

# TRACES OF HUMAN HISTORIES

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By

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The common thread in this body of work is memory. I am using memory as a pathway between the real and unreal to talk about how past experiences shift through time and create something new. I want to create a way to contemplate my own stories while allowing space for new interpretations. I am combining my own personal history with found images to create work that speaks to the piecing together of stories and the parts-to-the-whole relationship to create new narratives. I am inspired by remnants from my daily life. Collecting and organizing items is at the heart of my practice. I am questioning and reaching for my sense of belonging and place in these shared histories. I am using the environment around me and connecting it with my story and memories while I explore the idea that it has endless connections to other's memories. In my work I am investigating memory through themes of haunting, landscapes, and structures.

In my work *Collective Memory* (Fig.1), I am exploring ideas of memory as uncanny moments that haunt and linger. Memory is selective and as the moment passes it becomes less real therefore causing a transformation and shift as we recall and retell our stories. That point where memory is right on the edge between fiction and nonfiction is what I am most curious about. We become haunted with moments when we cannot put all of the pieces together and



recall if it is a moment from our past or someone else's. Avery Gordon addresses the idea of the collective nature of personal memories in her book, *Ghostly Matters*. Gordon describes how memories overlap and bump into each other over time. She also proposes that fiction can be seen as a method of telling stories, whether they are seen as fact or fantasy they can still offer truths.

Fig. 1 *Collective Memory*, 60in x 36in, collaged images, gesso, image transfers on wood panel

Gordon describes this idea as “questions of narrative structuring, constructedness, analytic standpoint, and historical provisionality of claim to knowledge direct sociology to the ways in which our stories can be understood as fictions of the real.” (Gordon 11) The haunting

comes from the untold stories and the space left for uncanny moments to overlap. The history we are told is expanded with the generations of stories we tell and create larger truths that can expand beyond the singular view. As some of the stories involve hauntings and strange, otherworldly events they can have more connections and overlapping themes because of their nature to be repetitious and similar collectively. “What can we make out of this rememory that forgets some things and never ever others, a memory already indicated as uncanny by its fundamental repetitiousness” (Gordon 165) We are sharing these moments more than we even realize. Our memories feel so personal but are in fact regurgitated moments that have happened multiple times throughout history. These memories revisit and haunt us as we move through life, and then move on to haunt someone else, connecting us all- even if only briefly.

In *Collective Memory*, there are collaged silhouettes that overlap and ghostly gesso covering and revealing the figures as a way to offer a moment of subtle recognition for the viewer. The idea that there is a “possibility of a collectively animated worldly memory... the moment in which you - *who never was there* in that real place - *can bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else.*” (Gordon 165) Collage is an accessible art form that resonates with a wide audience because the images are shared from our everyday life. Combined, they create a familiar language or collective dialogue. Gordon writes, “the picture of the place is not personal memory as we conventionally understand it, private, interior, mine to hoard or share, remember or forget. The picture of the place *is* its very sociality, all the doings, happenings, and knowing that make the social world alive in and around us as we make it ours. It is *still out there* because social relations as such are not ours for the owning. They are prepared in advance and they linger well beyond our individual time, creating that shadowy basis for the production of material life.” (Gordon 166)

As I refer to landscapes and a sense of place in my work, I seek to bring out a curiosity brought on by the feeling of nostalgia and the idea that sometimes personal can be more universal. Returning to the place of your childhood or a place that brings you back to a moment

has a strong impact on how we remember our past. The dictionary defines nostalgia as a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for, or a return to, some past period or irrecoverable condition. I have found that just starting to retell the story leads to more pieces of the memory to form as the experience resurfaces and using images that provoke a feeling of wistfulness allow

for new ways of recollection to happen. I am investigating my own memory and stories from my childhood through images and materials I have saved, I am allowing for the misplaced pieces to the stories to open new narratives and expand the story into something unfamiliar.



Fig. 2 *These Ghosts Don't Have Legs*, 8 16in x 16in wood panels  
Image transfers of home photos, acrylic on rice paper and scraps, gesso

In my most recent work, *These Ghosts Don't Have Legs* (Fig.2), the middle is left out and acts as the lost memory in my personal history, the glitch in the system that allows for the viewer's interpretation. This watery map portrays my stories through home photos while still creating a universal nostalgic feeling. I am investigating the connection we have, as a society, to lost memories and traces of human histories. In my work I focus on memory mishaps, when our mind recalls only part of a story or we are certain of a memory but then we find out it actually belongs to someone else. "The genius of memory is that it is choosy, chancy, and temperamental" (Shields 34). The actual moment is gone and we are using images in our mind to recollect a moment that shifts everytime we tell the story. My collages are building on something known and creating something that is new, revealing the overlapping stories we all share that have become blurred in this current space it occupies.

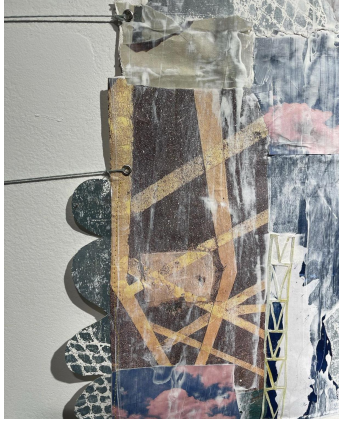


Fig. 3 Detail from *Topographical Tendencies*. 60in x 36in

*Collaged photos, found images, gouache paintings, thread, gesso on canvas*

*Topographical Tendencies* (Fig.3), was inspired by my continued exploration of place and observation of landscapes and common grids throughout my daily life. In this work there are images of shadowy landscapes connected to cloud photos and overlapped with net patterns. These abstract images offer a map throughout the work that is familiar and yet may lead to somewhere uncertain. The path from one point to the next may just be a path to me but a place for someone else where something significant has happened. Lucy Lippard refers to the sense of place being felt as an “extension of the body”, as your own personal memory, but also as a collective memory shared with the environment and all who have experienced that place. “The land is important to me, but even more important is the idea that it becomes a ‘place’ because someone has been there.” (Lippard 34)

Memories feel both comforting and constricting, as they are experiences that I cannot fully grasp onto anymore but they create our own personal history. This duality connects with the theme that, as a society, our past and present are connected and linked together so the idea of not knowing if a memory is yours or maybe someone else's is ok, maybe it is both. This idea is also connected to my curiosity around memory as serving its place between fiction and nonfiction.

Growing up near the ocean in Florida, I use water to mark a sense of place and it often makes me feel lost in the mountains of North Carolina. I am constantly thinking about the distance I am from the ocean. Raising my children in the Blue Ridge Mountains, and providing this place as our home, brings different memories that layer into my own story. My work represents place, as a memory and connection or a link to a specific time, in my personal history

as well as a collective memory shared with the viewers. In *The Lure of the Local*, Lucy Lippard speaks to the feeling of this concept of place.

“Inherent in the local is the concept of place - a portion of land/town/cityscape seen from the inside, the resonance of a specific location that is known and familiar.

Most often place applies to one's own “local” entwined with personal memory, known or unknown histories, marks made in the land that provoke and evoke. Place is latitudinal and longitudinal within the maps of a person's life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political. A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth.” (Lippard 23)



Fig. 4 *How Much We Can Hold*, 60in x 48in  
Canvas scraps, acrylic, house paint, image transfer, screen print

*How Much We Can Hold* (Fig.4) and *Threshold* speak to the landscapes and physical structures we occupy, as we come out of a pandemic, and how they seem physically unchanged but feel very different.

Jacky Bowring talks about these familiar yet strange encounters in *Melancholy and the Landscape*, she says “the uncanny is evoked not only by the particular physical elements or other spatial interventions, but also through the way in which the landscape is experienced... the uncanny is a kind of projection, a mental state which creates ambiguity and slippage” (Bowring 79). Ideas of slippage resonate throughout my collages, gaps and openings that allow for shadows and the uncanny to be evoked. These works were a product of the new reality of 2020, which was to be quarantined at home with my small children working alongside me as I completed my graduate work. Everything had been rendered unknown and obscure. The systems we thought were solid and unchanging were swept out

from under us; as schools closed, groceries were ordered online, and birthday parties were now drive-by parades. Our social interactions were altered, the work I was creating was reflecting on the restructuring of these systems. The boundaries between our home, work, and school were blurred in a way we were never presented with before. My abstracted collages tell the story of a breakdown in systems and a strange new parallel to the world we once knew.

All of our stories combined create a quilt of connected experiences. The gaps in our memory are valuable as they cause us to pause and question the histories and stories we have been told. My multi-layered collages act as a threshold to appreciate lost memories and untold stories through themes of hauntings, landscapes, and structures we occupy. This work is an exploration of the use of collage to portray ideas of memories and uncanny experiences as a means to create connections and offer space for reflection.



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