

Passing Through
An Installation of Photography

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Passing Through, an installation of photography, encourages the nature of memory through an engagement with the materiality of photographic images. Considering memory as an ephemeral phenomenon, I am interested in exploring the emotional and psychological affects that images have on the body and mind. Strategies of collecting and tracing are employed as a means of forming connections between people, places, materials, objects, and images. Recounting personal history, storytelling and participating in the immediate present, I actively seek out images as a means for re-experiencing memory. Triggers reveal themselves during the collection and deconstruction of both personal and found photographic material. Re-assembling this information produces an archive consisting of real and re-imagined fragments of spaces and narratives. Together, these processes produce a body of work that considers the image as an experiential entity that is inherently memory based; triggering memory to create an emotive response in the viewer.

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Dedication

I dedicate the work in this exhibition to my family.

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“We are not passive witnesses of an utterly objective world. Rather, under the surface, utilizing memory in a way that escapes our notice, we are constantly, actively, creatively, shaping our experience of the world as well as our experience of ourselves”¹.

Henri Bergson

My thesis work, *Passing Through*, originates from personal history and written journal entries. The image of a ship is a recurring theme in my life and in my work. This stems from memories of my father’s life long commitment to build a model replica of the HMS Victory in his small basement workshop in our Southern Ontario home. While experiencing this object in the present, recollections of past experiences arise to the forefront of my memory. I have a mental image of myself, as a child, sitting on the concrete floor amongst piles of sawdust with the scent of pine in the air and the sounds of woodworking tools as my father built his boat. Discussing the idea of the *mental image* in depth, French philosopher Henri Bergson’s writings suggest that experiential information collected accumulatively form mental maps that in turn create pictures in our minds, influencing present lived experience². In a similar way, author and naturalist Diane Ackerman’s writing on the senses in her text *A Natural History of the Senses*, poetically describes each sense in minute detail paying particular attention to interactions of the senses in our daily routines. She writes, “As we know, the eye works a lot like a camera; or rather, we invented cameras that work like our eyes”³; therefore, in the archiving of personal

¹ William, G. Barnard, *Living Consciousness: The Metaphysical Vision of Henry Bergson*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 162.

² Barnard, 121 - 129.

³ Diane Ackerman, *A Natural History of the Senses*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 232.

memories such as the growth of my father's model ship, I use my camera as an apparatus for experiencing in addition to recording.

The example of my father's model ship also functions as a metaphorical signifier for tracing memories related to childhood and family. Artist and writer Victor Burgin describes "the memory trace...[as] nothing more than a signifier amongst others, in complex and mobile relations with other signifiers...the successes and failures of memory alike"⁴. In this way, I interpret the photograph as a trace of an experience, not experience itself. Thus, like writing, the photograph functions as a visual indication of lived happenings. The building of this model ship began before I was born and yet my relationship to my father's passion fuels my studio practice in that I have been delving into the psychological and perceptual aspects of images as they relate to personal memories. I achieve this through the inherent quality of the transparent photograph and building connections through the tenuous nature of collage.

In her text *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*, author Nadia C. Seremetakis discusses the function of the senses in memories of lived experience. Seremetakis discusses memory as a spatial dimension; one that mixes emotional, psychological, and bodily experiences as a collective experience on the individual that forms a mental picture of the past.⁵ Using a childhood recollection of tasting a peach for the first time in her birth country Italy, Seremetakis explains that these first encounters in childhood begin an archived memory bank that the mind and body use as a framework for connecting her subsequent tastes of a peach with her first experience of one.

⁴ Victor Burgin, "Strange Temporalities," *Memory: Documents of Contemporary Art*, (Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2012), 177.

⁵ Nadia, C. Seremetakis, *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*, (Colorado: Westview Press Inc., 1994), 4 - 5.

The role that the senses play in the construction of memory is an important concept in the creation of my work. The senses influence the perception of a lived experience and are often responsible for recalling specific triggers that take one from the present to the past in a fraction of a second - like the click of a shutter. Sight, sound, touch and smell are all elements of the sensorium that aid, however subtly, in generating an indication of memory. For example, one would assume that the act of taking a photograph involves mainly a visual sense, as does the act of looking at a photograph. However, the act of taking a photograph involves actively and consciously going out into the world to experience and witness moments and events. What motivates me to take photographs of lived experiences goes beyond the visuality of photography to involve all of the senses, not just looking through a lens.

It is with the senses that I seek out what to frame and photograph; thus what triggers a memory. In *Remembering The Senses*, poet and arts critic Susan Stewart writes “the senses are not merely organs used in responding to and apprehending the world, they are also a powerful source of material memories. Such memories are material in that the body carries them semantically, they are registered in our consciousness or... in the unconscious knowledge of our physical experiences”⁶. Therefore, similar to Seremetakis’ story of tasting a peach for the first time, Stewart delineates memory as formed through the senses in the participation of present lived experience, and they are recounted when the senses form relationships and similarities with sensations that have already been experienced in our past that open our memory bank and allow

⁶ Stewart, Susan, “Remembering the Senses,” *Empire of the Senses: Sensual Culture Reader*, ed. David Howes (New York: Berg, 2005), 59.

our mind and body to transfer and carry information relatable to memories.⁷ The senses are the mind and body's way of developing a process of storing information.⁸

To acquaint oneself with a photograph involves more than just looking. Sounds, smells, textures, and tastes are all elements of lived experience that cannot be replicated in images, yet photographs can awaken elements of a past experience, so that a memory that has been formed through the senses is then recalled through one's interaction with the photograph. Canadian theorist Marshall McLuhan explains in his text *Inside the Five Sense Sensorium* that photography at the dawn of the industrial revolution was responsible for making visuality the most dominant of the senses.⁹ He claims that image media like photography and later television created visual space, while sound such as radio created a heightened awareness of auditory space.¹⁰ He further says that this combination of visual and auditory space has created a "synaesthesia sense" where we experience multiple senses at once.¹¹ Stewart addresses the senses specifically in relation to art making and looking at art. Her text titled "Remembering the Senses" discusses a Marxian and Bergsonian view of the senses within aesthetic choice making, saying that our experience of the senses is a direct result of objects that are made with aesthetic choices in mind.¹² She goes on to say, "...sense experience and memory are in the history of human making in accordance with human ends of expression".¹³ Both McLuhan and Stewart's arguments support the conceptual

⁷ Stewart, 2005, 59 - 69.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ McLuhan, 43.

¹⁰ Ibid, 46 - 47.

¹¹ Ibid, 44.

¹² Stewart, 2005, 59.

¹³ Ibid, 67.

underpinning of memory-making and the senses through the act of image-making and object-making. In other words, this shows that the photograph, although a dominantly visual medium, when combined with the aesthetic choices of object making can in theory produce images that become sensorially engaging; activating more than one sense.

My own process for gathering images reveals emotional and sensorial attachments to photographs to the extent that this thesis stems from personal history and storytelling. Fearful of losing or forgetting stories that are important to me, I collect and record narratives from my own memory as well as through secondhand accounts from shared family stories. The collection of stories is a solitary activity involving a line of processes that incorporate hand written journaling, found and made photographs, and drawings. Author Susan Sontag writes in *On Photography*, that to collect photographs means “to collect the world”.¹⁴ She states, “photographs are a grammar and, even more importantly, an ethics of seeing...The most grandiose result of the photographic enterprise is to give us the sense that we can hold the whole world in our hands - as an anthology of images...Photographs really are experiences captured, and the camera is the ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood.”¹⁵ This would suggest that the act of participating in the collection of photographs means to collect experiences rather than images, the experience being the act of collecting and not just the experience of seeing the photographs themselves.

Using my camera as a device for experiencing and looking, I make images that call forth memories. Something as simple and inconsequential as a sudden glare on the interior of a window as I turn my head, or something as complex as encountering a fallen tree across a sidewalk after a bad snow storm provoke memories and connections to past experiences. This

¹⁴ Sontag, 3.

¹⁵ Ibid, 3 - 4.

includes sounds, smells, textures, and sight - the warmth of light streaming in through a window for example, involves a bodily engagement with temperature, and a reaction to bright light and colour with the eye.

The gathering of images, for me, is synonymous with the act of writing. Early on in my work, writing on a daily basis becomes a conscious act that stimulates memory and reflection and introspective growth, allowing thought to flow intuitively. Whole sentences, single words, or phrases of past experiences and out-of-focus memories are written at a rapid pace so that thought becomes synonymous with writing. It unconsciously feeds into my artistic practice and indirectly prompts the desire to gather and collect photographic material in order to make the invisible (memory) visible (photograph) through the lens of my camera.

During the process of gathering written and photographic information, an archive of digital and physical material is amassed. Sorting through this archive becomes an act of reflection. It involves an internal, contemplative space enabling me to make connections between personal writings, images I have collected, and the places and events I have experienced. Based on an immediate emotional and sensorial attachment, images are chosen and printed on transparent Clearfilm - a transparent photographic medium. Once the images are converted from digital files to a print they are then considered for their emotional content and treated as a physical material. Further reflection occurs through the deconstruction of the images using eyes and hands. Drawing, tracing, and writing are used to choose elements of photographs that elicit emotional and/or sensorial responses. Tracing is synonymous with drawing and writing, and involves an intimate familiarization with the photograph. I make decisions based on fragments of

memory that most often occur in my writing; extracting information that protrudes from the image as being connected to a previous experience. (Refer to illustration #1)



1. Natalie Hunter. Concept Drawing For *No, I Was In The Water...* 2012 - 2013. Acrylic and graphite on mylar.

I have always had the compulsion to trace things. Whether it be a photograph or an object, for me, tracing is a gesture that involves the body and activates the consciousness of the mind. Tracing is an investigation of the in-between spaces, holes, and out-of-focus details between absence and presence of memory¹⁶. It is an introspective, contemplative act¹⁷. I did not realize that tracing became a major conceptual part of my process until witnessing a poetic gesture within a recent occurrence. While visiting Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* in Washington, DC, I witnessed a woman weeping in front of the long list of names written on the jet black wall. When prompted to leave the site with her family members, she immediately took a

¹⁶Susan Hiller, "Working Through Objects," *The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Charles Merewether (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006), 41 - 48.

¹⁷ Hiller, 2006, 41 - 48.

piece of white paper from her pocket and a piece of black crayon. Carefully, she placed the paper on top of a name, and slowly rubbed the crayon on the wall to trace the impression. This experience, a strong symbolic gesture, sticks in my mind. It helped me understand my own definition of the trace. In this instance, tracing became a way of remembering, of recording, of preserving, and a way of holding onto the past. In this sense, I refer to the photograph as a trace but my final works do not include handwriting or mark-making. They reside as photographs that allow for multiple readings beyond the highly personal.

In his article *Archives, Documents, Traces* French philosopher Paul Ricoeur writes, “The notion of a trace constitutes a new connector between the temporal perspectives that speculation arising out of phenomenology...any trace left by the past becomes a document for historians as soon as they know how to interrogate its remains, and how to question them”¹⁸. For me this means that collecting and tracing become a form of connecting people, places, materials, and objects - forming ones own mental archive. Victor Burgin sees the trace as connected with memory stating, “The memory trace...is nothing more than a signifier amongst others, in complex and mobile relations with other signifiers...the successes and failures of memory alike”¹⁹.

The act of the trace is prominent in the process of my work through three key areas; the visual trace, the physical trace, and the mental trace. A trace can be an act; a gesture, a product, or even evidence of an act or gesture. To trace is to remember; to record to memory and archive thought. It helps to form relationships with people and things between what is being traced, and

¹⁸ Paul Ricoeur, “Archives, Documents, Traces,” . 66 - 67. *The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Charles Merewether (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006), 66 - 69.

¹⁹ Burgin, 177.

the tracer.²⁰ Photographer Idris Khan is best known for his series of works where he compiles composites of other artists work such as Bernd and Hilla Becher and Edward Muybridge. In a lesser-known work, *Every...photograph whilst traveling in Europe* (See Illustration #2), Khan compiles all of the photographs from his experiences travelling. Overlaying them on top of one another, he collapses them into a single composited image thereby compressing all of the information from his collection of photographs into one muddy and congested representation. For me, work such as Idris Khan's *Every... photograph whilst traveling in Europe* is a visual form of writing; a way of recording something in an enduring form and an example of the physical trace.

Writing is the manifestation of mental thought into a physical product; a trace. Therefore, for me, physically tracing elements in a photograph for example, is directly connected to the activation of the conscious mind; a mental trace. Writer Carla Mazzio identifies touch as the most direct of all the senses, claiming that the other senses require mediation to produce a sensation²¹. Touch is implied through the collage - you can trace the action of how they have been layered.

²⁰ Hiller, 41 - 48.

²¹ Carla Mazzio, "The Senses Divided," *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, ed. David Howes (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), 91.



2. Idris Khan. *Every... photograph whilst traveling in Europe*. 2003. <<http://www.skny.com/artists/idris-khan/images/>> accessed: March 21 2013.

The mental trace is also connected to the visual trace. A visual trace happens when I am experiencing the world through the lens of my camera: I am consciously aware of my surroundings and my camera as a tool for looking. The camera, an extension of my hand, visually touches and collects elements of my surroundings and over time, an archive of places and spaces is formed. Author and educator, Radoslaw Poczykowski, in *Hand Drawn Memory - How to read a mental map?* defines a mental map, (what I call a mental trace) as “images of environments created in our minds for spatial orientation”²². Poczykowski further goes on to explain that mental maps function to “preserve the memory of a place reconstructing a spatial

²² Radoslaw Poczykowski, “Hand Draw Memory - How to read a mental map?”, *Cartographies of Culture*, ed Kalaga, Kubisz (Frankfurt: Peter Lang GmbH, 2010), 41.

order which does not exist anymore...mental maps serve as carriers of memory and orientation in space”²³.

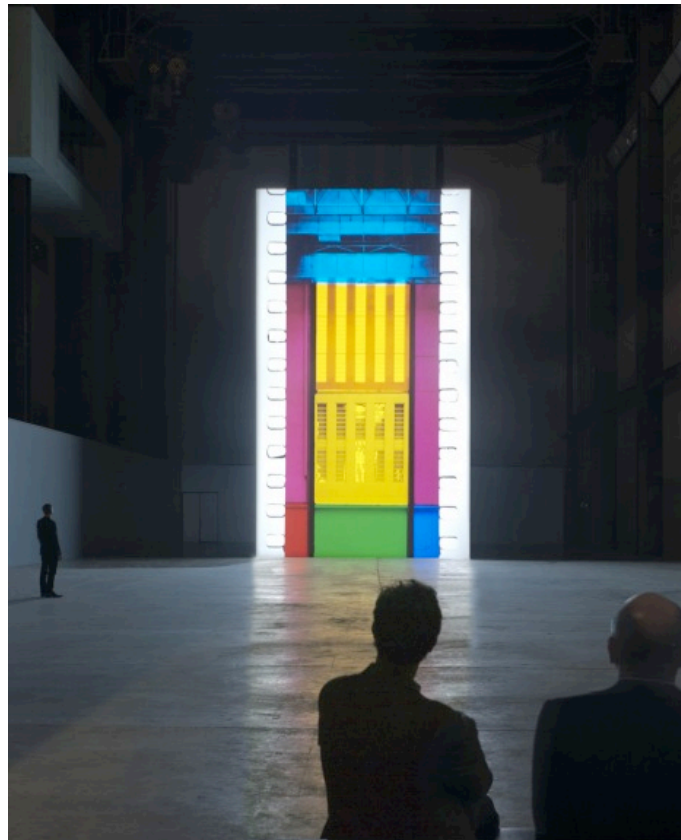
Beyond writing and visually tracing experiences through the use of my camera, the memory triggers become apparent again during post-production when I begin deconstructing the images I have made. These triggers usually include particular elements of a photograph related to my sensorial experiences of a place. The experience I wish to recreate begins when I piece together elements, pairing together experiences and formalizing my own fictitious realities of events, spaces and places. This experiential quality is what I strive for when considering the installation of my work.

With this awareness, I approach the collage assemblages from the perspective of a sculptor; as a material and an object first as well as an image. I am more concerned with the analogue, printed image that exists in the world and has a physical materiality. Through this innate understanding, I explore how images have an affect on a physical, emotional and psychological level; the image as object and material. For me the physicality of an image is what makes a photograph have mental and spatial dimension. It is this physical attachment that makes photographic imagery powerful by producing mental points of reflection in the viewer, but also in the photographer. The act of taking a photograph with a camera is also a physical and mental experience that involves consciously being within a particular space and time and participating within the experience as it involves a bodily engagement with a subject²⁴. Artist and filmmaker Tacita Dean (See Illustration #3) attains a unique spatial and metaphysical approach in the two-dimensional picture plane. This is reinforced by her ability to create narrative through a

²³ Poczykowski, 41.

²⁴ Barthes, 9.

collection of still, ambiguous images in her installation project *Film* at Tate Modern. Her choice of 35 mm analogue film; an almost obsolete technology next to current digital technologies, privileges material over image. Her practice involves the production of experimental non-narrative films where she physically manipulates the celluloid film strip.



3. Tacita Dean. *Film*. 2011. Unilever Series. Installation view at Tate Modern. <<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/talks-and-lectures/rosalind-krauss-on-tacita-deans-film>> Accessed: October 30, 2012.

I identify with Dean's understanding of the film strip as a material, and although I use a digital camera, all of my decision making happens with an actual image in my hands. The function of the light box, both in my artistic process and the presentation of my work, connect with light boxes used in analogue photography. Negatives are placed on the light box as a means of sorting and selecting which negative to print. In my work, perhaps because I was a sculptor

when entering the program, the light box becomes an apparatus for seeing images and thus becomes a sculptural object in the gallery space.²⁵ Like Tacita Dean, I too manipulate images, but for the purpose of breaking them apart to reconstruct an experience. The still image is my medium, while Tacita Dean's piece *Film* deals strictly with the moving image of the film strip.



4. Uta Barth. *Untitled*. From *In-Between Places*. 2000 - 2001. <<http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/2aa/2aa239.htm>> Accessed: November 2, 2013.

German born photographer Uta Barth's practice involves using the camera as a tool for seeing as opposed to a tool for documenting (See Illustration #4). Her work looks at intimate exterior and interior spaces using deliberately out-of-focus photography to capture emotional and psychological attachments to space. Her out-of-focus aesthetic directly subverts traditional notions of photography throughout art history, where subjects and environments were subject to long exposure and sitting times. My own work relates to her decision for using the camera as a

²⁵ Bishop, Clair.

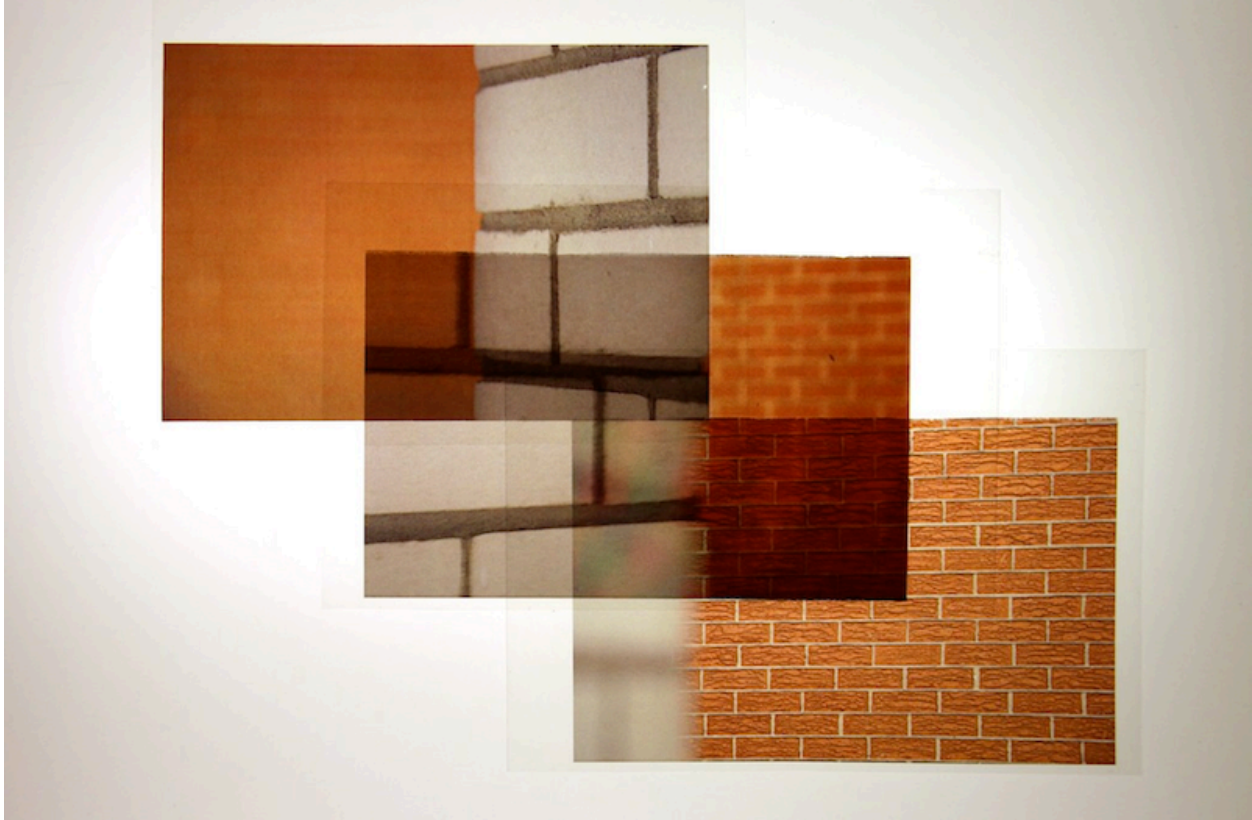
device for seeing as opposed to documenting the world, as I too create photographs that suggest spaces but are not detailed documents - sharp, in-focus and with great depth of field.

“Photography is unclassifiable because there is no reason to mark this or that of its occurrences; it aspires, perhaps, to become as crude, as certain, as noble as a sign, which would afford its access to the dignity of a language: but for there to be a sign there must be a mark; deprived of a principle of marking, photographs are signs which don’t take, which turn, as milk does. Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see”²⁶

Roland Barthes

As I take apart my images, decision making is influenced by eyes and hands through the use of drawing media, writing, and collaged photographic material. This process encourages an introspective mental space. Once I have selected images to work with, I return to the digital and use imaging software such as Photoshop to further deconstruct the chosen images moving them toward the reconstruction of a remembered experience. Photoshop functions as a further extension of my hand. I pick and choose information formed in the above mentioned drawings and collages. This information is isolated into a separate image. These separated fragments are then printed onto transparent film and the photographs are either illuminated and layered atop large scale light-boxes or installed on the wall to form large scale, assembled collages. The whole installation functioning as a temporary, ephemeral experience that responds directly to the shape and parameters of the gallery.

²⁶ Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 6.



5. Natalie Hunter. Example of a Transparency Miniature. 2012.

The fore-mentioned process allows me to make conscious material choices. Physical and digital photographs, transparent photographic film, and light are materials that I consciously choose to use in my work based on their unique connotations, materiality, and physical/non-physical properties. It is my belief that images function as physical, mental, and spatial experiences. I question the ephemerality and temporal nature of digital images as they are losing their physical relevancy and a relationship with the body - their instant consumption making it almost impossible to form strong emotional and psychological attachments.²⁷ Pixels are ephemeral and images that are stored digitally (on computers, hard drives, and the internet) are

²⁷ Clair Bishop, "Digital Divide," *Artforum*, (September 2012), <http://artforum.com/inprint/issue=201207&id=31944&pagenum=0> (accessed November 12, 2012).

impermanent; their life and death exists in a single instance. In order to keep these images alive, constant maintenance is needed to update files and save information as there is no record of these images once they are gone. Therefore, archiving, recording life and personal history has taken on new meaning as the production and consumption of images has reached its peak since the birth of photography.²⁸ Although I use digital photography to collect images, the physicality of a photographic image as an object (the print) is more important than the digital file. Digital photographs are made of pixels and lack a material presence. The file itself resides in memory and is inherently ephemeral. Even the output has a life span, approximately eighty years, which could coincidentally be seen to mimic a human life span. The printed photograph becomes the material through which I create my own assemblages. These giclee prints on Clearfilm, reference the analogue negative in their materiality and position on light boxes. Similar to emulsion on analogue film, the transparent photographs are delicate and subject to scratches and wear over time. These physical qualities are what attracts me to the medium and which references ephemerality, mortality, and fragility of memory, as seen in this thesis body of work. (Refer to illustration #5)

Passing Through, an installation of photography at the University of Waterloo Art Gallery consists of elements that occupy both the floor and the walls. Layered collages on transparent film assembled on the walls are paired with light boxes on the floor. While the wall images are fixed, the light box images are movable. In it's entirety, the installation was conceived to engage the body in both physical and visual levels. The exhibition examines the futile attempt at preserving the fragile and tenuous nature of memory. I navigate this endeavor by exploring the

²⁸ Bishop

discipline of image making in the hopes of re-awakening memory using body, mind, and the senses. I am conscious of the tension between out-of-focus versus detailed photographs, and suggest that it represents a restlessness between ephemerality and permanence. This is evident in the narrative subject matter of the images, and the physical methods of display.

Light is necessary for photographs, both analogue and digital, and something I consider to be a material in my work. Although light exists in a de-materialized form, it is needed for capturing images through the optics and sensors of the camera lens. Light acts as a material stabilizer, and the convention of the box shape makes reference to the experience of seeing an image through a camera lens, vitrines, and similar apparatuses for archiving photographs.

The rationale for combining the collages with the light boxes is a futile yet genuine attempt at re-constructing (even for a brief moment) the intangible and unfixed memory. As one stands over the light box works, you become aware of your own physicality and body position as you navigate around this object on the floor. The images placed on the light boxes are not pinned down and are vulnerable to intervention by chance. For example, a sudden gust of wind may change the position of the photographs on the light box bed.

The exhibition consists of six works: *Were You In The Boat When The Boat Tipped Over?*, *No, I Was In The Water...*, *Upon Awakening at Dusk, She Felt Just Like The Weather, Through The Woods We Ran*, and *To Cut Down The Family Tree*. Walking into the gallery, the viewer is at first confronted by a dimly lit room. Three identical large illuminated light boxes are installed on the floor grouped in the center of the gallery. On the light box located near the back wall is *Were You In The Boat When The Boat Tipped Over?* (See illustration #6). This floor piece consists of seven collaged digital prints on transparent film, layered one on top of the other in an

irregular pattern to form a composited image that breaks the conventions of the photographic frame. The layered prints are loosely placed flat on top of a light box 50” wide by 40” long by 8” high. The light box lays directly on the floor, horizontally parallel to the back wall that it sits in front of. Warm lighting softly illuminates the collaged prints, revealing ethereal, out-of-focus, atmospheric fragments of an undefined space. These layers are coupled with clearly defined details of a model ship. The image of the ship is broken up into three separate layers, giving the impression that the ship is rocking violently within the murky waves of the hazy spatial elements behind. The ship appears to be falling out of its photographic frame, and yet the frame of the light box contains the disorder of the collaged images. Metaphorically, this piece references my father’s life long commitment to the building of a model ship. The frame of the light box referencing the small basement workshop that contains this object as it slowly grows in size and changes over time.



6. Natalie Hunter. *Were You In The Boat When The Boat Tipped Over?* 2013. Light box collage. Giclee prints on transparent film.

Installed on the back wall, directly behind *Were You In The Boat When The Boat Tipped Over?* is *No I Was In The Water...* (See illustration #7). Also composed of layered, transparent, digital prints, this piece is installed directly on the wall; free of the impeding photographic frame that is present in *Were You In The Boat When The Boat Tipped Over*'s light box. Covering a 60" by 125" area, this collage is directly related to the collage on top of the light box in the center of the room both in subject matter and aesthetics. However, in this collage, the indistinct features of the background further blur details of the ship's orientation to the space surrounding it. The top most layers contain crisp, well-defined features of the model ship. Most prominently, the side of

the ship is situated from a close-up distance, at a higher center of frame. This indicates that the viewer is looking up at it's side from below; from the perspective of someone treading water.

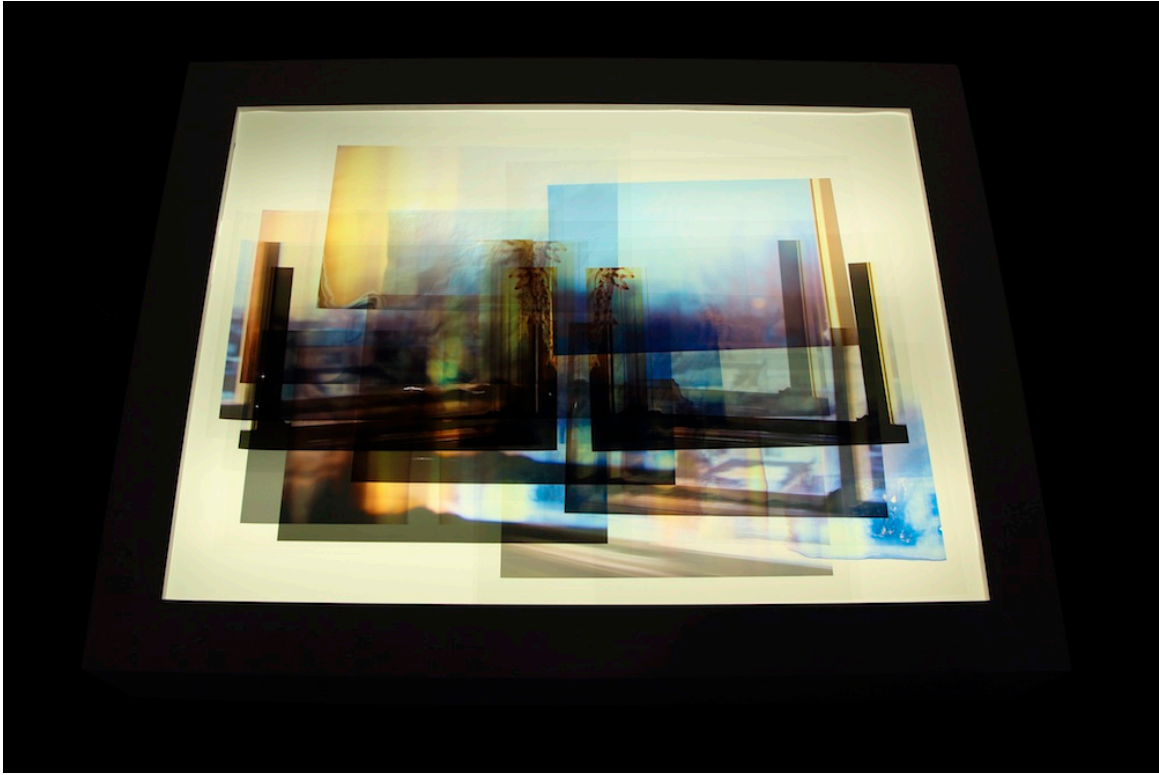


7. Natalie Hunter. Installation view of *Were You In The Boat When The Boat Tipped Over?* and *No, I Was In The Water....* 2012 - 2013.

The titles for the piece, *Were You In The Boat When The Boat Tipped Over?* and *No, I Was In The Water...* function as a conversation; pointing to what is happening visually and physically for the viewer as they experience the work. These titles also suggest an underlying narrative; a question is posed, and an answer given, indicating a conversation between two people. The object of the ship functions as a metaphor for the relationship between two people. I have witnessed the growth of this object in my father's small basement workshop as a small

child growing into adulthood. This piece attempts to navigate the emotional and psychological relationship I have with the object and by extension, the person to whom the object belongs.

She Felt Just Like The Weather (See Illustration #8) is situated in the center of the room directly parallel to the far right wall of the gallery. Again, a 50” wide by 40” long by 8” high light box warmly illuminates a densely layered collage made from multiple transparent photographic prints. The prints are layered atop the illuminated light box to depict an out of focus image of an interior, domestic space. It is a composition of a house intermingled with the effects of light on drapery and a window pane that blends to form areas of muddy blue and orange colours. Placed on top of these underlying layers, one can see clearly defined interior window frames mirrored beside one another. Accompanying this work, *Upon Awakening At Dusk* (See Illustration #9) is comprised of a large collage that is installed on the right diagonal wall of the gallery. Containing similar imagery to *She Felt Just Like The Weather*, the prints are organized along the wall in a linear sweeping pattern that mimics the sudden motion experienced when one arises from bed too quickly. This breaking apart of the image produces holes and out-of-focus points that are related to memory. I use fragments of photographs to physically manifest a fleeting moment that is extended over a period of time. Maintaining a close proximity to the light box in *She Felt Just Like The Weather*, *Upon Awakening At Dusk* seemingly emerges from the confines of the light box. Beginning with details of the window frame and lace drapery, the collage becomes more abstracted as the viewer physically moves to the right along the wall. Out of focus, abstracted imagery of window blinds merge with lens flare and colour shifts or glares on the glass window pane before completely dissipating.



8. Natalie Hunter. *She Felt Just Like The Weather*. Light box collage. Giclee prints on transparent film. 2013.



9. Natalie Hunter. Installation view of *Upon Awakening At Dusk* and *She Felt Just Like The Weather*. 2013.

Situated on the left wall while walking into the gallery is *To Cut Down The Family Tree* (See Illustration #10). This wall collage vertically occupies the center section of the wall and again contains clusters of layered colour transparencies. This work begins with repeated images of a moving tire swing that is collaged with imagery of a red house and blurry photographs of fragmented tree stumps. The composition of this piece suggests a tenuous tipping point as the collage builds and extends up the wall and breaks towards the left. In close proximity, the third light box *Through The Woods We Ran*, contains imagery of a swinging tire intermingled with blurred fragments of a house and details of a tree suggests a fleeting viewpoint in motion. Muddy patches of green and gold suggest the imagery is situated during the fall season. Derived from personal narrative, these pieces suggest depths of uncertainty; two separate unrelated moments, (a search for a family holiday tree remembered from childhood, and the re-transplanting of a beloved family maple tree) compile to develop emotive metaphor that is rooted in personal history.



10. Natalie Hunter. *To Cut Down The Family Tree*. 2013. 144" x 144" wall collage.

While each work can occupy a space individually, similar to Sontag's view that photographs are a language, I view the works in this exhibition as phrases.²⁹ The sculptural experience of the light boxes combined with the wall works engages the body on two levels. The viewer navigates the light box collages as if approaching a sculptural object; a spatial relationship that encourages the viewer to navigate the gallery in a circular motion. This perceptually allows the viewer to experience the wall collages in their entirety before moving around the light boxes to engage the pieces on an intimate level. As a result, the body experiences a perceptual push and pull mimicking the focus of a camera lens. The images on the

²⁹ Sontag.

light boxes function as physical material that can be manipulated at will and they have the potential of being picked up and moved around. This ability does not radically change the reading of the work, but adds a tenuous fragility to the object-hood of the images. Thereby making the composited image an ephemeral phenomenon, while creating a relationship with the body. The wall collages are placed in a particular composition that cannot be changed by the viewer. They defy the photographic frame present in the light box as the images are staggered along the wall giving the illusion of motion through the build of the image. This tension between fragile and fixed elements, physical and visual engagement function according to the tenuous nature of memory. The work seeks to produce an experience for the viewer that summons memories relatable to their own personal histories and compels the viewer to feel the powerful perceptual capacity for images to produce or recall memories.

My father never considered the space in which he was constructing his model ship. He simply began. Starting with an original blueprint that he purchased through the mail from England's Royal Navy records, his life long project grew in size over time. After many years the ship has become so large that it can no longer fit through his workshop door. It remains in his basement as he continues to work on it with no planned date to finish. Experiencing my father's model ship evolve over time, I have become acutely aware of objects and their surrounding spaces. As a result, my work made with component parts can be reorganized to fill any given space, and its moveable components allow me to install and experience my work differently each time. I create spaces within spaces, and like my father's ship, my work never ends.

Situating my practice somewhere between private and public, visible and invisible, memory and forgetting, digital and analogue photography, and object making, I create work that

emphasizes the fragility and ephemerality of memory. I see the work as a form of storytelling that elicits a connectedness with an actual experience, but is separated and filtered through the perception of myself as the storyteller. I want the viewer to feel the fragility and ephemerality of memory, and experience their own emotional attachment with private memories through the sensorial, pictorial, and tactile elements of my work.

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