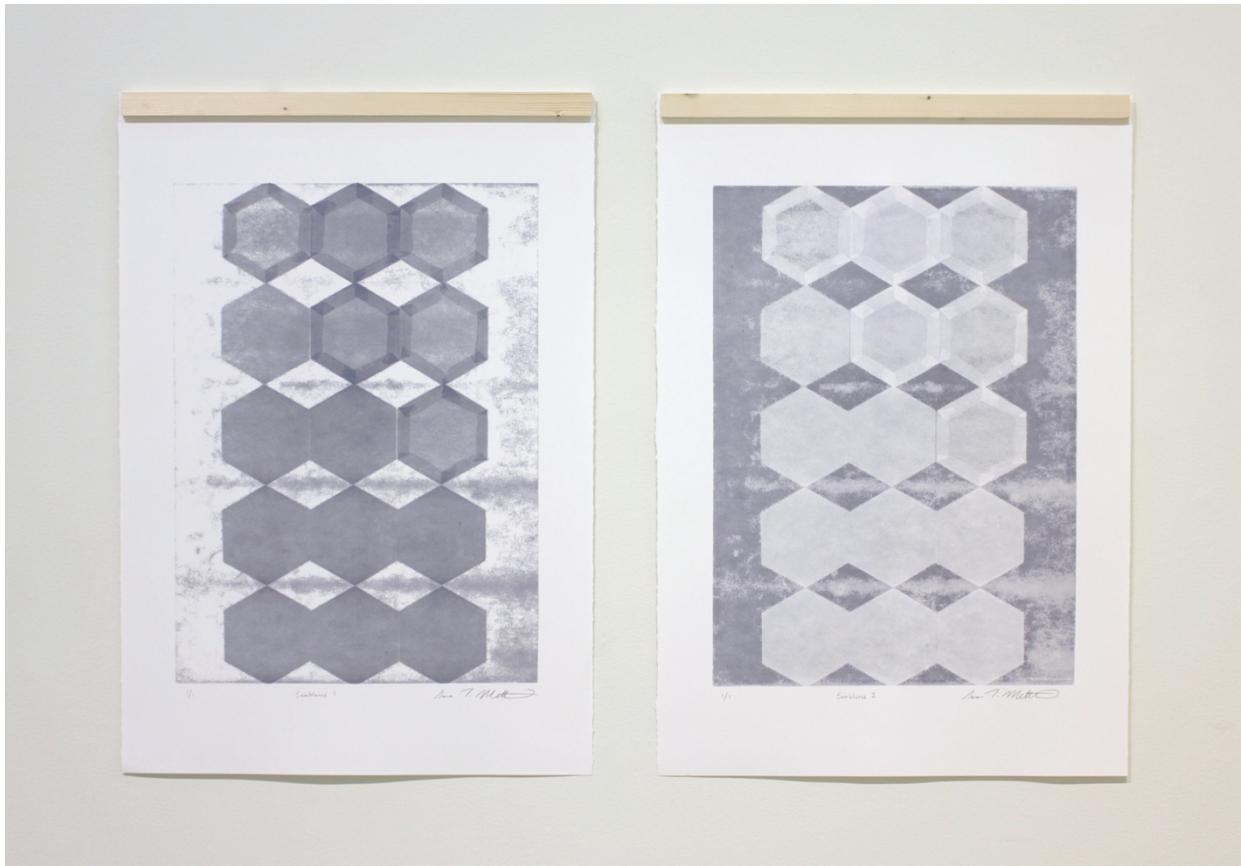


Fig. 10 Sara Method, Semblance 1 and Semblance 2, 2020. Image courtesy of the artist.

Prints: Stones and Boundaries

To carry a stone home from Jesse James's grave or from the Petrified National Forest is to hold on to a conversation with another world. It is a reference to the absent other. In their very presence, rocks symbolize the presence of the absent. The absence is signified by the presence of the stones, they refer to something gone.

-Irene Klaver, "Phenomenology on the Rocks"⁸



Fig. 11 Sara Method, *Leavings 1* and *Leavings 2*, 2019. Image courtesy of the artist.

In my series "Leavings" and "Remainder," the prints mimic stone walls and cairns or markers. Stones themselves serve as a symbol of a border or boundary – a meeting of two places. They can be stacked or lined up to create a physical barrier or boundary. The surface of the stone often carries its own areas of habitation at the microscopic level along the outer layer, creating a

⁸ Klaver, Irene. "Phenomenology on the Rocks." p. 163.

boundary between that on the outside and the stone within. Also, the history of the stone's material and placement serves as a marker for place and memory. Some stones carry layers of sediment built up over eons, compacted into striations indicating a different sense of time and place. Throughout history, they have been used to mark significant moments or locations as they have an aura of being outside of our general understanding of time.

The prints in "Leavings" reference the idea of using stones as a marker to remember a place or create a navigational point. (Fig. 13) Stones and water are both important in my hometown of Bassett, Virginia. There are memories of playing with stones along riverbanks and in creeks. Slate, granite and quartz were always abundant in fields that were plowed for agriculture and old pastures for grazing. We would often see hand-built rock walls and slate sidewalks, and old stone chimneys were left standing in fields as remnants of structures that had long disappeared. In the print series, I am exploring that idea of marking a moment in time by using the stones. They provide a way to navigate back to those memories spent outside in fields, woods, and along creeks and rivers.

The stones are also present in "Remainder." (Fig. 14) Here they are built up to create a wall, but the space in the middle indicates a gap. The gap could be from the stones falling away over time and breaking down the boundary, or the fallen stones from the left side of the wall are slowly joining the two sides together. As with memory, the outcome is not always apparent, particularly when the impression is fading. Each stone in both series serves to represent a moment in time. As in the quilting series, the separate parts are coming together to form

something new. The resulting image leaves it ambiguous as to whether those sense-impressions of community are holding together or starting to fall apart. Nothing is completely clear.

The prints in the “Leavings” and “Remainder” series are abstract but contain enough of a reference point for viewers to consider their own interactions with stones over time. Stones often feel cool to the touch and connect with something ancient, a reference to a time long before. When I look at “Leavings” and “Remainder,” I imagine the cool smooth surface of river stones, and the roughness of field stones. There is a tactile quality to the layering of the shapes to fill the space. In the stacking of stones, human interference has reorganized the elements of nature, but they are slowly disintegrating and returning back to the earth in their own form. (Fig. 14) The soft edges of the images and hazy atmosphere indicate the passage of time and slow disintegration or loss – the presence of absence.

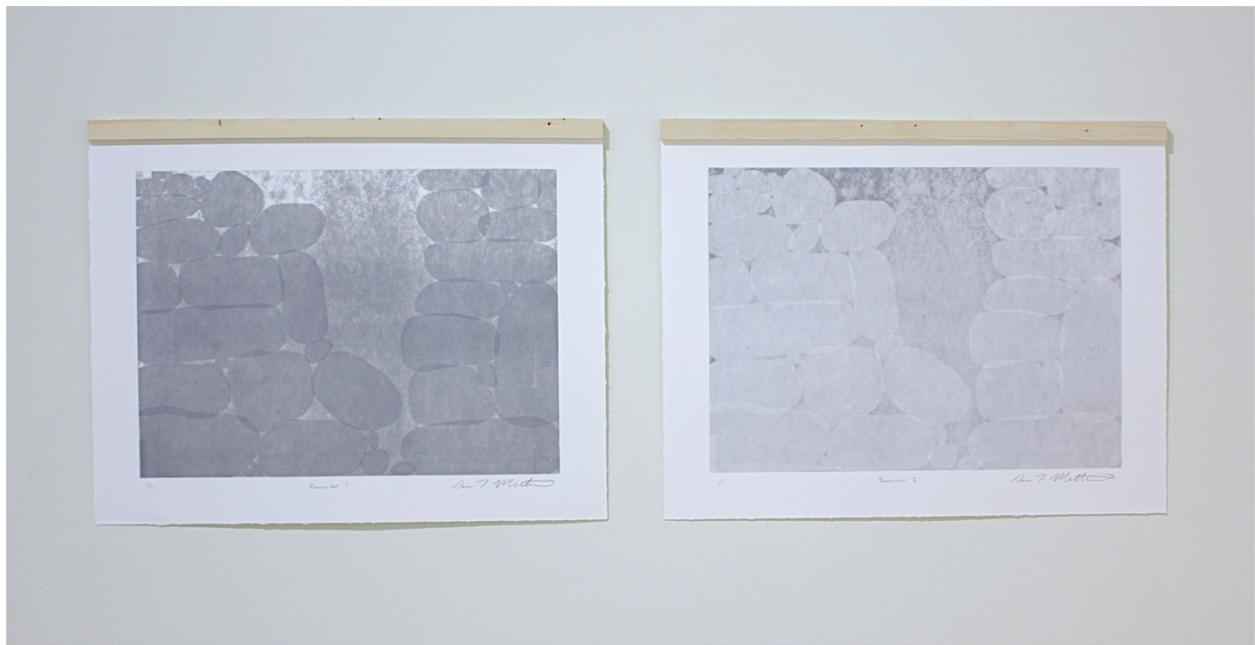


Fig. 12 Sara Method, *Remainder 1* and *Remainder 2*, 2020. Image courtesy of the artist.

Mapping to remember

A given place or set of places acts as a grid onto which images of items to be remembered are placed in a certain order. The subsequent remembering of these items occurs by revisiting the place-grid and traversing it silently step by step in one's mind.

-Edward Casey, "Place Memory"⁹



Fig. 13 Sara Method, Photograph of Bassett, VA: Age 0-7 in process with projected map, 2020. Image courtesy of the artist.

In Edward Casey's writing on the similarities of memory and place he explains they both share in "the existence of pathways in and through their midst...that give access or egress and ... facilitate internal exploration." (Casey 204) While the print series serve to produce images and sensory-impressions of memories, the wall-mapping piece, "Bassett, VA: Age 0-7," provides an opportunity for me to physically find pathways to enter into the memory landscape of place. Projecting an image of a satellite map view of Bassett, Virginia and following the projected

⁹ Casey, Edward. *Place Memory*. p. 183.

roads along the landscape, I hammer specimen pins into the wall to provide connection points and serve almost as mile-markers. I wrap colored strings around the pinned geographic points, revisiting each subsequent marker along my memory place-grid. (Fig. 15)

Lucy Lippard refers to the importance of place in *Lure of the Local*, stating “[p]lace for me is the locus of desire. Places have influenced my life as much as, perhaps more than, people. I fall for (or into) places faster and less conditionally than I do for people.” (Lippard 4) Like Lippard, I too share an affinity for places and how they influence my life. In my artistic rendering of this map, I am illustrating the main movements I made throughout my hometown through the age of seven. Each color represents certain zones of thoughts and experiences. The blue line portrays spirituality, connecting the church and home. Orange depicts the path of my explorations in nature. Yellow, the longest line of all, represents the school bus route taken every day with my mother, the school bus driver. The black fiber connects my childhood home to that of my grandparents and great-grandmother, the strongest line travelled most often – the representation of relationship and family. The lines follow the physical routes, but some also begin to cross-over and trace thoughts, daydreams, and memories along the way – tangential connections existing between physical spaces. Yet the most lines converge at my childhood home, the domestic space containing the archive of memories and the true locus of place and memory for this experiment. Once the layer of the projected image is removed from the final display, there is only the title and resulting lines to give an indication this represents a map. The end result leaves behind an abstract physical tracing for viewers to follow and perhaps project their own interactions with impressions of place.

Conclusion: Memory loss and preservation

Whatever is imprinted we remember and know as long as its image lasts, but whatever is rubbed out or cannot be imprinted we forget and do not know.

-Plato, *Theaetetus*¹⁰

The works of art in the *Traces of Memory* exhibition all attempt to capture memories spilling from the boxes of my personal memory archive. Generally, these older memories are harder to see clearly with the passage of time. The atmospheric print quality and soft layering of imagery in the pressure prints capture a moment in time that is not concrete, and the imagery has the appearance of disappearing or dissolving. The pinned fibers in “Bassett, VA: Age 0-7” attempt to trace pathways to retrieving those memories, but the map is also not permanent or always reliable as it changes subtly with each installation. The pathways shift as thoughts and memories refuse to stay fully within their vessel during the process of creating the work. The shadow lines show alternate pathways and connections that may lead to points completely off the marked trail.

As I look at my work retracing memory and the fading or blurring around the edges, it brings me back to my great-grandmother, Viola Ferguson. I am reminded of the years spent coping with her battle with Alzheimer’s. There is an urgency to the idea of pinning down a memory and idea while I am still able to do so. Yet, the softness of the printed line and the softness of the fibers mapping out my physical memories of place all allude to the inevitability that all of it will slowly fade away. The rock walls will tumble, the factory bricks will return to the earth, the threads of remembrance will slowly unravel.

¹⁰ Plato. *Theaetetus. Sophist*. Harvard University Press, 1921, p.187.

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APPENDIX 1

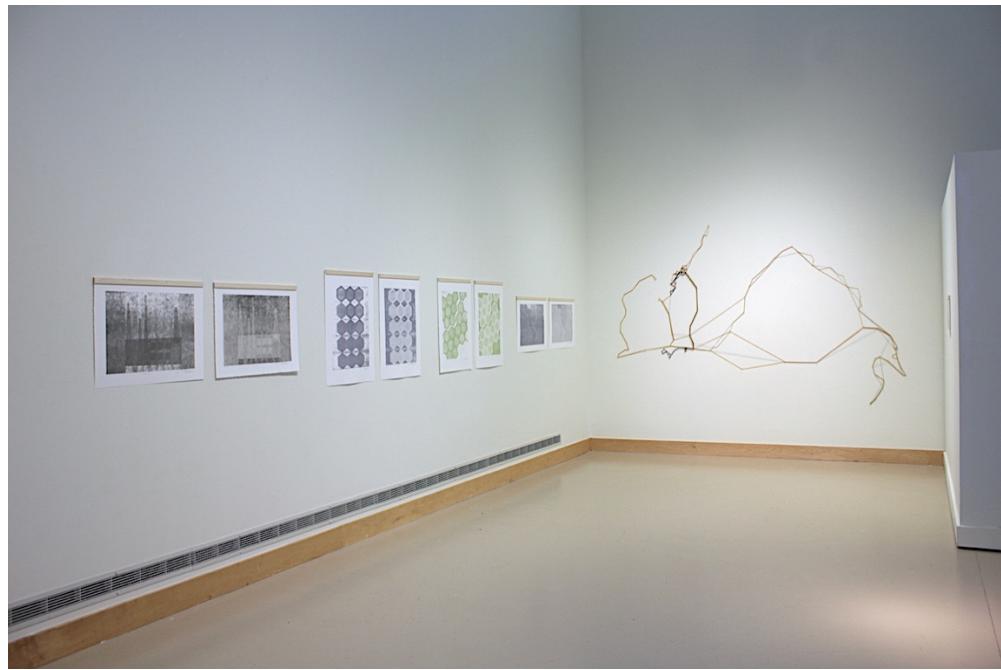


Fig. A1 Sara Method, *Traces of Memory*, installation view, 2020. Photograph by Sara Method.
Image courtesy of the artist.



Fig. A2 Sara Method, Photograph of the artist installing the exhibition, 2020. Image courtesy of the artist.

APPENDIX 2

Musings on Bassett

after all the jobs left, Bassett felt like a ghost town
empty/blank windows staring out at weeds growing through railroad tracks
rusted fire escapes casting shadows on cracked sidewalks
fields of parking lots returning to nature
grass reclaiming each parking space one at a time
not heeding the imposed order of faded painted lines
creating small islands of asphalt in a sea of tough grasses and dandelions

I think about all those changes since the factories closed
it used to be a steady hum of activity
clouds of smoke billowing from smokestacks
workers cars and trucks filling the lots
industry, production, and the occasional flood

when the jobs were outsourced for cheaper labor
the factories began to close
where do the workers go?
where do the skills of the finishers, assemblers, sanders, cutters, weavers, inspectors go?
where are those promised better jobs?
does a promise put food on the table?
does a promise pay medical bills for ruptured discs, worn out joints, and nameless cancers?

as a child, I swore to never leave
when I was a teenager
I ran at the first chance and never looked back
the writing was on those blank brick walls
there was nothing here for me

now I look back with guilt
ashamed of fleeing
I clearly see my own prejudices smacking me in the face
getting above my raising and thinking I was better for leaving

I see the determination of all those who stayed
the bitterness of losing a job
the stubbornness to stick it out for family

tripping over pride to accept help but then sharing that willingly with anyone who needs it

it's not perfect

there are a lot of drugs—a lot of unemployment

too many arrests—too many promises

to keep this town from giving in to the ghosts of a promise

to provide textiles & furniture to the world

made in the USA but not for those who made it

they'll probably survive

they always seem to

some of my distant family left their homes

to come to this place for those promised manufacturing jobs in the time of the boom

most of them were gone before the bust

what would life have been like if they had stayed home?

is it enough to find a job to make ends meet?

to settle down and raise a family in the same place you were raised?

to spend your weekends watching the race or the big game?

never missing church on homecoming?

catching up with your neighbor on the front porch?

it's easy to get caught up in memories of snow forts and running through sprinklers

of playing tag with a neighbor or passing notes at school

we don't like to remember the white hoods and casual slurs

the brush-off of "he didn't mean it"

you can't seem to have one without the other

when I was little, I felt I had been placed in this body for now as an observer

that I would do it again in another life just as I had done before

I wondered what my life would have been like in a different body

and I remember feeling it was very unfair

that I would have to endure all the bad in life and eventually die

I wanted to float above and observe always

that's probably why I never truly felt settled or that I belonged anywhere

It's easier to watch, cut ties, and move on to the next

always taking notes

filling away images and memories

trying to drift by without really being noticed
like the Pleiades, if you look at me directly, I disappear
I can only be seen on the periphery

It's that feeling that I am unique in the universe
and the crushing reality we are all just alike.

I'll probably survive
I always seem to