

An Interior
An exhibition of paintings
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.

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Abstract

The work *An Interior* is a painted room. It grew from the proposition, ‘What if I painted wallpaper?’ This proposition is related to my ongoing interest in the psychological and social functions of decor and labour spent decorating. Some questions I ask are: How do people use the spaces of their homes and the stuff they keep in them to build and maintain their relationships to themselves and others? And, a longstanding puzzle in contemporary practice, what is the relationship between decor and art, especially with regard to gender? The paintings in *An Interior* are an investigation of these questions through the lens of my body and experiences. This document expands on that investigation in three sections. The introductory section is a formal discussion of the work. The second section provides an overview of the complex relationship between the contemporary home, its decor, and its inhabitants which compelled the work *An Interior*, and the last discusses specificities of my painting practice and process as a mode for understanding this relationship.

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Table of Contents

List of Images	vi
An Interior	
Form and Influences	1
The Contemporary Home, Its Decor and Its Inhabitants	16
Painting: Practice and Process	24
Bibliography	29

List of Images

1. *An Interior* installation shot. Oil on canvas, wooden mouldings, temporary walls. 2
University of Waterloo Art Gallery, 2017. Installation approx. 8' x 20' x 14'.
2. *An Interior* installation shot. Oil on canvas, wooden mouldings, temporary walls. 2
University of Waterloo Art Gallery, 2017. Installation approx. 8' x 20' x 14'.
3. *An Interior* installation shot. Oil on canvas, wooden mouldings, temporary walls. 3
University of Waterloo Art Gallery, 2017. Installation approx. 8' x 20' x 14'.
4. *An Interior* detail. Oil on canvas. 2017. 4
5. *An Interior* detail. Oil on canvas. 2017. 5
6. *An Interior* margin details. Oil on canvas. 2017. Each 12" x 29". 6
7. Stockholder, Jessica. *Catcher's Hollow*. 1993. Witte de Withe, Rotterdam. *Jessica Stockholder*, <http://jessicastockholder.info/projects/art/catchers-hollow/>. Accessed 28 Feb. 2017. 9
8. Wagschal, Marion. *Artists with Children*. 1988. Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal. 11
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts,
<https://www.mbam.qc.ca/en/exhibitions/past/marion-wagschal/>. Accessed 28 Feb. 2017.

9. Waterston, Darren. *Filthy Lucre*. 2013-14. MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts. Photo: Amber Grey. *Darren Waterston*, <http://darrenwaterston.com/artwork/filthy-lucre/#>. Accessed 28 Feb. 2017. 13
10. Tintoretto. *Ecce Homo*. 1566-67. Scuola di San Rocco, Venice. *ARTstor*, http://library.artstor.org/library/#3|cluster|SCALA_ARCHIVES_1039779723||Ecce20Homo||. Accessed 28 Feb. 2017. 15
11. New York drawing room, photographed 1894. Anne Massey, *Interior Design of the 20th Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990) Print. 21

Form and Influences

An Interior is an exhibition of representational oil paintings on unstretched canvas, installed to completely cover a three-sided space created by temporary walls. They are framed by decorative mouldings top, bottom, and between the canvas panels, giving the effect of a painted room.

The walls are covered by alternating large and narrow painted panels. The imagery is domestic and intimate. The large panels' structure is based on a repeating, geometric quilt pattern, and each contains one large central 'figure'. This is either my body or its substitute—a mass of flowers, a heap of clothing. Each narrow panel is a column of three smaller paintings. The images in these margins are more varied, each depicting something revealed, something concealed, or something unexpectedly absent. There are still-lives of solitary objects: a pair of boxed pantyhose, the guts of a halved miniature pumpkin, an empty photo frame. There are strange scenes: an empty chair left outside in the dark, another wearing a lacy blouse and heels. None of the objects are particularly special looking. They appear to be old-fashioned, out-of-date, or cheap consumer goods. An energetic figure wearing only a bed sheet, like a child's Halloween ghost costume, reappears in each margin as a gesturing guide. Floral patterns are repeated throughout. Colours are harmonious, with desaturated purples, peaches, blues and beiges dominating, punctuated by a repeating grid of metallic gold and black squares. Brushwork is vigorous. Paint alternates between areas of thin application and thick, heavily worked knots in areas of emphasis, like a hand or a well-lit fold of cloth. Surfaces are sensual. The overall effect is of being enfolded in a complex and busy patterned space, on the scale of a room in a house.



Fig. 1. *An Interior* installation.



Fig . 2. *An Interior* installation.



Fig . 3. *An Interior* installation.



Fig . 4. *An Interior* detail.



Fig . 5. *An Interior* detail.



Fig . 6 . *An Interior* margin details.

An Interior could be described as an installation. The contemporary impulse to installation, works of art which assert authority over the entire contents and effect of a specific, contained space, can be traced to the 1960's, with artists like Alan Kaprow, Arman, and Lucio Fontana (Bishop 429-30). Institutions took up the flag in the late sixties and early seventies, with exhibitions like *Spaces* (1970) and the *Project Rooms* series (1971) at the Museum of Modern Art paving the way for installation's mainstream legitimization and prominence (Bishop 1). Miwon Kwon characterizes those new site-specific practices as motivated by “aspiration to exceed the limitations of traditional media, like painting and sculpture, as well as their institutional setting; the epistemological challenge to relocate meaning from within the art object to the contingencies of its context; the radical restructuring of the subject from an old Cartesian model to a phenomenological one of lived bodily experience; and the self-conscious desire to resist the forces of the capitalist market economy, which circulates art works as transportable and exchangeable commodity goods”¹ (Kwon 86). By contrast, David Joselit writes of painting, “As the most collectible type of art, which combines maximum prestige with maximum convenience of display (both for private and institutional collectors), painting is the medium most frequently condemned for its intimate relationship to commodification” (Joselit, 132). It derives its aesthetic authority from its long history of commission and collection by those in positions of power.

In response, Joselit calls for painters to be aware of the mechanisms which support the interpretation and experience of paintings; not dissimilar to Kwon's assessment of site-specific works' intent to “relocate meaning from within the art object to the contingencies of its context”. “Certainly, painting has always belonged to networks of distribution and exhibition, but [artist Martin]

¹- Though Kwon continues in this article to complicate these assumptions about how site-specific practice functions in a contemporary context, especially in relation to the global fluidity of capital and, increasingly, artists, I think it is still relevant to consider these as motivating considerations for artists working in site-specific installation.

Kippenberger claims something more: that, by the early 1990s, an individual painting should explicitly visualize such networks” (Joselit, 125). In my opinion, how or whether to do this is one of today's painter's most troubling puzzles, and it boils down to what to do with one's awareness of the conventions of Western painting. In *An Interior* I turn for solutions in part to artists like Jessica Stockholder and Katharina Grosse, who stretch some of the techniques and problems of painting into work that could be described as installation.

Stockholder's sprawling, colourful works, which she insists on as sculpture rather than installation, engage with and are formed by the qualities of preexisting architectural spaces where they exist (“Figure-Ground Relations” 1-2). She started her practice as a painter, and in her work I recognize the language of painting— the application of flat(ish) planes of colour to surfaces, though these surfaces have become unruly and spacial. The painting expands in such a way as to draw attention to the qualities of three-dimensional space, as well as the illusory or flat space that is painting's usual purview. Writing about her work *Catcher's Hollow*, (fig. 1) Stockholder emphasizes complex relationships between what is figure and what is ground, which shift as the viewer moves through the space (*Swiss Cheese Field* 1-3). It is partially in this sense that I wanted *An Interior* to be a room, painting expanded into a space in which a viewer moves and the awareness of the body in relation to different images and surfaces shifts and surprises; painting which engulfs.



Fig. 7. Stockholder, Jessica. *Catcher's Hollow*. 1993. Witte de Withe, Rotterdam.

An Interior, however, is not intended to prompt a contemplation of painting in generic space. It references a specific space, a domestic space. The scale of the room, the mundane objects and textiles depicted, and the division of images by mouldings and painted cartouches imply a decor in a modest home. But aspects of the paintings also imply the conventions of historical figurative paintings: the draped nude, a concern with rendering the illusion of volume by manipulating tone, the triptych or folding altarpiece in the Christian tradition.

I love paintings, all kinds. The ones I like best depict the figure. The depicted body seduces; it's a thrill to be allowed to look at each other. But the pull of this seduction is fertile ground for a subtle range of meanings. Of her figurative practice, painter Marion Wagschal says, "Bodies are my water lilies, my gardens of earthly delights and fears. The body is a kind of battlefield where struggles for survival – political, physical, environmental, psychological – are waged. The body is a map of a life

lived" (Mathieson). I admire Wagschal's empathetic employment of the grotesque—refusal to shy away from the awkward postures or grittiest textures of the unidealized body and matter-of-fact approach to depictions of interpersonal relationships—which eschews sentimentality without jettisoning tenderness. I admire the attention to the craft of painting as well. Her paintings achieve the knife's edge where paint becomes partially flesh, while retaining, for the viewer, an acute sense of its identity as paint containing a record of a painter's gesture. Wagschal also employs motifs and strategies from historical figure painting. A text accompanying her recent retrospective states she “has been developing a type of realism that draws on various sources, from the Middle Ages to the contemporary era, with a strong penchant for the nineteenth-century Romantic painters. She invokes Corot, Delacroix, Géricault, Goya and Manet, updating their pictorial tradition and questioning her own place as a painter within a predominantly male history of art” (Montreal Museum of Fine Arts). She conceptualizes her engagement with history as making herself an 'irritant' to it (Mathieson).



Fig. 8. Wagschal, Marion. *Artists with Children*. 1988.

Darren Waterston's 2013 work *Filthy Lucre* combines this impulse to irritate a beloved history one finds troubling with the expansion of painting into immersive space. *Filthy Lucre* is a re-imagining of Whistler's *Peacock Room* (1876-77), his decor for the dining room of wealthy shipowner Frederick R. Leyland. Whistler's room is a sumptuous painted space, meant to display Leyland's ceramic collection, but its creation was fraught with conflict between artist and patron over creative control and remuneration. One of the room's most prominent murals, of two peacocks fighting, was reportedly painted in revenge after a disagreement over how much Leyland should pay for uncommissioned work Whistler had done. Waterston's work reproduces the room as though some malevolent force had swept through (C-FILE). The floor is littered with broken ceramics, the elegant shelves are crooked and shattered, the painted textures suggest mouldering and decay. The two peacocks fighting in Whistler's painting literally disembowel each other in Waterston's. *Filthy Lucre* manifests the history of tension between patron and artist, present but invisible in the *Peacock Room*, which persists in the relationship between market and contemporary artist. In an interview Waterston says, "I had been thinking of all the great painted rooms in art history. As a painter, how can I create a work of art that feels like a painting, that you are walking into a painted space? I thought, "Oh, there's the Peacock Room." [...] The more I was studying about the particular time in which the room was made, as well as the advent of the art market and the dance between the artist and the patron, I thought, "This is my world." I mean, this is the contemporary art world" (Hurley).

The work is a critique, drawing a parallel between historical dynamics and current ones, and revealing unseen relationships in the production of art, then and now. But it is also an homage. The room is beautiful; the disembowelling peacocks are still decorative, finely painted and patterned in glowing gold. Waterston worked with craftspeople to create an immersive space to echo the original Peacock Room. "[During the construction] It was Susan Cross who said to me, "Darren, we're not

making a set here, this is not going to be seen from a distance. Every inch of this, not unlike the Peacock Room, is to be contemplated” (Hurley).



Fig. 9. Waterston, Darren. *Filthy Lucre*. 2013-14. MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts. Photo: Amber Grey.

I admire this work's ability to be both irritant and celebration. Part of the impetus for *An Interior* is my appreciation of Renaissance and Mannerist paintings that are made and shaped for specific interiors and installed directly onto the wall, often under mouldings (fig. 4). Because these works were painted for powerful patrons, by artists whose innovations became canonical, pointing out that they functioned a bit like very classy wallpaper seems ridiculous. But most paintings, throughout history, hung in spaces where the contemplation of art was not intended as the main activity. I love galleries, but I didn't encounter them until I was an adult. The first place I was aware of art was in the home. Pictures were things you hung in your house to make it nicer to live there, and they functioned as part

of the larger aesthetic project of making a place to live. The pictures in the houses where I grew up were not impressive examples of art by anyone's estimation, but I remember looking at them. The things they made me think and feel are deeply ingrained, perhaps more so than reactions to art I encountered later, in art school and galleries and museums, because I lived around them. With *An Interior*, I wanted to bring these things together: a love for the history and craft of painting, and the sense that the home and the uses of aesthetic objects within it are important and meaningful.



Fig. 10. Tintoretto. *Ecce Homo*. 1566-67. Scuola di San Rocco, Venice.

The Contemporary Home, Its Decor, and Its Inhabitants

In my childhood, the most important house belonged to my paternal grandmother. This house is in Saskatchewan, in the bushy corner between Manitoba and North Dakota, on a farm where my family has lived since the 1890's. Other people lived in the house, but it was always unconditionally my grandmother's house, and continued to be after her death.

My grandmother made things. She made the kinds of things farm wives of that era made: jam, clothes, gardens, quilts, knitted dishcloths, stained glass windows. Her domestic prowess is a small legend in my family, and the house is saturated with proof. Things she made are everywhere, as decoration and to be used by the house's occupants. The quilt kept you warm, like any other quilt, but the fact that she had created it made that warmth specific and special. I knew my grandmother as a blur of labour and productive energy.

The presence of my grandmother's labour in her house is overwhelming, and indeed my grandmother was an overwhelming woman. Part of the reason this house looms so large in my imagination is that family conflicts, the tensions between what each person needed or wanted from each other, come most into focus there. My grandmother, matriarch, was a catalyst, and because the house is imbued with her labour it is also imbued with what she wanted from all of us. And so being there is to confront that. As a child I watched the adults in my life interact in this space and tried to puzzle through what was happening. When I think about the house, I think about the quilts, and the television in a wooden box, and the bird feeders full of sunflower seeds and suet, and the wall of family photos, and the flowery sofa in the sun porch where my grandfather smoked. But I also think about growing up and trying to understand how people are complicated, and families are complicated. I think about my grandmother's death and its aftermath. Somehow the things, the space, is all of that to me. I would not know my family if I did not also know the house.

This narrative frames my personal landscape on the question of houses. How is it the material house and its contents might have such a profound effect on the immaterial stuff of self and psyche? Material anthropologist Daniel Miller has written widely on the subject. For him, the home is not an exteriorized manifestation of a person's personality or aspirations, nor exclusively a marker of class, cultural, or familial affiliation, but one term in a reciprocal relationship. The home and the inhabitants are part of a continuing process of accommodating; each changes and is changed by the other. The people create and change the home, decorate and maintain it according to their needs and the conventions of their community, but the act of living in the home also creates and alters the people (Miller, "Accommodating" 115).

In his discussion of how we might understand the relationship between people and things, Miller paraphrases Pierre Bourdieu's study of socialization in a Berber community called the Kabyle:

Amongst the Kabyle, a child soon came to take for granted the systematic order of the home interior. One side was dark because another was light. It was high because another was low. This had to be placed on the right side, that on the left. Furthermore, a child would also soon appreciate the same underlying order of things, discerned in the home interior, was also the underlying order of agricultural implements, or, for that matter, the order of kinship and marriage expectations. High against low, right against left, could apply as analogous in many different domains. A particular society elaborates its cultural practices through an underlying pattern which is manifested in a multitude of diverse forms. By learning to interact with a whole slew of different material cultures, an individual grows up assuming the norms of what we call culture. The child doesn't learn these things as a passive set of categories, but through everyday routines that lead to constant interactions with things, thereby providing for Bourdieu what he termed a theory of practice. (Miller, *Stuff* 53)

Here is the seed of understanding how things might be reciprocally related to people, that people and things might produce each other, rather than things being produced by people and functioning symbolically. Did the underlying logic of my grandmother's house serve to inculcate in my family the underlying logic of our society? Or, did the house produce the people as much as the people produced the house? I think it is a question worth considering.

Understanding how stuff frames and prompts behavior alters my understanding of the function of labour in the production of a home, particularly labour directed towards those things typically thought of as decorative. The project *An Interior* is, after all, a meditation on decor of the most mundane kind. Sensitivity to the ways stuff in the home serves, by the practice of living with it, to shape our understanding of the world allows me to feel less embarrassed about appearing frivolous or materialistic when I consider my attachments to stuff. It allows me permission to investigate this part of my experience I feel to be important but which, historically, has not typically been framed as such.

It's significant that my fascination with making a home is borne in my memories of my grandmother, and not my grandfather. I understand my grandmother's and my own labour in the production of a home partially in relation to our shared femininity and the expectations enfolded therein. In order to pick apart the specifics of that relationship, a historical perspective on women and their domestic material culture is useful. In her account of the relationship between femininity and design, *As Long As It's Pink*, historian Penny Sparke has much to say on the topic. Femininity has been tied to the idea of domestic space since the industrial revolution (Reed 35). The relationship between women and the creation of domesticity is ambivalent. The expectation that women labour at home has denied them access to other kinds of labour and social freedoms, as pointed out by many feminists, but women like my grandmother have also gained both personal satisfaction and social affirmation from their efforts within the domestic (Sparke 5-9). While domestic spaces and the objects within them are

important sites for the creation and maintenance of personal and group identity, the labour of producing and maintaining them is not typically monetarily compensated (Miller). According to Sparke, this labour has often been framed as frivolity, leisure, or, in some cases, a waste of effort and resources, and she provides an historical explanation of why this might be.

In nineteenth century England and America, new modes of work led to changes in the roles of men and women. Pre-industrial agricultural and craft labour was centred on the home and undertaken by the family unit; division of tasks by gender existed, but all family members laboured in or around the home (Sparke 21-22). With urbanization and relocation of labour to factories, work done for wages was separated from non-remunerated work done in the home. This separation was along gendered lines: work outside the home was conducted largely by men, and work inside the home largely by their wives (Sparke 21). That women ought not to work outside the home was an ideal the middle classes were most able to manifest, but the tasks of the home remained the sole responsibility of working class women as well (Sparke 19).

The physical separation of men and women's labour led to more polarized ideas about the characteristics of men and women and the development of increasingly separate, gendered ways of relating to the world (Sparke 4). The public world, with its values stemming from mass production and rationality, became the purview of masculinity. The private home and its tasks, associated with emotional care, family maintenance, and the production of comfort and beauty, were gendered feminine, and the values of Victorian female culture grew from the demands of these tasks (Sparke 21). In a rapidly changing world, the home was imagined as a bastion of traditional values on which society was built. Women's work, as creator and caretaker of the home, was to preserve these 'emotional' values that were viewed as necessarily absent from the public sphere (Sparke 26).

The home was a private retreat from the harsh outside world and was to soothe the frazzled nerves of the Victorian man, but it also needed to demonstrate the respectability and status of the

family. “The fluid nature of society at this time meant that many people were acquiring new middle-class identities and needed visible displays of their new status” (Sparke, 18). These two requirements, comfort and display, were reflected in the appearance of Victorian interiors. Draped fabrics and carpets, to soften edges and muffle sound, featured prominently. Pattern, colour, and surfaces for display proliferated. Ornaments, which drew on 18th century aristocratic aesthetics although they were largely mass-produced, demonstrated the discerning nature of the homemaker and the social status or aspirations of the family (Sparke 47). Women themselves were increasingly conflated with this domestic retreat, and were considered to 'naturally' possess characteristics suited to its production through the discriminating choice and arrangement of objects: the exercise of their feminine 'taste' (Sparke 23).



Fig. 11. New York drawing room, photographed 1894.

I can see the demands of comfort and display manifested in my grandmother's house as well. The sensory fullness of the Victorian drawing room (fig. 2), its exaggerated invitation to sit and enjoy oneself in comfort and luxury, is translated into my grandmother's home, albeit within the limited resources available to her. It is also a fullness *An Interior* invokes. Every inch of the wall is treated. Pattern is overwhelming, and there is little visual rest in the paintings. The flatness of their ground plane, parallel the surface of the wall, refuses an illusion of receding space. It is a confining sensuousness.

The expectation that women labour to produce a comfortable home persists in the present, and journalist Emily Matchar details its current iteration. What Matchar calls the 'New Domesticity' can be characterized as affluent young people's renewed interest in traditional, hands-on homemaking skills and crafts. She identifies urban homesteading and slow food movements, home craft and cookery blogs, and the increased popularity of highly involved parenting styles as indicative of this increased interest (Matchar 1-4). The roots the New Domesticity can be found in 1990's DIY and craftivist movements, and Matchar suggests the factors which have led to widespread adoption are:

- increased interest in self-sustenance as a reaction to globalized production of consumer goods
- increased individual concern with the impact of our economic system on the environment and human welfare
- decreased trust in the ability of governments and institutions to deal with these problems
- lack of workplaces with flexibility to facilitate child-rearing
- desire to remain emotionally connected to others in what is perceived as an alienating digital world
- desire for self-fulfilling labour and authenticity in a world perceived as inauthentic. (15-25)

Though an increasing number of men are participating in the New Domesticity, the majority involved remain women (Matchar 25). This is continuous with Victorian ideas about gender, and our

current moment, in which rapid changes in technological capacity have led to rapid changes in how people relate to work and home, might be seen as displaying social instability analogous with that created by the industrial revolution of the Victorian era. Perhaps we are experiencing the same kind of reaction, though in response to a different set of challenges: a refocusing on the home as a conservative bastion of values perceived as slipping away in an ever more digital world.

However, the understanding of home decor as an arena for the expression of self-identity, present in the New Domesticity's emphasis on self-fulfilling labour and authenticity, is a departure from the Victorian demand to demonstrate social status and respectable values. Sparke pinpoints this shift to 1950's North America, an era when the domestic was re-popularized as the heart of social values (and, incidentally, the era when my grandmother's house was born). In America, the desire to create stability in the wake of WWII, as well as new affluence, caused the home to again be seen as “a refuge from the moral anarchy of the marketplace” (Sparke 166). The era's focus on gender roles in the context of the domestic can also be read as a reversion to older notions of feminine domesticity in reaction to the upheaval in gender dynamics created by the wartime necessity that women work in traditionally masculine settings (Sparke 170). However, the leveling of class differences caused by the disappearance of domestic servants and availability of labour-saving machines, as well as the relocation of families to new, isolating suburbs, meant that 1950's women lacked “the cohesive social, political, and religious framework of their [Victorian] predecessors” (Sparke 172). Exercise of taste in the home became an increasingly private affair, aimed less at affiliating oneself with aspects of larger society than at creating a sense of personal belonging. Sparke writes, “As the idea of 'display' was displaced by that of 'identity', activities such as arranging flowers became, increasingly, a means of self-identification for many women rather than a necessary social ritual” (79).

This understanding of domestic labour and space as expressing personal identity seems to underlie the current appeal of the New Domesticity, as well, possibly, as the propulsion I personally

feel to make paintings about domestic space and activities. The contemporary domestic seems a crucial arena for understanding the source of the ways we relate to each other and the world, and our specific relationships to objects can illuminate the ways each person positions themselves with regard to those social norms. As a contemporary woman, the domestic is especially important to me in the process of negotiating my relationship to historically embedded expectations of femininity. Insofar as the project is in some sense a self-portrait, depicting as it does my body in a domestic space, my relationship to the domestic becomes a cipher for understanding my relationship to my contemporary context.

Painting, Practice and Process

The relationship between people and home decor is only part of this project. I'm hesitant to draw divisions between form and content, but the previous sections have not addressed the process by which a painting is made. Painting is, after all, a very specific and arguably impractical way to produce an image/object. It is my argument that the kind of investigation into the experience of living with things and how it patterns personal and social being-in-the-world *An Interior* aspires to can be done effectively through the practice of painting in a way it could not by other means. This is because of the specific materiality of that practice, the qualities of which make it useful for investigations of the sensual, habitual, and unconscious.

Paintings, for me, start in a range of ways. An image is gleaned, and from there this partial picture begins a process of incremental pinning down, fleshing out. I'll start with quick sketches and then collect photographic images or still-life objects to help me in the painting process. These photographs are often of myself, and making them becomes an attempt to bodily materialize the immaterial idea. The limitations of my body and these kinds of performances are transferred to the painted image: if I wish for a painting of a woman putting on pantyhose I am limited by the appearance and physical ability of my own body to put on pantyhose, as well the ability of the camera as it can be controlled by one person acting as both photographer and model. These limitations lead to alterations in the composition of the painting unforeseen in either imagining or sketching it.

The most important place where compositional decisions are made and the image is 'pinned' is the process of painting itself. I think of this process as exploratory: a mark is made, assessed, and reacted to. In this way, the final accumulation is impossible to visualize beforehand, because it is the end result of a long series of small, sometimes impulsive, decisions about colour, paint texture, gesture, and pressure. Each of these is improvised in reaction to those preceding, within the loose structure set out by the initial imagined painting, sketch, and photographs. Here again I am limited by the ability and

unpredictability of my body, as well as the body of the paint. But I'm also guided by my body; its muscle-memory of previous marks and its pleasure in looking and the movements of painting. My intuition that the body, its limitations and its knowledge, is a primary factor in determining the outcome of a painting, even one which aspires to recognizably refer to something in the world, comes from my experience of the act of painting.

Historian James Elkins has written eloquently on practising painting, using the metaphor and language of alchemy, in his book *What Painting Is*. Elkin's argument for the use of alchemy to understand painting is that painters and alchemists relate to materials similarly. Alchemists were, among other things, searching for ways to categorize and understand the material world, but without the tools of modern science. They had nothing with which to reliably measure temperature, time, or any other factors which might make processes communicable or reproducible. Alchemists reacted to the changes in the qualities and behavior of their materials they could sense with their bodies, with the benefit only of personal experience and the intuition that comes with it (Elkins 28-30). Painters do this as well. Elkins points out that the things painters need to know about their materials in order to paint are not communicated well by language, nor are they related to a scientific understanding of their properties. "The world of visual art is filled with unknown materials. After a lifetime of experience, an artist comes to know a very small number of them intimately. [...] Long years spent in the studio can make a person into a treasury of nearly incommunicable knowledge about the powderiness of pastels, or the woody feel of different marbles, or the infinitesimally different iridescences of ceramic glazes. That kind of knowledge is very difficult to pass on, and it is certainly not expressed well in books on artist's techniques. [...] But it is a form of knowledge, and it is the same knowledge the alchemists had" (Elkins 22-23).

Elkins' description resonates with my own experience of what it is like to paint. The kind of knowledge that Elkins describes can be said to reside in the body, and is also, at least partially,

unconscious; each movement is not actively considered and decided upon. They flow instead from an intuition of what might work which functions on some plane before the experience of thoughtfulness and comes from accumulated experience. This isn't to say that paintings are unconsidered, of course it is necessary to periodically pause and consciously assess, but only that the act of painting involves sensory, as well as linguistic and rational decision making. It is here that I find the affinity between painting and the relationship to objects in the home. As Miller writes, that relationship and what it teaches are learned through routine, through continuous physical interactions with things in our homes on a daily basis. Knowledge of what domestic spaces mean is sensory and resides in the body. For Miller, this semi-conscious, or purely sensuous, relationship, learned through proximity and habit, is often overlooked as being knowledge in the traditional sense of the term.

Gilles Deleuze also elaborates on the connection between painting and the sensory, though principally from the perspective of the viewer rather than the artist. In his book on Francis Bacon, Deleuze presents a model of how subjects are porous through the mechanism of sensation. Sensation is a direct reaction to the world addressed to the flesh, and it happens between the body and the exterior world, rather than in one or the other alone. Deleuze writes that sensation is the determining factor in instinct, rather than thought (39-40). Because sensation requires the simultaneous presence of both subject and object, instinct, a vital part of how people behave and experience, comes into being through a blurring of those terms.

Deleuze argues that Bacon's work demonstrates a departure from both abstraction and figuration², through an emphasis on what Deleuze calls the Figure. The Figure is a representation which is the visual manifestation of sensation: Bacon paints the sensation itself, and his paintings are therefore perceived as sensation. This happens, for Deleuze, in Bacon's elimination from the painting of

²-understood as containing both illustrative and symbolic modes of representational painting

the scene or trauma which provokes horror in favour of the sensation of horror itself. He desires to “paint the scream more than the horror[...] as soon as there is horror, a story is reintroduced, and the scream is botched” (38). Bacon's interest is the force within the screamer which precipitates the scream, rather than the story by which we might understand why this force occurred. By making visible this unseen force, Bacon points us to sensation. For Deleuze, Bacon's picturing of sensation is a solution to a problem he identifies as common to all arts: that of making sensible insensible forces.

This explanation of how objects and subjects co-create through embodied sensation is akin to Miller's emphasis on the reciprocal relationship between people and stuff, in which both simultaneously define and are defined by each other. It is therefore reasonable to consider sensation the medium through which the relationship between home and inhabitant happens. By making visible the invisible force of sensation, Deleuze argues that Bacon is engaging in a sort of advocacy for life against death; an optimism in a vital energy or love of living. By revealing invisible forces which shape people's relationship to the world, he is making struggle possible. “When, like a wrestler, the visible body confronts the powers of the invisible, it gives them no other visibility than its own. It is within this visibility that the body actively struggles, affirming the possibility of triumphing, which was beyond its reach as long as these powers remained invisible, hidden in a spectacle that sapped our strength and diverted us” (Deleuze 62). In a similar but perhaps quieter mode, I hope that refocusing attention on the sensory relationship between (my female) body and the objects and space of a home might make visible how that invisible exchange shapes our understanding of ourselves and our world.

It is my opinion that the practice of painting specifically, though not exclusively, is a useful mode to make sensible the insensible partly because of the understanding of materials it necessitates. Painting, as I understand it, is rooted in a sensual knowledge of the properties of substances. It requires a careful consideration of the body in dialogue with materials, the subject in dialogue with objects, and as such produces things imbued with that knowledge, which can suggest a blurring of the boundaries

between those categories. It is my intention, in the project *An Interior*, to extend that understanding of the self in dialogue with material towards the relationship between people and the materials of the home. As a result I hope to produce a space which tells not a story about my body in a home, or about my grandmother's home specifically, though it starts there. Instead I'm trying to produce the sensual texture of the body in the home; make visible the invisible, embodied experience of living intimately amongst things and others. This experience, which is accumulated in practice, as Miller suggests, is what underlies the social and psychological functioning of decor and decorative labour.

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