

You Can Never Go Home

An Exhibition of Lightboxes and Kinetic Sculpture

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

My thesis exhibition, *You Can Never Go Home*, reflects the idea of irreconcilable, parallel homes, one that's *here* and one that's *there*. Moving from Calgary, Alberta, to Waterloo, Ontario, to pursue my Master of Fine Arts, I have used myself as a two-year case study to examine how one might make a new place a home. The installation consists of an abundance of handmade objects: life-sized selfies displayed in lightboxes, sculptures in the form of houses and other symbolic buildings (some containing lightboxes and short video loops), as well as my collections of curios, tools and building materials. As an installation, the work examines concepts, concerns and emotions that accompany the process of moving a long distance—longing, memory, nostalgia, absence, belonging, family, lost-ness, place, time, anxiety, resilience, futility, humour, loneliness, rhythm and routine. It is an anxious, obsessive, yet humorous manifestation of my attempts to feel at home in a new place, just as I am about to leave.

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(fig. 1) Monsieur David, *Burmis Tree*, photograph.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burmis_Tree#/media/File:BurmisTree.JPG

The Burmis tree is a centuries old limber pine (fig. 1). It stands sentinel along Highway 3, signifying the entrance to the municipality of the Crowsnest Pass, Alberta. It is a tree with a history—its own death, vandalism, and storms have desecrated it. Because of its emotional importance to the residents of the Crowsnest Pass, it has been fundraised for, patched up, braced, and restored multiple times. The tree, with its long, pointing limbs (and now, braces) represents not only strength, longevity, resilience, and survival but also futility, care and the passing of time. It is a symbol of place, belonging, and for some, home.

The Burmis tree is significant as it is an iconic symbol that reminds me of my home province, Alberta. I grew up in Hanna, Alberta, a small town located a few hours north of the Crowsnest Pass. Since moving from Calgary, Alberta to Waterloo, Ontario to pursue my MFA, I feel like I have two homes. My home in Waterloo is my current and physical home. It is where my daily life happens. But, what I consider my real home, the prairies, is somewhere else. Alberta, no

longer my physical home, is now framed as a home that's *there*, a psychological location of otherness, a place that I long for and idealize.

My thesis exhibition, *You Can Never Go Home*, reflects this idea of irreconcilable, parallel homes, one that's *here* and one that's *there*. Themes such as longing and belonging, lost-ness, nostalgia, loneliness, time, futility, family, and absence are all present. In the University of Waterloo Art Gallery, the back wall of Gallery Two is filled with objects that represent my accumulated, obsessive search for belonging and a sense of home (fig. 2). The 24 foot long wall is crammed full of lightboxes, handmade houses, tools, building materials, jigs, a cuckoo clock, rickety studio shelves, handmade objects, toys, mementos, suitcases, and a giant plaster caribou. There are windows and peepholes to look inside of, and still images and videos of rural



(fig. 2) Jennifer Akkermans, *You Can Never Go Home* (installation shot), 2016, mixed media, 12' x 24'.

landscapes and of myself attempting to build a home. There are miniatures, trinkets, material experiments and moving parts—an abundance of curious objects that I have both built over the last two years, and collected over my lifetime. The display is crowded, raw, with works half-finished and cords tucked in haphazardly, yet it is also carefully arranged. Reminiscent of my studio, it conveys a nervous energy, an anxiety, and a case of *horror vacui* (the fear of empty space). As a maximalist, I fill every available space with the things I like, enjoy, and find comforting—things I have collected that make me feel happy and calm. In a way, I am a bowerbird¹, creating a nest full of attractive objects that I have amassed in order to protect and insulate myself from the outside world.

The sculptures fall into four categories, although there is some overlap, as there often is with memories. The first category romanticizes my childhood home (the *there* of Alberta). These works speak to what I miss about the prairies: landscape, family, connection, belonging, and the notion of a simpler life. They are idealistic and sweet, lightbox-based beacons that beckon me, such as *Farm House* (fig. 3). The second category records my attempts to create a feeling of home in Ontario. These works depict still images and videos of my daily life now—activities done within my apartment, domestic chores, personal routines, and moments of crisis. In these depictions I am trying to create and maintain a routine and rhythm, a sense of normalcy and comfort (although I am not always successful). *A Stitch in Time* (fig. 4) illustrates one such attempt as I continuously



(fig. 3) Jennifer Akkermans, *Farm House*, 2015, mixed media lightbox, 21” x 12” x 7”.

¹ Bower birds collect and decorate their nests with pretty and colourful things they find around them.



(fig. 4) Jennifer Akkermans, *A Stitch in Time*, 2015, mixed media, digital photo frame, 22" x 12" x 6".

fold-out a quilt while making my bed. A third category consists of house forms covered with collage, journaling, and ephemera. These reference my personal practice of art journaling, which I have been using as a tool to cope with life's challenges since childhood (fig. 5). The fourth, and perhaps most humorous, are the objects that I have built in an attempt to recreate objects from my parents' home and childhood, purely from memory (i.e. without references): a giant plaster beast that does not know whether it is a caribou, moose or an elk, and an ill proportioned and expressionless Sunshine Care Bear (fig. 6). These manifestations/mishaps illuminate the inaccuracy and failure of



(fig. 5) Jennifer Akkermans, *Journal #28, Page 52*, 2009, personal journal.

memory. As a set, these categories illustrate my obsession with wanting to recreate a sense of belonging, a sense of feeling at home, a state of being I remember having, but took for granted.



(fig. 6) Jennifer Akkermans, *Sunshine Bear*, 2015, soft sculpture, 20" x 9" x 7 1/2".



(fig. 7) Opa's windmill, plywood, approximately 6' tall.

large windmill (fig. 7) on his front lawn in Saskatchewan, a symbol reminiscent of the windmills in his homeland. Since moving from the prairies to Ontario, I often think of his windmill and feel compelled to recreate it, relating these journeys, mine and theirs, to that same longing for place. Their stories give me hope. They succeeded at rebuilding themselves a home and were able to start over. They were able to feel at home in Saskatchewan.

It is impossible to move long distances without your life completely changing; it is not an easy transition. This exhibition examines my experience of cross-country displacement, a complicated process that I am constantly renegotiating. It is about home—the idealization, the memory, and the mythology—and in this investigation, I use myself as my own case study. My Dutch grandparents immigrated to Canada from Holland after

WWII. My Opa built a

Feeling at home is a state of mind, a feeling that is often associated with where a person grew up. In *Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard writes that “the house we were born in is more than an embodiment of home, it is also an embodiment of dreams” (15). Our childhood homes are our first real experiences of the world, often becoming the standard to which we compare every other place we encounter. Alberta, for me, is this point of comparison, a magical, ideal place that I long to return to.

In reality, however, I left for specific reasons, and in all likelihood will not return there to live. I have outgrown that home, given it up, and in the process, have felt uncomfortable, unsettled and out of place. My childhood home now represents all things calm and simple—safety, comfort, and even boredom. It represents a more secure and predictable way of life, a life that is pastoral. It represents community and family who care for me, and so has become a dream of belonging—a dream that, emotionally, I want to return to.

Bachelard’s Nest House explains this desire to return to our past:

Not only do we come back to [the nest house], but we dream of coming back to it, the way a bird comes back to its nest or a lamb to the fold. This sign of return marks an infinite number of daydreams, for the reason that human returning takes place in the great rhythm of human life, a rhythm that reaches back through the years and, through the dream, combats all absence (99).

As a consequence of leaving, I am aware of what I am missing—the proximity of family and friends, and the security that comes with that—stability, routine, familiarity, and predictability. In a way, it has become a memory and a dream of what I want to achieve here. “Memories are dreams, because the home of other days has become a great image of lost intimacy” (Bachelard 100). And so the work I am doing here (studio work as well as psychological/emotional work) is about absence and longing, home and the things that I miss.

Place is an important part of home, and is closely connected to family. Yi-Fu Tuan writes, “Place can acquire deep meaning for the adult through the steady accretion of sentiment over the years. Every piece of heirloom furniture, or even a stain on the wall, tells a story” (33). It is the small

things that happen in a place which give it meaning to us as individuals. This is why the prairies mean so much to me.

I call on my past experiences of place to comfort myself through this time of difficult transition, to remind myself of who I've been and where I've come from, and to remember that things will not always be like this (for better or worse). In reference to place, photographs are a point of departure, both old family photographs, such as those used in *Double Bind* (fig. 8), and candid unedited photographs that attempt to capture and remember things as they were and are, such as



the older photos in the house lightboxes and the more recent *Real Moment Selfies* (fig. 9). I also use idealized landscape images, such as those in *Farm House* (fig. 3) to represent the way I feel about the prairies now—a place that it is always happy and sunny, which of course, is not true, but nostalgia eclipses the truth when we're far from home.

(fig. 8) Jennifer Akkermans, *Double Bind*, 2015, lightbox in suitcase, 15" x 17" x 14" (Open), 6" 17" x 12" (Closed).



(fig. 9) Jennifer Akkermans, *Loneliness*, 2014, lightbox, 31" x 41" x 7".

Cultural signifiers, such as the customs of a particular place, resonate to create a sense of familiarity. We feel most at home when those around us approach the world in similar ways—people who have similar beliefs, histories, habits, ways of speaking, political views, etc. I use specific cultural symbols within my work to connect myself to these communities. Cuckoo clocks are often associated with Dutch culture, and I associate them with my father’s family in particular. My grandmother had a collection of clocks, and if I happened to call her at the right time, I could hear the comforting cacophony of chiming clocks in the background. There are other symbols in the exhibition that reference place, movement, culture, and feelings, although you might have to be “in the know” to identify some of them—the Burmis Tree, the maple leaf, birds and nests, barns, fences, windmills, tulips, teacups, gravestones, patchwork quilts,

suitcases, and mirrors. As much as symbols, my collection of objects is important in the process of building my new identity and home. They provide continuity from one time to another. They ground me by way of the memories and experiences I have attached to them, personal souvenirs of time and space, places to which I will never return. They are also evidence of attempts to build myself new memories and associations. Within my studio (fig. 10) I collect and rearrange my objects in order to organize my thoughts and to keep things visible, gestures that ward off forgetfulness.



(fig. 10) Jennifer Akkermans, video still from *Sneak Peek*, depicting artist in studio, 80 min loop.

My memories of home are very much tied to place. “Being attached to a place means allowing memories to be held by that place. In turn, being held by a place means being able to return to that place through its role as a reserve of memories” (Trigg 9). The two are inseparable. Even though home is a feeling, it is impossible to separate the association of it from place.

Place is sensed through the body, which is dependent on time, experience and memory. Familiar physical landscape puts us at ease and provides a sense of belonging. Rebecca Solnit writes:

I talked about places, about the ways that we often talk about love of place, by which we mean our love for places, but seldom of how the places love us back, of what they give us. They give us continuity, something to return to, and offer a familiarity that allows some portion of our lives to remain connected and coherent (30).

Within the walls of my studio there is this sense of place and home, this sense of belonging, which has become evident through the accumulation of time spent, the personalization of the space (intentional and unintentional), and by occupying the space not only as an artist, but as a human being. And although the studio functions as evidence in this two-year, self-imposed case study, it also holds my past—the things I have held on to, valued, and lost.

Yi-Fu Tuan talks about what it means to be lost, stating that to be lost is to lose awareness of the spatial relationships and orientation of your body with external reference points (36). To be lost is to not know where and how you are in the world. This is particularly relevant when applied to the psychological and emotional reference points of home. In my case, not only has my sense of physical geography been changed in moving across Canada, but the severity of the change has challenged my perception of my place in the world. I have had to reorient myself in relation to Ontario's physical geography, and renegotiate my now long distance relationships with family and friends. I have had to find a new place and way of being. It has been (and still is, sometimes) disorienting and uncomfortable, but I have made new friends here, people who have helped me orient myself within this new place. Although the customs in Ontario are not drastically different, even the smallest differences can cause distress and have taken some adjustment on my part (such as figuring out how to handle milk in a bag), and so I have had to rearrange myself in order to fit into this new cultural landscape.

I have been lucky in that my journey has been within the same country and that I was moving into an established community. My grandparents, however, had a much greater challenge. They immigrated to Canada from Holland after WWII, leaving all of their friends and family behind.

They had to adjust to a new country, new landscape, new language, new customs, and a new way of living.

When we leave somewhere and move on, our old lives are relegated to memory. And in this respect we can never go home. We reminisce about what we no longer have, or what is gone from our lives. “Memory presents itself, at least initially, as an appearance of what is temporally past, thus, absent” (Trigg 47). Rachel Whiteread’s *House* (fig. 11) speaks of absence and what is missing (Warde-Aldam). *House* is a three story concrete block, made from the inside of a house located in East London. After casting the interior shell, the house’s building materials were then peeled away. While made from a house and referencing a house, it is not a house, but a distinct sculptural form that gives material presence to absence. The work touches on temporality—not only the house it venerated, but also the sculpture’s own impermanence. It is an echo of what came before. It also points to the inevitability of change and the passing of time. The work itself



(fig. 11) Rachel Whiteread, *House*, 1993. Photo by Sue Omerod. <http://www.apollo-magazine.com/house/>

had a very short life span—a mere 80 days—and so now could be considered a memory of a memory. Like *House*, *You Can Never Go Home* is a memorial or documentation of a particular time and place—it highlights the bitter-sweetness of my short quest to find home in Waterloo, a journey that will soon be over.

Nostalgia is something that erupts when we feel dissatisfied with the present situation. Being nostalgic allows us to escape the current moment, and remember (or imagine) something that was different, or better than now. Often, we are nostalgic for home. The word “nostalgia” means homesickness, *nostos* meaning “return home”, and *algia* meaning “pain/longing” (Wilson 21). In times of uncertainty or personal growth, we use nostalgia to comfort ourselves, by remembering

who we were and where we come from. “Nostalgic recollections give us the opportunity to observe and juxtapose past and present identity” (Wilson 35). Frequent nostalgia can indicate feelings of uneasiness, unsettledness or dissatisfaction. But nostalgia is never the current reality—it encourages us to dwell in the past, to not be in the present or look to the future. “In general, we may say that whenever a person feels that the world is changing too rapidly, his characteristic response is to evoke an idealized and stable past” (Tuan 188). When we look back with nostalgia, we romanticize our pasts. We focus on the good things, ignoring the not so good things. We create our own mythologies of place and time. We exaggerate. The days were nicer then, the land flatter, the cold colder. There were no imperfections and our imaginations inform these mythologies. Dylan Trigg explains this in *Memory of Place* stating that “(m)ythos flourish in the absence of precise knowledge” (85). In *You Can Never Go Home* the (remembered) imagery and the structural forms are idealized, polished, and a little shallow; more attention is paid to the surface, because that’s what I remember. I don’t remember the individual details of things, only that the barn was red, but not where the paint was peeling, or the number of windows it had.

Graeme Patterson also works with the mythology of remembered places and times. His work is a combination of imagination, memory and play. Patterson’s dioramas and animations invite us into his dream world—a world fabricated from Patterson’s recollections, experiences, and dreams. Sometimes there’s little distinction between fiction and reality. In particular, Patterson’s series, *Woodrow*, romanticizes the prairies. Comprised of models of derelict buildings containing crazy characters, stories and animations, *Woodrow* reimagines the artist’s childhood on the prairies. Staged within these spaces are miniature video screens that tell stories. For example, *The Barn* (fig. 12) plays a short stop motion animation entitled *Romancing the Farm*, where various farm animals loiter and redneck activities (such as shooting cans off of a fence) take place. My work also romanticizes the prairies—in the way that the prairies are now the stuff of dreams and memories for me, inaccessible from here and now. Patterson’s work uses the diorama to set up an imaginary world, and uses humour to invites us in. My work also uses humour in a similar attempt to invite the audience into my world, although my world is much more solitary, something akin to looking inside my head.



(fig. 12) Graeme Patterson, *The Barn*, 2007, mixed media, 7' x 3' x 6'.
<http://www.graemepatterson.com/THE%20BARN.htm>

Within my miniatures, the house form serves as an idealized façade, a semi-traversable barrier between interior and exterior. It is a simplified, symbolic version (i.e. a square topped with a triangle). It is the trope of what we might think a house to be. These houses are physical representations and metaphors of my psychological landscape. As such, the outsides are familiar; for example there are doors, windows and a stucco-like finish. The insides however illustrate interiority—a psychological portrait of who I am and how I'm coping. For example, one house contains a video where I am lying in bed, reading *On Longing*. In this action, I could be attempting to find a solution to address my own longing. In *On Longing*, Susan Stewart writes about miniatures, particularly dollhouses, as metaphors for interiority.

A house within a house, the dollhouse not only presents the house's articulation of the tension between inner and outer spheres, of exteriority and interiority—it also represents the tension between two modes of interiority. Occupying space within an enclosed space, the dollhouse's aptest analogy is the locket or the secret recesses of the heart: center within center, within within within (61).

In addition to dollhouses, portions of the work also resemble birdhouses. Birdhouses are shelters, structures that humans make and install to provide birds a place to rest, somewhere to protect themselves from the weather. By making structures that resemble birdhouses, I am attempting to provide myself places to rest. Birds symbolize the human soul, angels, and higher states of being (Circlot 26), and by making restful places, I am trying to soothe my soul. Birds also represent knowledge, which, as they are not human, I interpret as intuition. (Intuition is important in my approach to my journaling practice. Following my intuition without judgement allows me to get at feelings and ideas that my consciousness doesn't want to acknowledge.) The small birds that populate the installation signify our smallness in the world, our freedom, our fragility as human souls. Mirrors are used as false openings that reference the locations of windows and doors. This implicates the viewer as both intruder and invited guest. It also creates a sense of permeability to the spaces inside. It is an illusion, however, welcoming in its invitation, but threatening in its solidness. It is a trap, as, bird or human, you can never actually go in. Even the houses that incorporate real openings are false, as the insides are only constructed fabrications, not actual spaces meant to inhabit.



(fig. 13) Jennifer Akkermans, *Stuck Inside*, 2015, MDF, polyfilla, plexiglas, paint, sandpaper, digital photo frame. 17" x 15" x 5".

Houses are symbolic of the human psyche and the content of my interiors are often metaphors for deeper things such as my approaches to personal struggles. This parallel relationship of the house to the body (Stewart's notion of within within within) is articulated further through form and language, for example, in expressions like the hands and face of a clock, or the eyes as windows to the soul. In one work, I play with this expression, filling the two upper windows of one of my houses with a close-up of my eyes (fig. 13). At this point the relationship of house to body

collapses, as I fully embody the interior of the house to the point that I no longer fit. It is uncomfortable, and I desire to exist outside of the house, yet, I cannot.

Houses are not only symbolic of the human psyche as a whole, but also individual aspects, including wisdom, tradition and femininity (Circlot 153). Bachelard writes, "Through its light alone, the house becomes human" (35). Light symbolizes consciousness, warmth and belonging. In my work, I use light to represent my own consciousness, as well as to reference the idealism of advertising, where lightboxes are often used. The backlit images also serve as beacons that let others know that I am here. The lit images and videos occupying the interiors of my houses are real moments where I let down my guard. They are moments of vulnerability. For example, in

one image, the viewer takes the place of the television as I mindlessly stare and eat popcorn. By letting the viewer look in (even in a semi self-preserved way, by use of windows and peepholes), I hope to find someone who feels similarly, to open up the possibility of connection, to negate feeling alone.



(fig. 14) Sarah Anne Johnson, *Laundry Room*, 2009, cibachromatic print, from the *House on Fire* series. http://www.bulgergallery.com/dynamic/fr_artwork_display.asp?ArtworkID=3581&Body=House%20on%20Fire

In her series, *House on Fire*, Sarah Anne Johnson uses the dollhouse form to explore the personal narrative of her grandmother's experience in a mental institution. The series includes a hair-raising selection of chromogenic prints shot in a dollhouse. Everything is slightly off and anxiety inducing. In the *Laundry Room* (fig. 14), for example, the room has surpassed its owner's ability to keep control of its cleanliness—the metal sink and washing machine are rusted, the walls flaking, and something ominous is growing rampant or decaying, taking over the room. The owner has lost control to the room itself. While different in execution to mine, Johnson's autobiographical work deals with similar themes, where she analyzes her family's emotional reactions to the situations of their lives. I approach my work as I do my journals—

from a first person perspective, looking at my own experience from my specific point of view (which makes my response much more emotional and subjective), whereas Johnson can be more objective because she tells her family's story in the third person.

This sense of wanting to take control also plays out in my work through repetitive actions or ongoing activities, however, my efforts are often futile. For example, in the video within *A Stitch in Time* (fig. 4), I repeatedly float a blanket over the bed, attempting to get it to land as it should. I repeat the action time after time, and exhaust myself in the process. Both the repetitive act and the use of the video loop become a rhythm of futility, marking my unsuccessful efforts. And in this way, the failure becomes comforting, almost normal.

Miniaturized, the dollhouse also implies a desire for control. Stewart states, "Worlds of inversion, of contamination and crudeness, are controlled within the dollhouse by an absolute manipulation and control of the boundaries of time and space" (63). Through actions like making a bed or eating popcorn, I try to control a specific moment in time. It is an attempt to manage and make sense of a world in which I actually have very little control. I adhere to the ways that I think things *should be* done, even though they may not be working for me, even though I may have better luck doing them differently. But I am human, I am stubborn, and I am sticking to what I think I know. But really, I need to learn to be flexible. I need to change my strategy in my attempt to make this place a home. How do you make somewhere a home? I won't profess to have figured that out, but I have an idea.

Time is the only real way to make somewhere new a home. As time passes, and as things become more familiar and predictable, the uneasiness dissipates. Being an active part of the community and getting out to explore the world helps. The building and maintenance of old and new relationships, daily routines and structures create a sense of rhythm and purpose. It has to do with the accumulation of little things over time. For me, it is an ongoing process, always under construction.

In *You Can Never Go Home*, I manipulate time in numerous ways. I speed things up and slow things down to emphasize certain moments, feelings and perceptions. I use the rhythm of

repeated actions to create a sense of anxiety, stubbornness, perseverance, and/or futility. In the still images, I stop or hold time. The mechanics of my clocks are always out of sync—the face moves instead of the hands, the cuckoo sounds are imprecise and arbitrary, or the pendulum’s swing is random, sporadic and jittery. With these objects, there is no sense of time and rhythm. The object is neither predictable nor stable, and so it is uneasy. This disruption of our normal sense of time speaks to a sense of anxiety and of being on high alert.

Time within memory is not linear. It appears as instances, moments, and tableaux, which I attempt to immortalize in my work. Both the dollhouse form and the photograph present a tableau (a singular scene within a shallow space), not a narrative with a distinct beginning, middle and end. However, the photograph as tableaux does imply action outside of the frame, something that we cannot see, but know is there. This sense of something happening in the space beyond also occurs in the dollhouse. Stewart writes “the miniature is a world of arrested time; its stillness emphasizes the activity that is outside it’s borders” (67). The work I make hopefully allows others to identify similar moments in their own experiences, creating parallels between their worlds and mine.

David Hoffos makes miniatures that tell stories of another kind. Using the domestic as a stage, he creates mysterious worlds, incorporating windows, peepholes and secret spaces to ignite our imaginations. Hoffos presents the world as metaphor for our psyches, using characters or scenes that seem deeper than what we can ascertain from their situations on first look. For instance, Hoffos uses repetitive actions to give an impression of unresolvedness, such the action of the characters pacing the ground in *Scenes from the House Dream* (fig. 15). When speaking about this work, Hoffos acknowledges that he is interested in what might be happening outside of the frame, scene or screen edges, as well as the edges of time (National Gallery of Canada). The format of the miniature supports this, as articulated by Susan Stewart’s “world of arrested time” (67). Hoffos’ approach to making work is similar to mine as he implies that his artwork often reflects his internal states and challenges (Hoffos has battled with anxiety, depression and Tourette’s), states of mental health that fuel his practice (National Gallery of Canada). While Hoffos’ work examines his personal demons and fears, mine is more about longing, place and time.



(fig. 15) David Hoffos, *Scenes From the House Dream: Airstream*, 2007.
http://davidhoffos.com/?page_id=10

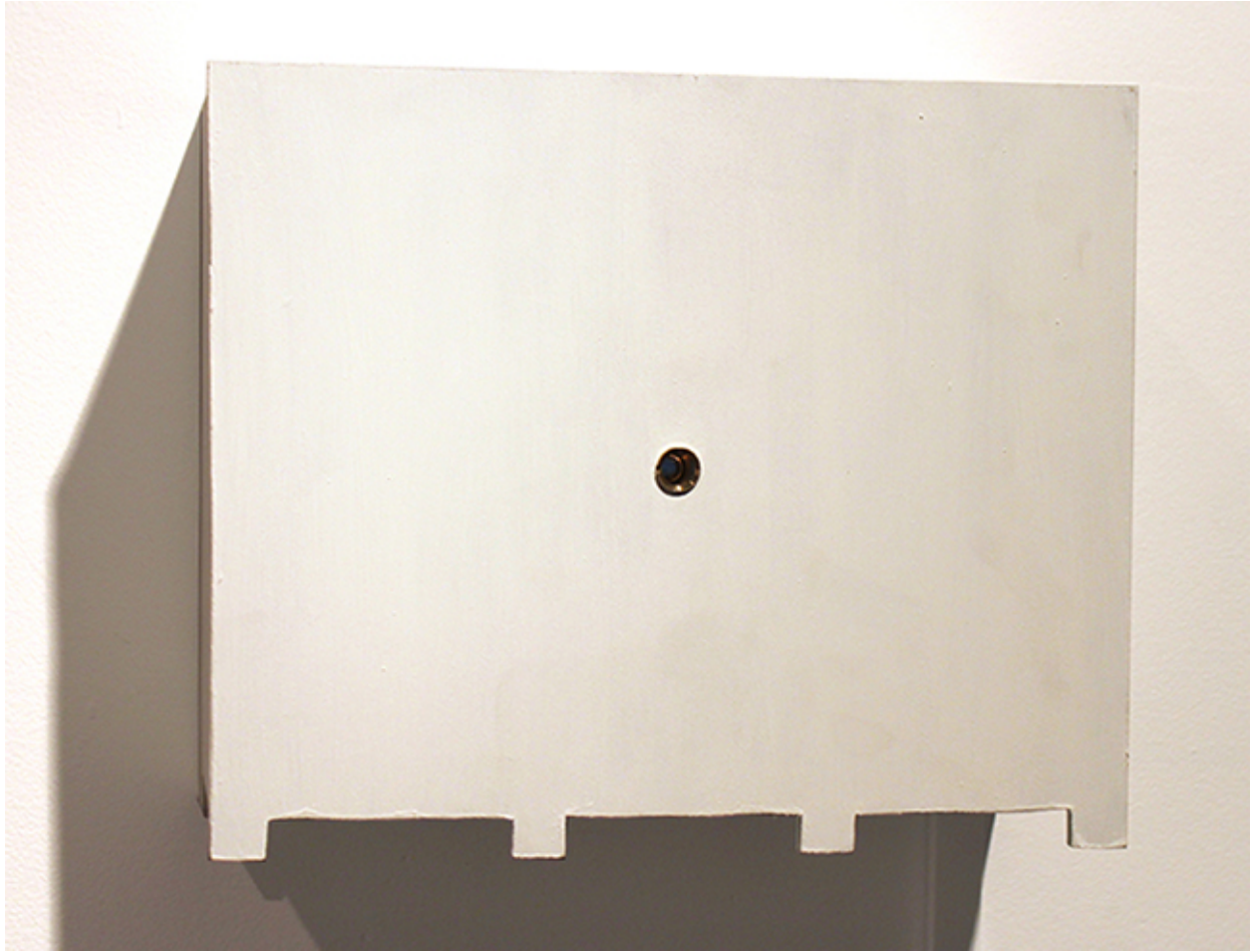
The souvenirs and objects on display (for example, a little wooden figurine of a man looking sideways, a robotic rabbit, and a roll of lace) signify memories collected over the course of my life, which is itself a collection of time as experienced. “Attachment to things and veneration of the past often go together,” according to Tuan (188). As a coping mechanism, we sometimes embed our ideas of home into objects we can take with us (Ilyin), using those objects as stand ins for people, places, and belonging. My objects represent the places I’ve been, the people I’ve known, and the specific experiences that make me who I am. The multitude of houses, like the pages of my journals (themselves a collection of people, places and experiences), reflect an

accumulation of effort and time spent, which is echoed in the handmade quality and care put into building them.

But my work is always under construction. The sculptures are imperfect in their unfinishedness and the insides sometimes show their guts (e.g. foam, wires, hardware and half-painted walls). Some of the doors aren't there and the roofs are unpainted or only half-shingled. Like my challenge to make myself at home here, there are hiccups, roadblocks, and nothing is ever at rest. There is more to be done, some loose end to be tied up, or something not quite right. The individual works attempt to recreate this feeling of home that I am looking for, but in some way, they all miss the mark. As such, the installation can be seen as a series of failed attempts at making a house a home—my transitional process of abandonment, half-finishedness, and completion. It is not about being perfect, but about being. It is about resilience, obsession, and a bit of desperation.

In this process I get caught up in the details of things as a way to comfort myself. Bachelard writes that “patience brings peace to one’s fingers” (159). By focusing on the details, I don’t have to look at the big picture, which can be overwhelming and anxiety inducing. I focus on the details to avoid the panic. Art is a way that I can study myself, collect my feelings, comfort myself and hopefully find my place in the world. I make autobiographical work because I am the subject that I know best. The work addresses the anxieties of displacement and the steady resolve to find my way to a new home.

Recently, I have come to the realization that my studio has become my home. By the act of spending time in the space, building relationships with people as well as objects, I have inadvertently built myself a home here at the university. In the exhibition, I acknowledge this in two ways—through the resemblance of the installation to my studio, and through the inclusion (and separation) of *Sneak Peek* (fig. 16), a small model of my studio, which is mounted alone on the wall opposite the main wall. The model is quite small, only 10” x 12” x 6”, a completely white box, save for a singular peephole. Looking through the peephole invites the viewer into another world—the crazy, messy, comforting chaos of my studio. The video inside (fig. 10) shows me working, making the very artworks within the exhibition. Since I have been here, my



(fig. 16) Jennifer Akkermans, *Sneak Peek*, 2015, MDF, peephole, digital photo frame, 10” x 12” x 6”.

studio has been more of a home to me than anywhere else. It is through the passing of time that makes somewhere a home—here, this is evident in the multitude, arrangement and rearrangement of the objects, not only the things I’ve built, but the tools, materials, samples, mementos and personal objects (including mundane things such as instant coffee and a toothbrush) that I’ve collected, curated and arranged in my space.

The Fluxus attitude is representative of the way I approach making art. Fluxus involves an “unpretentious directness” that challenges the preconceptions of fine art (Smith 3). In my work, I focus on small every day moments. I collect objects, images, and experiences, in order to make memories that will make this place a home. I build objects a little bit at a time, not unlike how

our lives are built. I work intuitively and emotionally, as a way to help me understand what is happening in my life. I try to maintain a sense of playfulness and humour, even through the frustration. I perform repetitive, mundane actions in an attempt to speed up the psychological processes that are underway. I play with the concept of time, metaphorically stopping it, looping it, slowing it down and speeding it up, presenting it as it appears to me throughout this process (i.e. bad days seem to last forever and good days whiz by). I attempt to implicate the viewer by encouraging them to interact with the work, forcing them to look through windows and peepholes. I use humour and contradiction to illustrate the frustrations. Like the Fluxus spirit, the process is almost more important than the finished work. The act of doing is the work, and also my life. It is one and the same.



(fig. 17) Jennifer Akkermans, *You Can Never Go Home* (installation shot), 2016, mixed media, 12' x 24'.

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