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Letters Home

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LETTERS HOME

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Despite what the saying “home is where the heart is” would have us believe, defining and understanding the construct of home is a multifaceted process that is often obstructed by generalizations and simple characterizations. The M.F.A thesis exhibition *Letters Home*, is intent on challenging the construct of home. My research is founded on the idea that the arrangement of things in the process of homemaking gives meaning to our lives and serves as a form of personal identity. This thesis is designed to be a tool to enable individuals to consider their own idea of home, serving as a research aid.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my mother, who made me laugh when I wanted to cry.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For hundreds of years, the physical form and construct of the home has provided artists and other creative personalities a foundation for thought. A home is not just a structure or a psychological and emotional process of reflection and recollection. A home is a complex process and the thesis show *Letters Home* is dedicated to challenging the construct of home. The rooms and secrets of a home are housed there, taking on a layered history of every person, furnishing, object or invention that was once a resident of that space. In the arts, the home has been documented and exhibited as an extension of identity and personal ownership of a place, as opposed to the simple physical structure that is a house. Johannes Vermeer documented and glorified the daily actions of a middle-class home in *Delft* and *The Hauge*, while Paul Cezanne over a four-year period painted the landscape of Mont Sainte-Victoire surrounding his home in Provence numerous times. The concept of home in art is extensive, spanning from Grant Woods' iconic painting *American Gothic*, the works of Norman Rockwell, Mary Cassatt's many depictions of mothers and children in a domestic home setting as well as the presentation of a home as property in many of the works of Thomas Gainsborough. The home and domestic settings have been the location for much of art history, but what is a home? My research is founded on the idea that the arrangement of things in the process of homemaking gives meaning to our lives and serves as a form of personal identity. The act of homemaking is a process of sedimentation, meaning the accumulation of objects, physical homes, and the web of interactions between people, experiences, and the creation of recollections creates the foundational ideas of a home.

Home is a widely accepted term and is thought of as a dwelling composed of rooms and decorated by those who occupy the space. The identification of a home, the act of being at home, or being homeless has become a measure for our lives; given the effect of a home as a form of personal identity and worth, it is important to provide a consistent definition for my research. I compare the widely-accepted definition of home as being where an individual spends more than fifty percent of their time, against the notion that a home is where an individual willingly returns. Over a lifetime, a person lives in some form of a family home. Individuals have a hometown to identify where they were born, they have a home state/region and a nation of origin, all geographical systems of organization. These are all systems of organization that help in determining those who belong in a home, and those who do not. The research and work that appears in *Letters Home* is semi-autobiographical to my experiences and childhood; belonging to a transient military family the association of home to a place was never fostered in me. For this reason, part of my research is dedicated to the investigation of localism, regionalism and the effects these philosophies have on the home as a symbol. Additionally, in my own artistic practice, the accumulation of objects and the act of collection, ideas of a subconscious home, relationships, recollections, places, processes, homemaking philosophies, otherness and the home as a symbol are all crucial in challenging the construct of home and discussing why we project our own identities onto physical structures.

The exhibition *Letters Home* is dedicated to pondering the idea of what a home is and what makes up our idea of home. For being one of the most widely accepted terms in the world, it is important to understand it as a multifaceted symbol with varying

meanings unique to every individual. A home defies the physical parameters of a house. What is missed in a simple comparison is the way in which everyday practices that occur within a home make it emotionally special to those who inhabit it. Specifically, why do we, as a result, give meaning to our lives based on our association with home?

CHAPTER II

CHALLENGING THE CONCEPT OF HOME

The Sedimentation of Home

When thinking about the concept of home, sedimentation processes are not often readily associated. Sedimentation refers to the gradual process of settling and is referential to soil settling in stratification. However, it is exactly this process of settling that can be applied to the home, as every occurrence within a home is part of a larger process. Within earth sciences the use of the term sedimentation, particles and materials come together to form a solid barrier or mass. Similarly, the sedimentation of a home is a process of accumulating specific objects, physical homes, the interactions between people, experiences, and the creation of recollections that develop the foundational ideas of a home. These sedimentation processes have been undergoing changes and alterations for thousands of years, based on historical precedents and personal preferences. This can be viewed in the organizational structures of homes from the Neolithic village of Skara Brae and the similarities these early homes have to the formats of modern Western homes.

Located in the West Mainland parish of Sandwick, Scotland, are the architectural remains of Skara Brae, one of the most predominant prehistoric monuments in Europe. The ancient ruins are composed of eight dwellings occupied from 3180 BC to roughly 2500BC by Neolithic villagers. Of the eight dwellings, seven are assumed to be houses and all share remarkable similarities in organization of space and the furnishing within them. Stone and wooden furniture pieces including, dressers, seats, cupboards, and storage boxes were found in the dwellings, all made in the same way. Additionally,

archeologists found that in the seven home structures, beds and dressers were positioned and placed in the same spots. When entering the dwelling a dresser stood on the antipode wall in all of the homes with two beds flanking the doorway, one larger and one smaller. This positioning of beds aligns with the Hebridean custom of the time indicating that the husband slept in the larger bed with the wife in the smaller (Lloyd Laing). By any account, the population of Skara Brae was acclimated and settled into the Neolithic settlement. For reasons not fully known, the site of Skara Brae was abandoned by its occupants, leaving behind furnishings, beads, pots, and tools. However, in its modern existence, the site has provided historians and archeologists insight into early home structures. What is poignant is how little the basic tenants of a home have changed. The population of Skara Brae all possessed staple household objects that are still present today. Their homes were organized and differentiated by social standing and hierarchy and many of these traditions are enforced today. These traditions of organization echo the notion that the making and defining of a home is a process of sedimentation, meaning that the arrangement of things within a home over time, through the process of homemaking, gives meaning to the lives of those who lived there. The accumulation of cultural practices aids in defining how we craft our homes and allows us to feel connected to that physical place as an extension of ourselves. Skara Brae illustrates that homemaking as an act has very ancient origins, however, not all of these origins and traditions can be discussed within this paper. Instead, we can understand that these types of traditions influence the organization of a home, and how it is structured, relating to the process of sedimentation in a household. The

accumulation of objects, physical homes, and the interactions between people, experiences, and the fostering of recollections creates the foundational ideas of a home.

Homemaking Philosophies and Hybrid Traditions

When an individual starts to create their own home, how do they know how to go about it? This question may seem trivial and counterintuitive because the simplest answer is that it is intuitive. The process of creating a home is based on what feels true to that individual, and the attainment of this truth is based on a grooming process set in place, either knowingly or unknowingly, by a homemaking philosophy. This is a set standard of how a population goes about forming and defining a home. The most physical form of a homemaking philosophy is a dowry chest, otherwise known as a hope chest. Appearing almost universally in some manner as a historical fixture, a hope chest was a furniture piece used to contain items a young woman would need in anticipation of her married and home life. There are many kinds of hope chests and those implemented and used by the American settlers in the Western Expansion contained items such as linens, needle and embroidery work, woven fabric work, clothing, family heirlooms and other items deemed important for the young women's future. Notably, it was the young American settler women who crafted her own hope chest, filling it with items often of her own making and in the process practicing, utilizing and applying the knowledge she would need for her own homemaking process. Knowledge of the making and maintaining of a traditional settler home was passed down from one generation to another through compiling a hope chest. We can in many ways see the basic concept of a hope chest in a much less physical form in the modern-day presence of homemaking philosophies and the forging of hybrid traditions.

The hope chest contains an interesting notion, for while it was the female owner who compiled the contents of the chest, the furniture piece itself was constructed by a male figure in the household. So often when the idea of homemaking is brought to mind, it is the female within the home who is imagined taking an active, controlling role in the process. Archaically the domestic is considered women's work, and thus less than male work. However, it is important to acknowledge the modern connotation of a homemaking philosophy in the Western world, and the way it is used here. A homemaking philosophy is for all peoples who must take part in constructing the complex idea of a home and is not limited to a particular gender.

Despite the denouement of hope chests in America the idea and commercialization of homemaking over the last one-hundred-and-so years has been swept into a remarkably frenzied cultural cycle. While proper homemaking etiquette has been passed down through generations by word of mouth, the first books dedicated to how to go about homemaking surfaced in the United States in the mid-1800s. Most notably expressed in the work of Catherine Beecher and Fannie Farmer, the contents of such texts focused on informing women and young girls in the proper way of household management, placing emphasis on, sanitation, frugality, and nutrition (*The Craft of Daily Life: Homemaking* | Collection Development, Norton Holm, Sarah). These texts became the first attempt, excluding those of samplers, to formalize homemaking, creating a field of study for young women. These homemaking books appeared during a long period of economic fluctuation and provided practical information in order to expunge the need for servants. With the passing of the 1862 Morrill Act, land-grant colleges facilitated the birth of the home economics course that remained a staple in the American education

system until running its course in the 1980's and 1990's (Who Killed Home Ec., Dyas, Brie). Throughout the wartime era of the 20th century, the manufacturing of processed food saw the decline of many homemaking processes that defined the Morrill Act home economic era. What appeared in the 1950's as a set standard in the American education system was expectedly vilified as a "symptom of the subjugated women" (The Craft of Daily Life: Homemaking| Collection Development, Norton Holm, Sarah) throughout the 1960's and 1970's. Within the following decades, a rejuvenated Martha Stewart epidemic brought a face and alternative purpose to the American ideal of homemaking. This caused a shift from the daily operation and running of a home to that of expression and celebration of personal creativity. The home had always been a place of personal identity and a physical manifestation of oneself, but with the popularity of Martha Stewart and others, a visual aesthetic was added as an addendum to the already massively encompassing field of meaning for the term homemaking. This notion of aesthetics in homemaking has remained intact while leading into a response to the changing economic climate following 2008 and the applaudable hipster-infused sustainable living movement of the 2010's.

Within these historical shifts, a road map of hybrid traditions is provided, exemplifying the application of a simple idea. The modern homemaker uses the lessons, tips, and practices handed down to her or him from parents, grandparents, family members and historical fixtures. These practices pull from the basic tenants of home economics classes, from personal experiences and simply put, the way a home was organized and run throughout an individual's childhood. These are the traditions that individuals pull from in making their home and constructing an individualized

homemaking philosophy. Within a hybrid tradition of homemaking, individuals combine elements obtained from the family, or other peripheral influences and meld them with their own intentions of homemaking, forming a kind of hiraeth. This is the order in which traditions within a home are made and maintained through generations, and often a visual home aesthetic can be passed down, accounting for the alterations and differentiation within one generational home to another, as well as the similarities. It is widely maintained that a home is a place of physical manifestation of oneself and is formed from the old and the new.

Defenestrating historical and cultural context, the process of homemaking “can be defined as the routines that support and maintain [a] home, family, and community, regardless of size or configuration” (Norton Holm, Sarah). While the familiar tasks of homemaking are enforced to maintain the physical structure of the home itself, the acts themselves are less important, if not completely void in a conversation on the concept of home. Instead, what is more interesting, and notable, is how individuals go about making a home, through the applications of homemaking philosophies and hybrid traditions.

Accumulation and the Right to Return

Why do humans have the need to own things, to collect and accumulate things? Thomas Dent Mütter was one of the foremost grandfathers of American reconstructive plastic surgery and was a pioneer for those who followed in his medical footsteps. Today, however, he is not well known for specializing in the operation of congenital anomalies, but instead as a collector. Over the course of his medical career, he acquired and collected abnormal specimens and objects, including anatomical and

pathological specimens, wax models, tumors, wet and dry preparations, medical equipment, and illustrations of medical abnormalities. Mütter's ardent passion for collecting is now manifested in the Mütter Museum, located in Philadelphia which is one of the worlds most recognized archaic medical museums, and the result of one man's interest and desire to collect.

Furthermore, the original American Library of Congress was composed of thousands of books acquired from the collection of president Thomas Jefferson and even the foundation of the British Museum was created thanks to the collection of the Anglo-Irish physician, Hans Sloane. But how do processes of accumulation on a smaller scale help in the formation of a home? More importantly, why does an individual return to these collections through the concept of "right to return?" It is without question that the objects in our houses help make a home. We project onto those objects and assign meaning to them, then they receive importance within that setting. They are given a context, and within that context they participate in a dialogue larger than their singular entity. However, a singular object does not create a home, rather an assortment or an accumulation of objects arranged in a particular manner provides comfort and stability, and without such things accumulated together a feeling of *dépaysement* ensues, meaning a feeling of homesickness.

As a whole, the globe is highly populated by mobile households. According to John Berger (1984) the concept of home can be identified and isolated as a set of practices, these practices informed by family and cultural memories and myths (Elia Petridou, *The Taste of Home*, 88). One of these practices that help in defining a home is that of accumulation, in which individuals enact acquisition in creating the aesthetic of

their home. They define their lives through the types of food they eat, the use of disposable or reusable products, the way in which they conduct chores, celebrate certain traditions and the style of objects that appear in their home. Much like a young child trying a variety of sports or activities to pinpoint their interest, the process of accumulation allows individuals to specifically define the emotional and visual aesthetic of their home. Upon achieving this, accumulation of objects, memories, and relationships solidify their home and provide a foundation upon which it grows.

This process of homemaking through accumulation is often informed by hybrid traditions conducted by the individual or individuals constructing the home. Within the solidification of a home aesthetic through the accumulation of objects, recollections are formed, and the experiences of that time are projected and acclimated with that object or group of objects. The term recollection is used here as it references an imperfect reflection, whereas memory alludes to often over-idealized notions of nostalgia. The process of accumulating objects, relationships and recollections is an imperfect one and is grounded in repetition, much like the concept of “right to return.” For many scholars a home can be designated as a place where an individual spends more than fifty percent of their time. Instead, this can be challenged by the notion that a home is where an individual willingly returns.

Much like the act of accumulation is a process, so is that of the right to return, as Elia Petridou writes in *The Taste of Home*, the right to return involves an understanding of home as the result of repeated practice, that of setting out and coming back...it becomes a point of reference (Petridou 88), “a place of origin and retreat” (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga 1999: 6). While studying the influence of home on

young British undergraduates, L. Kenyon identified connections between strong attachments to a home and the presence of the right to return, as addressed in Elia Petridou's text 88). According to Petridou, "The notion of return implies permanence and continuity" (Petridou, 88) and as found by Kenyon, continuity allows for the perseveration of a parental home (Petridou,90). A home provides a sense of history and continuation, because it is the starting point individuals return to. Thus, "home is not a destiny of our journey but the place from which we set out and to which we return at least in spirit" (Hobsbawm 1991: 65). "The journey, itself symbolic of the adventure that leads to the development of self, is constructive of the meaning of home" (The Taste of Home, Petridou,88).

The right to return is indicative of a journey, much like that of the process of accumulation, and without such a journey, there cannot be a home (Petridou, 88). Through the acquisition and implementation of an individualized material culture, residents are able to gain ownership over a place in which they have a history within that place and a sense of identity. For D. Miller, material culture is directly connected to the way in which an individual interacts and accumulates objects within their homes, something called objectification (Petridou, 88). This is a process of self-creation between the object and the owner, a self-creation that is then associated as taking place within the home and becomes an element in how the home is defined.

The Subconscious Home

In the literature focusing on the idea of home within social relations, the most common tendency is to define a home through the use of physical boundaries and within a physical space. Of course, this makes approachable sense, our homes possess

addresses and we dwell within physical structures. However, through this definition, the symbolic nature of the structure outweighs the influence of people, object, memories, and feelings of security. Simply put, “what is missed by focusing on the analogies between physical and symbolic structure is the dynamic way in which everyday practice makes the home meaningful to those who inhabit it” (Petridou, 87).

Petridou writes

As Mary Douglas has argued (1991), home is a “localizable idea,” it is somewhere. But the suggestion that home is “a kind of space” is grounded on an understanding of space as a reality that is autonomous, independent of its human subjects. The concept that should be used instead and which captures the ontological significance of home is ‘place.’ Places are “contexts for human experience, constructed in movement, memory, encounter, and association” (Tilley 1994: 15). Paraphrasing Mary Douglas, home is rather “a kind of place”, which acquires its meaning through practice: and as such, it forms part of the everyday process of the creation of self (The Taste of Home, Petridou, Elia, 87-88).

This identification of place as formed by memory and encounter is akin to the subconscious home. The concept of a subconscious home is based on the notion of hiraeth, specifically, the feeling of homesickness for a home you cannot return to, or that never was. In the case of a subconscious home, it is that which never existed, because it has yet to exist. A subconscious home is a manifestation of a desired home and contains a variety of elements including the physical structure, the aesthetic of the home, objects and furniture pieces. Additionally, it houses anticipations of certain

people occupying a space in that structure, both people known to the individual and those they desire to know and love in the future. A subconscious home is far from a physical home as can be expected and is a possibly unknown representation of what an individual desires most in the world for their daily existence. An individual's notion of home is influenced by their subconscious home and they spend their lives attempting to achieve this image, despite the fact that it is unattainable. It takes time for a subconscious home to be developed, because it is, like the individual constructing it, in a constant state of fluctuation.

As previously mentioned, the paintings in the exhibition *Letters Home* are semi-autobiographical and specific objects appear in the works as representations of my own desired subconscious home. A two-tiered sage colored tole lamp appears multiple times throughout the show as well as a Greek revival influenced couch and loveseat based on a Pearson set. Similarly, figures alluding to family members, a stone bird bath, and monkey, duck and rabbit figures appear throughout the various sequences have symbolic meaning. These objects are physical manifestations of desired elements for an anticipated home that dwells in the subconscious and informs the way we perceive and accept our current homes.

Relationships, Recollections, Objects

Relationships, recollections, and objects are what fill our homes and compose the basic foundation for what we consider a home rather than a house. As already established, a home is made through a variety of processes based on traditions and hybrid traditions. Through the accumulation and creation of associations within a home, we establish a feeling of security that we return to, all based on relationships,

recollections, and objects. These three components when connected form the basis of our homes in a spider's web-like pattern. It is the relationships individuals develop within their homes that make them feel secure. Oftentimes these relationships become the sources that are desired to return to when away from the home. They provide purpose to a place and house such personal relations.

Additionally, the recollections of people are carried within a home, both positive and negative. The term recollection is used in this particular place to allude to the over-glorification and idealization that is often consistent with the term memory. Instead, the term recollection indicates the active and non-distorted remembering of an event. These recollections then dictate our feelings of a place, whether they are positive or negative. Then, that place becomes synonymous with one or more recollections. Lastly, as has previously been addressed in the discussion on accumulation, objects help in the organizing and defining of a space or a place into a home. These form the basic foundations of the making of a home.

People, Places, Processes

The correlation between identity and relationships is not a new idea in the scholarly research of the concept of home. Environmental psychologists such as Twigger-Ross, Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff as well as Jung and Cooper have widely established that through human development and the aging process, our homes come to represent us. However, identity is a complex notion that contains many differencing concepts and identity affiliated with home is largely established by identity through ownership or longevity. Establishing this identity through the guides of people,

places, and processes is important, and can be applied through Per Gustafson's Three-Pole Model or the Sense of Place and Place Dependency Concept.

According to Gustafson's model, three identity groups are determined: self, others, and environment (Laura L. Lein, *Home as Identity: Place-Making and Its Implication in the Building Environment of Older Persons*, 151). By establishing these three poles, a spectrum type model for an individual's experiences can be established. As Gustafson found, "an individual's expressed meaning... then can be situated between the three poles of self, others, and environment instead of belonging to only one category" (Lein, 151). Thus, there is an expansion of the three poles to allow for the identification of self, self-others, others-environment, environment, environment-self, and lastly self-others-environment. As Gustafson then established, "a meaningful place appears as a process, where various individual (and collective) projects converge and/or compare with other projects, with external events" (Gustafson *Meanings of Place: Everyday Experience and Theoretical Conceptualizations*, 2001,13). In other words, the expansion of each pole is a project, and when these projects converge they foster environments of stability and permanence.

As postulated by Lein, when fostering a sense of identity through a home, that place must be "distinctive and identifiable to the individual... it must also have a particular value to the person, be continuous, connected to the person's life trajectory, and able to withstand change" (Lein, 151). As established then, and previously discussed, the fostering of a home as part of a personal identity is ongoing, and individuals "take an active part in the process of giving [a home or place] meaning" (Gustafson, 2001, 13).

For Lein, housing is the interaction of place, people, and processes within a larger context, primarily affected by environmental factors, economic realities, demographic changes and political factors. This thought process is partially established by Lynne C. Manzo's Affective Relationships to Place Theory or the Place Attachment Concept, described in *Beyond House and Haven: Toward A Revisioning of Emotional Relationships with Places*. Highlighted in the text is the way place attachment is connected to the physical house and the surrounding environment. As stated by Lein, "this focus helps define how the house becomes a home and cultivates a sense of emotional attachment for the individual maintaining residence" (Lein, 153). Manzo's research is founded on four concepts intent on showing how a place and individual relate to each other through attachments with the environment.

As postulated by Manzo "affective relationships to places: encompass a broad range of physical settings and emotions... are an ever-changing, dynamic phenomenon[s]... both unconscious and conscious... and exist within a larger socio-political milieu" (Manzo, 48). For Manzo, the first of these elements that relate to relationships reference physical locations. As he states, "relationships to places can be a means through which we consciously express our worldview and explore our evolving identity... people actively engage with places and the creation of meaning, and in doing so, can consciously foster relationships to place" (Manzo, p. 53). This intention can further be seen in the writing of Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspectives of Experience*, in which he states, "what begins as undifferentiated space evolves into 'place' as we come to know it better and endow it with value. Emotion links all human

experiences so that place can acquire deep meaning through the steady accretion of sentiment” (Tuan, 33).

In the text, *Home as Identity: Place-Making and Its Implication in the Built Environment of Older Persons*, Lein identifies the category of place as referring to the physical nature of the place of residence where it is located geographically. The category of processes deals with those things that relate to maintaining a home and a place of residency. These could be as broad as the legal and political factors that affect the upkeep of a house, or the traditions of individuals in composing their homes. Nonetheless, for Gustafson, these processes are the active part of providing meaning and security within establishing a right to return. The last category is the most crucial and obvious, that of people, referential to the people who live there and have lived there in the past. These are the individuals who go through the processes of forming identities, and fostering relationships, as well as interacting with places. As obtuse as it may sound, without people and their interests in themselves and others, homes would not exist.

On a global or even local level, consideration must be paid to these categories as being directly affected by four additional categories as outlined within Environmental Psychology: environment, demographics, economics, and politics. The work that appears in the thesis exhibition is based on personal experience, and much of the research presented thus far has been informed by the same personal interests and experiences. Of the four additional categories previously listed, none affects and disenfranchises the concept of home as much as the political philosophy of localism within the relationships of people, places, and processes.

Localism, Populism and the Norman Rockwell Aesthetic

Within the discussion of home and how to challenge the construct of it, there is the combination of political and economic influences, specifically those of localism and populism. However, the investigation of these political philosophies in this paper is based on the creation of boundaries through their application. These boundaries can infuse feelings of isolation and separation into a physical place, hindering the process of sedimentation in homemaking for those new to an area. As a political philosophy, localism gives importance to the ripple effect every individual has in their community and the effects of local focus. Localism prioritizes what is best for a local population through the production and consumption of local goods, control of the regional government and taking pride in community identity. The philosophy is concerned with the development of a local area for a set group of people and emphasizes a shift from overhead governmental control and consumption of national products to a self-sustaining way of life. Every town, city or conurbation enacts localism with self-promotion and pride and recently the philosophy has been championed by the Green party, specifically, through the trend of supporting small business owners, urban and personal gardening, and the revival and development of smaller towns. However, localism is not to be confused with populism, which will be discussed later.

While being a political philosophy, the practical implementation of localism is rampant within city identities and is often viewed as part of a locations culture. The slow food movement is supported in large part by farmer's markets, community-supported agriculture, community gardens, farm-to-table programs and food cooperatives, all exemplified by localism ideologies. Localism within government structure is epitomized

within tertiary governments in which small community councils are the leaders in local government; this is also the case with worker's councils. However, most commonly localism is used in discussions of economics and environmental preservation, with many scholars believing that localism is imperative in the combating of economic and environmental concerns.

The rise of localism can be monitored starting with the conclusion of the World War era, when the hegemonic power of the time shifted from The United Kingdom to The United States. It was during the years of wartime action that the United States was characterized by heightened cultural forms of nationalism, injected into the national psyche. This time can be characterized by a Norman Rockwellian-aesthetic or that of the over-idealized, tranquility of small town USA living. Due to fears perpetuated by the Red Scare and the Cold War, the American sense of nationalism that was prevalent during past times of war was replaced by the growth of localist political viewpoints. As a response in America to the rise of communism, importance began to appear on the individual, and specific city or state identities. While this is not necessarily true for every occurrence, it holds as a generalized narrative of the progression of national American identity starting with the beginning of World War II.

While localism places emphasis on local control and production of local products in the revitalization of economies, it is not synonymous with populism. Localism is a political philosophy while populism is a political communication and effects the dialogue between groups in political conversations. It is a form of contrast between the everyday, common man and those considered the elites within a society. Often this comparison spurs on scapegoating and a vilification of elites despite the fact that this group is often

imagined within the dialogue. As outlined by André Munro, the political conversation designated as populism is “critical of political representation and anything that mediates the relation[s] between the people and their leader or government” (Muron, Populism: Political Program or Movement). There is a push towards an emphasis on the needs of ordinary citizens and what can best empower them through reform as opposed to revolution, as is seen in its original 1892 use. However, in contemporary use, populism has strayed away from its original intentions and can be more widely associated with authoritarian forms of politics (Muron.) While localism has been used as a defining element of the Green party, the 2016 Presidential campaign of Donald J. Trump echoed that of contemporary authoritarian populist politics. Within this definition, populist politics center around a leader who is charismatic and appeals to the issues of the people in creating solutions for the calamities of the time. Through aligning with the common man this populist charismatic leader induces a political landscape in which everything is personalized, and “political parties lose their importance, and elections serve to confirm the leader’s authority rather than to reflect the different allegiances of the people” (Muron). Within this, populism panders to the fears and interests of the largest population, rather than define what is best for social and political betterment. Within populism, leadership is controlled by a singular individual, and a national identity is formed through opposition and the separation of the common man to the economic or political elite. For Muron, a “populist economic program can, therefore, signify either a platform that promotes the interest of common citizens and the country as a whole or a platform that seeks to redistribute wealth to gain popularity, without regard to the consequences for the country such as inflation or debt” (Muron). Antipode to this, a

localist economy is managed by a group of individuals interested in maintaining their local economic gain and is not isolated to a singular economic class. However, both carry facets of what can be labeled the Norman Rockwell Aesthetic.

Many Americans reflect on the work of Norman Rockwell as a nostalgic time-machine to an idyllic era, his work appearing as a national mirror for the nearly five decades his work appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*. His illustrations now stand as a reminder of how America has aged away from the idealist and blatantly truth-less façade within Rockwell's work. Much like the concept of a home, the postwar America many imagine is void of nuance and oftentimes vapid. Postwar America in fact faced issues of political upheaval, social injustice, and massive economic booms, however, have been entangled with nostalgia. The very same nostalgia exists in Rockwell's work, which has come to serve as a symbol. This is a symbol rooted in innocence, togetherness, humor, compassion, and character. Rockwell was able to provide visually compelling stories, relatable to many, but almost always hopeful. However, for a contemporary audience, despite the technique of the work and the wit, Rockwell's pieces feel dated and often over-simplified through the act of pandering to the American public. His work characterizes a specific time in history, however, as can be seen with the place of localism and populism in recent political climes, this innocent and nostalgic yearning for a community has come to characterize what many desire within a community, creating a Norman Rockwell aesthetic.

As previously mentioned, over a lifetime, a person lives in some form of family home. They associate with a hometown, they have a home state or region and a nation of origin. These are all geographical systems of organization that aid in defining who

belongs in a particular place. With this in mind, a home can be viewed as an imperfect, small scale example of a community influenced by localism. Through a process of sedimentation members of a household are introduced to similar values and face similar expectations. They share a small-scale community identity, which is fostered through the process of homemaking. This identity then serves as something for which future generations can carry on and uphold traditions of, or rebel and push away from. However, localism is not a perfect philosophy, and practical applications can illustrate that fact.

Localism, Otherness and the Home as a Symbol

Within a discussion of localism, the political philosophy may sound ideal. It is a civic-minded philosophy that places importance on local community, however, when implemented there are inevitably issues due to set boundaries. These boundaries are created because of the focus on the local peoples and what is best for them, creating a system of identification in which everything can be associated with or against the symbol of a place. Localism alters a place into an isolated symbol and the identity of a particular location becomes associated with that symbol. We can readily see this alteration of place into a symbol based on identity, as can be seen in the cases of New York, London and Paris, to name a few, in which all are associated with a type of population, dream or theme. The same can be said for smaller cities or conurbations in which localism is actively practiced. With the transformation of a location into a symbol, the boundaries of that place are more readily implemented, and these boundaries produce a misconception, distrust, or fear of the “other,” causing the construct of home within that place to be made of feelings of isolation and alienation. The “other” in relation

to localism is influenced by the work of Edmund Husserl and his writings on phenomenology. This state of “otherness” is characterized by being alien or different from the social identity of a person or place. Rather than the post-colonial perspective of the dominator-dominated relationship of the “other” the post-modern philosophy, as it is used today, has changed. In this way, the “other” is now identified as being in a state of otherness as a phenomenological process of man and society. Much of the discussion of otherness within phenomenology relates to the concern of defining what is real and how an individual is placed within existence and within the nature of being. It is then easily postulated that the concerns of being the “other” effect the individuals place within a location, and thus the process of constructing a home as a symbol.

As has been established, the relationship between people, places and processes is key in informing how an individual not only constructs their concept of home but how they acquire a feeling of home through the right to return. As famously noted, Carl Jung made reference to the house as an extension of oneself, a largely accepted and upheld concept, with each room within a home standing as a physical representation of part of an individual, or a specific time in someone’s life. The home is an intimate space for an individual and is composed of recollections, objects, and relationships which help in the fostering of a home as a symbol; similarly, to how a location can become a symbol within localism. In her writings Clare Cooper expands on the settling process within a home, in which it feels foreign and through association comes to reflect an individual through the arrangement of their life. This is an example of the sedimentation process described earlier in this paper. This arrangement for Cooper is a process of composing

messages individuals are seeking to broadcast about themselves through the physical mouthpiece of the symbol of the home. Cooper writes,

If there is some validity to the notion of house-as-self, it goes part of the way to explain why for most people their house is so sacred and why they so strongly resist a change in the basic form which they and their fathers and their fathers' fathers have lived in since the dawn of time. Jung recognized that the more archaic and universal the archetype made manifest in the symbol, the more universal and unchanging the symbol itself, since self must be an archetype as universal and almost as archaic as man himself, this may explain the universality of its symbolic form, the house, and the extreme resistance of most people to any change in its basic forms. For most people, the self is a fragile and vulnerable entity; we wish therefore to envelop ourselves in a symbol-for-self which is familiar, solid, inviolate, unchanging. (Cooper, Clare, *The House as a Symbol of the Self*, 144)

As a population, the act of living within some dwelling that serves as a home is expected. Humans search for the achievement of their subconscious homes by attempting to physically manifest them through the nuanced, yet organic process of homemaking that appears like a natural progression. The thesis show, *Letters Home*, is influenced by the idea that a home is not just a structure or a psychological and emotional process of reflection and recollection. The ideas discussed throughout this paper are those that have informed *Letters Home*, an exhibition dedicated to pondering the ideas of what a home is and what makes up our idea of home. A home can, however, be accepted as a multifaceted symbol with varying meanings, which helps

provide meaning to our lives based on our associations with home and the processes we go through in constructing a home, many of which are visual.

CHAPTER III

VISUAL INFLUENCES

“In a very little time they got to the corner of the field by the side of the pine wood where Eeyore’s house wasn’t any longer. ‘There!’ Said Eeyore. ‘Not a stick of it left! Of course, I’ve still got all this snow to do what I like with. One mustn’t complain.’ ”

– A.A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner*

The Domestic

The works that make up the thesis exhibition *Letters Home* are small-scale watercolors depicting women engaging in unlikely, bizarre, domestic tasks that are enacted with high levels of placidity and acceptance. The actions and figures in the work encourage the viewer to consider their idea of home, and how the act of being at home or not at home has become a measurement for our lives. The works contain elements of nostalgia, though these refer to the history of the past rather than a rose-colored glasses retrospective. Primarily composed of six sequences of watercolor images, with various numbers of pieces, each sequence is bookended by watercolor images of homes. The exhibition has additional watercolor paintings that depict actions that take place in the home, or relate to the family unit, which are, by definition, domestic actions. As previously mentioned in the discussion of homemaking philosophies, the term domestic is often archaically associated with what is considered feminine and weak. Within this section, contemporary attitudes of practical homemaking practices were stressed as not being limited to a gender. Homemaking is a practice that all people must go through and should not be assigned a gender in the conceptual investigation. When considered as a visual influence, the domestic has appeared in

artmaking throughout the history of humanity, with both male and female artists choosing to depict domestic images. However, such use of the term domestic changes greatly between the work of Vermeer and Cassatt. Thus, as a visual influence for the exhibition, the connections of the domestic and the progression of feminist artists starting in the late 1960's should be considered.

As a term, domestic carries connotations of regressive and archaic attitudes towards feminine expectation. With the push for female liberation and a female presence in the workforce, the term became infused with the symbol of feminine subjectivity and oppression. This still prevalent attitude is a result of association and misidentification with the nineteenth century value system, the Cult of Domesticity, oftentimes characterized by conservative far-right American populations and conservative religious groups. The Cult of Domesticity or the Cult of True Womanhood was a value system upheld in many white, protestant middle class households and it bastardized the simple term of relating to the home or family life with ideological values based on ideas of upper and middle-class male-dominated families in the nineteenth century. The values set in place by the Cult of Domesticity gave emphasis to the woman's role in the home as well as how the work of the household and the family operated. Four cardinal virtues were possessed by the women who ran these homes and they were that of piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness, revolving around the idea that the woman was the "light of the home" and the center of the family (Welter, Barbara, *The Cult of True Womanhood*). During the Progressive Era, spanning from the 1890's to the 1920's, the emergence of the idea of the New Woman was formed in direct opposition to the Cult of True Womanhood. Even considering the Declaration of

Sentiments drafted at the Seneca Falls convention in 1848, the same opposition to traditional gender roles was raised by feminists and feminist artists in the late 1960's (Stansell, Christine, *The Feminist Promise*). The tumultuous associations and bastardized ideologies surrounding the term domesticity would prove to be important and controversial to feminist artists starting in the late 1960's.

As posited by Laura Meyer in the text *Power and Pleasure: Feminist Art Practice and Theory in the United States and Britain* it is possible to identify feminist art and art theory through two approaches. The first approach is that of "women power" and the second that of feminist "deconstruction" (Meyer, 317). The women power approach, which manifested in the 1960's, was born from female artist's desire to obtain control of their body image, pushing away the previously male-dominated presentation of women's bodies and countering the stereotypes of women in the mass media. This phase intended to create a more positive image of both women and women artists, aligning with the image of females identified by the early feminists at Seneca Falls and pushing against the stereotyped view of the "light of the home" female. This positive recharacterization of female artists was intent on promoting the strength and dignity of the female body, and female sexuality, as stated by Laura Meyer. Many of the female artists working within the intentionality of the first phase sought to use their artwork to "address distinctly "female" cultural experiences, and a related feminine aesthetic" (Meyer, 318). Personal and autobiographical subject matter became a central way of addressing keenly female issues and points of view, oftentimes through the decorative arts, fabric and other mediums carrying strong associations with women's handwork and those art mediums traditionally considered less than high art. Strictly speaking,

decorative arts are associated with the domestic. There was a strong feminine aesthetic within the work and solidarity among artists and women was presented as a key virtue, despite the fact that women of minorities were often not considered.

If women have turned to depicting scenes of domestic life, the traditionally feminine, or of children, as did Jan Steen, Chardin, Renoir and Monet, the choice of such subject matter would be closely associated with a private, personal connection or style and would fail to pull itself away from the stereotypical view of female identity. For Linda Nochlin the idea of making art involving a “self-consistent language of form” aligned with the writings of Griselda Pollock and Lisa Tickner (Meyer, 320). For these two British theorists “visual images constitute a symbol system analogous to that of language... thus images, like words, have no inherent meaning but assume meaning through habitual use (Meyer, 319). The meaning referenced by Pollock and Tickner was then structured around binary antipodes, where the idea and term of “women” would “function as the negative and opposite of man” (Meyer, 320). Due to the privileged white male viewpoint institutionalized and normalized over time, “women” carried associations with and came to exemplify during this time meanings of passivity and weakness. On the other hand, masculine adjectives were those of activity and strength. Thus, as asserted by Pollock and Tickner, it was not “possible to simply create an image denoting female strength... what [was] needed ...[was] a systematic analysis of the ways in which meaning [was] produced, or constructed, within the larger cultural context” (Meyer, 320).

Lacking in the work of *Letters Home* are male figures. Instead, only women are represented in the paintings because the work is based on personal experience and is

autobiographical as an American female. The discussions of men's and women's place in establishing a home is not the primary focus of the work, and male figures are excluded to prevent connotations of the complex adjectives associated with men and women in a discussion of the home. The work is inspired by the use of the term domestic within the feminist art movement of the 1960's as well as the autobiographical approach.

During this time, Nochlin and Lucy Lippard were two of the most prominent voices concerned with feminist art, however, their voices did not necessarily align. Lippard, in contrast to Nochlin, noted that female artists were intentionally pushed out and excluded from the male-dominate art world. Additionally, Lippard was "convinced that there [was] a latent difference in sensibility... particularly in women's art, and that should be acknowledged and celebrated" (Meyer, 318). However, it was in defining this sensibility where Lippard demonstrates uncertainty, and possibly an example of exercising the desire to avoid essentialist undertones in returning to ideas of femininity within the home and family. Instead, what remained true for Lippard was that artwork and art-making came from the "inside" and thus must be inherently different between men and women. This can be interpreted as contradicting her ideas on the downfall of the personal as political and the utilization of autobiographical artwork. For her, work comes from "inside" and if work is uniquely different between men and women, would it not also maintain that the work among women would also be inherently different? Early feminist artists in both the second and first phase found conflict within the focus on white middle and upper-class female artists, oftentimes excluding the experiences of minority artists, and Lippard's thoughts on artwork from the "inside" being able to

separate male and female artists would most likely differentiate female artists of differing socio-economic situations.

For Lippard, the utilization and creation of essential forms of feminist art as we see in the first phase of feminist art-making was “a necessary stage toward asserting a female practice and correcting the injustice of women’s exclusion from visual culture, and by extension, the terms on which society was structured” (Meyer, 318). A central focus for the characterization of female images and artists was then necessary, and for Lippard, the work of Judy Chicago was key. It was Chicago’s intent through her work to recover and introduce female figures throughout history, “rethinking their work according to new terms that went beyond the dominant (male) language of formalist criticism” (Gathercole, Sam, 71). It was exactly this type of recuperative history that Nochlin found to be possibility regressive and refused to accept as beneficial in the progression of feminist artists.

In Lippard’s attempt to define and find a women’s sensibility or the female aesthetic, many female artists in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s returned to the focus on crafts and decor founded by those working in the 1960’s. They sought to elevate women’s craft to a higher level within the art world hierarchy and remove it from its kitsch origins. As explained by Lippard in the text *Household Images in Art*, female artists predating the 1960’s had avoided art practices associated with female techniques. Those techniques including processes like sewing, weaving, knitting, ceramics and other mediums that were intended to appear in the domestic setting of the home. The Women’s Movement, as argued by Lippard, altered that and allowed female artists to decide whether to cast off their aprons or turn their aprons into art.

In reclaiming the term domestic, and altering it into a state of defining and recharacterizing the feminine through the use of traditional craft materials, the work in *Letters Home* is able to build upon this tradition. The show is composed of watercolor images, similar to the illustrations done by female children's book illustrators like Beatrice Potter, Kate Greenaway, Lois Lenski, Elizabeth Shippen Green and Jessie Willcox Smith that were traditionally considered low-level art or inferior to male illustrators. Expanding upon these watercolors, mixed media pieces consisting of bundles of handwritten letters and small paintings on envelopes use imagery that is in alignment with personal experience and expectation. All of these pieces are populated by women whose actions encourage the viewer to question the act of sedimentation in homemaking, specifically the unique homemaking philosophy maintained by my own forward-thinking feminist mother. As the sedimentation of objects, physical homes, and the incorporation of people or the creation of recollections inform the construction of a home, they similarly inform the domestic. The plain women within my work engage in unlikely, bizarre domestic tasks and these figures are often under high levels of stress and distress, conveying the complexities of homemaking. While unrealistic in presentation, the work is largely autobiographical and employs a mixture of those things that are sweet and associated with innocence to those in line with dark, menacing and oftentimes visually disturbing representations.

Influencing Artists

The thesis exhibition, *Letters Home*, is visually influenced and informed by the artwork I was exposed to at a young age, primarily illustration work. The use of images in telling a narrative is of pertinence, because the show is largely composed of six

sequences, with all the images within each sequence relating to a recollection or experience among my family members. The use of micro and macro-narratives is of significance with each sequence serving as a micro-narrative and the overall show as a larger, macro-narrative. The images are largely grounded in everyday, domestic activities that help in the development of a home, containing elements of the fantastical, bizarre and unlikely. The images often venture into a bizarre, fantastical place, yet are grounded by clothing and objects in an indefinite contemporary time. The clothing depicted on the figures remains consistent in style and cut, all referencing Laura Ashley dresses ranging from the 1990's to present, a representation of the dresses that defined my own upbringing.

Visually, the paintings draw inspiration from renowned American illustrator, Tasha Tudor, who through her work created an imaginary world that, while not lacking the horrors of life, contained a wholesome and nostalgic innocence. In 1971 *Corgiville Fair* was published and introduced readers to the wonderful, idiosyncratic world of the Corgi dog. Running parallel to Tudor's own lifestyle in which she was devoted to the dog, Tudor maintained as many as 13 corgis at a given time throughout the last thirty years of her life. Tudor was dedicated to the time period of the 1830's and lived her life accordingly, isolating herself in her Vermont home and utilizing the way of life that would be expected in an 1830's cottage. She used only period antiques, made her own candles, wove her own clothes, made soap, dolls, knitted furnishings and clothing and lived without running water for periods of her life, all while amassing a multi-million-dollar fortune from her illustration and writing work.

On many levels, Tudor's work, whether knowingly or not, operates through metaphor and representation. The viewership of Tudor's work is a younger demographic and many of the themes addressed in her work are social injustices towards children and the contaminating force of the male adult world which was active in her own life. However, more impactful in her illustrations and written works is the empathetic tack taken while addressing larger themes of human nature. Tudor's work was based on her children and their lifetimes, as well as her construct of home. Her illustrations feel deeply personal as if the viewer is invited to enter her home or her memories of that place. The detail and care taken within the work and the complexity of action foster this feeling of personalization. This technique of inviting the viewer to enter into a specific and personal moment is employed within the sequences that partially compose *Letters Home*. Through the inclusion of specific actions and objects, the viewer is invited to enter a private experience.

The illustrators of Tasha Tudor, Robert Lawson, Richard Scarry, Quinton Blake, Amy Cutler and Kate Greenaway all effectively use macro and micro-narratives. In this sense, a macro-narrative refers to the larger overall picture or history, while micro is referential to a singular action or act and the components of that narrative. As can be expected, these are paramount in the success of illustrations, and while my work is not accompanied by text the continuation of a narrative and the depiction of actions is necessary, making it so every piece in a sequence makes sense together and provides a cohesive representation of individual actions. These macro and micro-narratives are largely maintained through wit and whimsy in the watercolor paintings, as informed by the works of Amy Cutler, Quinton Blake, Robert Lawson and Kate Greenaway. In her

spacious, exquisitely detailed prints and drawings, Amy Cutler draws from the media, fairy tales, and her own experiences to convey the complexities of womanhood. Often autobiographical, her work is a mixture of those things that are sweet and associated with innocence and naiveté, to those in line with dark, menacing and oftentimes visually disturbing representations (Kirk Hanley, Sarah. *Ink | Tales for Out Time: Amy Cutler's Prints*). Of the illustrators mentioned above, Cutler employs parables in her work. These visual representations of parables illustrate the deleterious effect of imposed expectations that are unattainable for women in any culture or economic state (Kirk Hanley). These parables are often pulled from fairy tales that inspire her work and when speaking on her work, Cutler often describes contemporary culture as entirely rife with magic and folklore. For the purpose of these parables, the women in her work are often depicted taking part in odd and oftentimes useless activities. Tasks like sewing stripes onto tigers, pulling buildings with their hair, flattening each other with antiquated household items, and oftentimes toting around horses on their backs, all indicative of the fact that women's work, as suggested by Cutler may never cease (Kirk, Hanley). Similarly, the approach of depicting figures in off-the-beaten-path tasks is implemented in my work, which, by contrast, contains a less melancholic message.

While Cutler uses the single image parable to rightfully find fault with regressive attitudes of women, my work employs very similar principles in a differing manner with an alternative intention. Instead, the females that occupy a space within my own work engage in tasks related to home life, all in odd positions and resulting in bizarre effects. Figures are seen riding rabid foxes, levitating in sitting rooms, straddling grandfather clocks, being bombarded by falling lamps, wrestling with lawnmowers and sewing roofs

onto small-scale birdhouses. All the actions depicted within the images serve as small-scale parable images related to the construction and identification of a home. These images are often physically impossible and fantastical but are done to allude to the wealth of possibilities and experiences that can be achieved while defining a unique concept of home. In the images both positive and negative tasks are set for the figures to carry out, altogether encouraging the viewer to contemplate their own idea of home and how they came to define it. There is a large scale meta-narrative among the work in which forty-seven pieces relate to a grand narrative of a family. Within this meta-narrative of relationships, these forty-seven pieces are divided into six sequences depicting micro-narratives, all between individuals with my family and all with a sarcastic overtone that is simultaneously genuine.

While Cutler's work ventures into the fantasticalness of fairytales, Quinton Blake's work is a pure representation of the absurd. Having gained a reputation as a reliable and humorous illustrator of more than three-hundred children's books, Blake worked with such literary names as Joan Aiken, Elizabeth Bowen, Nils-Olof Franzen, William Steig and most notably Roald Dahl and Dr. Seuss. Interestingly, his collaboration with Seuss produced the first book that Seuss wrote but did not illustrate himself, *Great Day for Up!* The illustration style of Blake was honed while working for such magazines as *Smash*, the loose style of his illustrations running parallel to the beginnings and lifetime of the Abstract Expressionist movement, which influenced the young artist. Blake and scholars of his work often note how he illustrated for children, a generation which he felt was overly restrained and controlled. The tame and precise illustrations of those like Beatrix Potter, and Kate Greenaway did not speak to children,

as stated by Blake. Instead, a loose hand allowed for the imagination to run rampant and exude energy. His works often contain a level of whimsy and ridiculousness to make the viewer feel as if they are a sleepwalker, venturing into a uniquely Blake-like world filled with a cacophony of emotions. These feelings in Blake's work are largely facilitated through his use of line that varies from sporadic and agitated to tranquil and agile. While the works of Tudor, Cutler, Potter and Greenaway are characterized by hiding and imbedding lines, Blake and Lawson choose to celebrate lines. The celebration and highlighting of lines is heavily apparent within my own work.

The varying influences of Blake's work on the images that appear in *Letters Home* can be seen through a comparison of Blake's work, *Down to The Sea* and *There Was a Pool Shaped Like a Peanut That Tasted Like the Sea*, 2017, from the second sequence of the show, of which the latter was inspired by the former. Blake's work depicts young children and a dog running out of what can only be assumed is a welcoming ocean, enjoying a day of fun and activity. They boast garlands of seaweed and from the water droplets beading off the dog and a colorful bucket filled with water, we can assume that they are returning from the sea. Unlike the illustrations that appear in works like *Matilda* and *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, both credited to Dahl, *Down to The Sea* is wistful, light-hearted and full of a peaceful energy, appearing in the Michael Rosen book, *Bananas in My Ears*, published in 2011. Blake's work is characterized by strong outlines, either consistent or broken, that frame the figures and objects in his work. Full-page images are uncommon, instead, the illustrations of Blake are traditionally heavily contained and dense, action and color set against a white, negative space backdrop. While this is not always the case as seen in *The Twits*, the use of negative space as a

resting point for the eye and in providing cleanliness to the work is something employed within the work of the *Letters Home* exhibition. The figures within the pieces occupy a space with minimal backgrounds or other surroundings. This allows the viewer to better enter the painting and compose their own world without the influence of specific indicators. While the backdrops remain blank, my work employs a trope heavily used by Blake in his work: that of creating personalization and empathetic attachments to those in the image through simplistic outlined supporting objects. The red flotation device worn around the waist of the child first to the right within *Down to The Sea* can be seen clutched in the hand of the young woman highest in the picture frame in *There Was a Pool Shaped Like a Peanut That Tasted Like the Sea*, as a direct homage to the original work.

In fact, the continual presence of objects like the red flotation device within Blake's work creates associations between the viewer and image. The presence of the simple flotation device, the yellow bucket and fuzzy beach towel in Blake's work reminds the viewer of their own trips to the beach or pool at any point in their life. As discussed earlier in this paper, the presentation and obtainment of objects and how we choose to arrange them within our homes gives meaning to them. We project onto them and thus they carry meaning. It is through the same process that meaning is awarded to the peripheral and supporting objects that appear in the work. Associations can be made between the viewer and similar objects they have used in creating their own home, which then allows them to consider how they made that home. Additionally, the objects that appear in the works carry meaning to me, and this personalization of actions and objects allows the viewer to enter into an intimate and private moment,

much like the objects and clues we can deduce by looking at the work of Blake. Most importantly, his work contains a vibrant energy, and it is this energy that I have attempted to infuse into my own work.



Fig. 1. There Was a Pool Shaped Like a Peanut That Tasted Like the Sea. Watercolor and pen on Strathmore watercolor paper. 11"x 15", 2017.

The scenes and characters that appear in the over forty pieces in the show are born from a personal history. Because of this, the complexities of the idea of a home can be presented in all of its flaws, instead of the traditional Norman Rockwell-like

aesthetic, and the work of Kate Greenaway was paramount in the presentation of a seemingly undermined tranquility. While the children and women in Greenaway's work appear carefree, her work was oftentimes didactic, and she claimed a strong branding over her work. Her work was composed of figures of children dubbed the "Kate Greenaway children," both young girls and boys many of who were too young to wear trousers. Greenaway developed her own interpretations of late 18th century Regency fashions, altering the traditional smock-frocks and skeleton suits to reflect the narrative she was telling. The young girls in her work were often depicted wearing high-waisted pinafores and children's clothing lines of the time often adapted the outfits depicted in Greenaway's images for production of wearable alternatives. These fashions would later influence the work of English painter Maude Goodman. It is the movements of the figures and the ways in which they interact with each other that is manifested within my work. Greenaway's goal is to depict fluid and transitional action while solidly grounding her figures together in a uniformed togetherness. Every movement of a figure, no matter the scale, has an equal effect on another figure or object within the picture frame, grounding it in a physical state. Thus, the work contains lighthearted attitudes but depicts very physical and often taxing actions. While many consider the act of homemaking and constructing a home to be un-taxing and meaningless work, that would be a misnomer. As we have established, it is the arrangement of objects and the sedimentation of those very same objects as well as recollections and relationships that construct a home. It must also be noted that the making of a home for many often involves physically demanding maintenance and involves the emotional stresses often related with interpersonal relationships. These are not things that should be written off

lightly and it is because of a mixture of these stressors, and the not always cheery relationships between people, that many dangerous and perplexing scenes are depicted within the exhibition.

Greenaway's work varies from that in *Letters Home* greatly in levels of saturation in color pallet, levels of contrast, the graphic quality of the line work and the less than delicate facial features in the work. However, general movements of Greenaway's figures are informative to the work, as can be seen in comparing Greenaway's illustration, *Poster the Strains of Polly Flinders* from the written work *April Baby's Book of Tunes*, against figure 2, *The Bird Bath Became the Court House* from the third sequence in *Letters Home*. The positioning of the three young women in Greenaway's illustration is echoed in *The Bird Bath Became the Court House* as an intentional reference to the source material. The young girls in Greenaway's image dance in a state of celebration and enjoyment while the three women in the latter image stand in varying stages of reaction to a swarm of birds, many of which are emerging from the chest cavity of the central figure. This emersion of birds from her chest cavity is in reference to another of Greenaway's more famous works, *Apple Pie* in which allusion is made to the children's nursery rhyme, *Sing a Song of Sixpence*, in which blackbirds are baked in a pie. The birdbath depicted in *The Bird Bath Became the Court House* is additionally designed to even resemble a pie. The figures in *The Bird Bath Became the Court House* are reversed, but the movements of the figures are inspired by the work of Greenaway, especially the shape and length of the arms and legs.

The use of line as pattern within my work is informed by two artists, Robert Lawson and Bjørn Wiinblad. The career of Robert Lawson is one of many avenues, in



Fig. 2. The Bird Bath Became the Court House. Watercolor and pen on Strathmore watercolor paper. 9"x12", 2017.

fact, it is difficult to identify Lawson as an artist who wrote books, or as an author who illustrated books. Lawson began his career illustrating for advertisements in magazines like *The Ladies Home Journal*, *Everybody's Magazine*, *Century magazine*, *Vogue*, and *Designer*. With the start of World War I Lawson entered the first U.S Army camouflage unit, accompanied by other artists who were placed upon assignment. As can be deduced from the name, the unit was designated to design and alter camouflage patterns for the troops. Scholars and Lawson's biographer have noted that the unit would often put on shows for the children of the French women who worked with them, and it was Lawson's remarkable sense of fantasy and humor that ensured his survival during the war, especially in relation to his mental health.

The same witty and inventive humor that Lawson employed in the war is blatantly present in his children's fiction and in his illustrations, but most remarkable are the concinnity of pattern and detail within his work. One of the themes addressed by Lawson within his written and illustration work was that of historical storytelling, particularly using a literary device that would later become a staple in children's fiction. This was the retelling of a historical figures life through the eyes of a companion animal, a device he first realized in the book, *Ben and Me*, with the depiction of Amos, the mouse protagonist. Many of the later works written and illustrated by Lawson employed the same device, which was compatible with his style of illustration that heavily depicted animals and pastoral landscapes. This is apparent in *Captain Kidd's Cat*, which is narrated by the titular feline McDermot. The reliable, empathetic, and humorous narrator tells the story of his pirate master's voyage, in which he is depicted as being an honest man who was betrayed by his friends and lost his earthly possessions. A similar device is used visually in the work of the *Letters Home* exhibit, with the monkey, rabbit, bear and duck figures previously mentioned as objects of my own subconscious home appearing in fourteen images. The continual appearance of these characters is meant to be a form of visual guide for the viewer while viewing the micro and macro-narratives. With the subject matter of many of his works being historical, in the rendering of the illustrations, Lawson heavily relied on time-specific patterns and designs, often using them in the rendering of clothing, woodwork and framing designs. This creates a rich and luxurious image as can be seen in the illustrations in *Ben and Me*. The use of line and pattern have come to be a distinguishing factor within Lawson's work and the historical implications influenced the prominent pattern used throughout the *Letters*

Home exhibition. Much of the clothing and hair of the figures depicted in the exhibition are covered in a singular pattern, that pattern is a repetition of the Celtic Gordian knot, a stylized symbol that has come to represent the Irish people and stands as a representation of an impossible structure that can never be disbanded.

Bjørn Wiinblad was a Danish painter, ceramicist, designer and artistic polymath renowned throughout Europe and the United States for his detailed pattern work and round-faced figures. These characteristically round-faced figures are whimsical, often dressed, similarly to Kate Greenaway, in 19th-century costumes, and with delicate pen work. Wiinblad was a prominent designer and ceramicist from the Rosenthal porcelain company, and the level of fine detail, monochromatic color story, and foliage design work made his work synonymous with the companies' image. However, the designs that appeared on the porcelains were varied from his painting work, and it is the former that has informed the work in the exhibition *Letters Home*. Wiinblad's paintings are often dense with saturated color, oftentimes characterized as psychedelic and offset by metallic overlays or paint, often gold or silver. These images vary from his porcelain work which is of a clean and orderly aesthetic with a fantastical and endearing attitude. As Wiinblad's most successful set of Rosenthal dinnerware was a design entitled Romance (Romanze) his porcelain design work is most commonly characterized by two lovers engaging in a variety of innocent courtship adventures, as can be seen in the January platter from his calendar series. As seen in the image, two lovers enjoy a tranquil January day in the snow, exchanging meaningful and long looks. Both are bundled with animal pelts, one topping his head and the other as a muff covering her hands, both deceased animals seemingly as at peace as the figures donning them.

Female figures were a staple in Wiinblad's work, serving as the main subject matter of both ceramic designs and paintings. These females are always presented expressing a wide range of emotional nuance, specifically through their gaze.

As stated by Wiinblad, the female figures in his work look upon the viewer and the actions in the composition with an openness and curiosity. They are in wonder with the world and the actions taking place around them, however, their faces wear expressions of dejection, melancholy and mysticism. This wondering gaze was paramount to Wiinblad, and while he employed a large workshop of artists, the eyes of the female figures he always painted himself. These figures and their personalities also found expression "through unusual heads and strange, sprout-like ears, short arms, small breasts, and angular noses... in other words, the women were intensely 'Wiinbladian'" (<http://www.bjornwiinblad-denmark.com/meet-bjoern-wiinblad>). These uniquely 'Wiinbladian' characteristics proved paramount in the development of the figures that appear in *Letters Home*. The figures who populate my paintings seemingly lack skeletal structures in many cases, and their bodies contort and function in strictly anatomically implausible ways. While there are figures with more developed anatomy in the trunk region, the arms, legs, and necks of the figures often sprout out of their Laura Ashley inspired dresses like rubber bean stocks. Proportionally, arms extend too long, and hands and feet often surpass their proportionate size, all culminating in a consistent stylized depiction of the figures that appear in the work and are directly inspired by the uniquely Wiinbladian female characters.

Most notably, however, are the noses in Wiinblad's work and the noses of the characters in the *Letters Home* exhibition, which can appear anguilliform in many cases.

I was first introduced to the work of Wiinblad when my mother was gifted a vase from his Valentine's Day collection in the late 2000's. I was intrigued by the often angular and hawk-like noses of the figures and the exaggeration of those particular facial features in profile. Seemingly referential of the long sloping noses of Modigliani, the noses of those figures in my own work bear a resemblance to Wiinblad's. It is a common trope that children in illustrations are depicted with small, round and rosy noses, to accompany their rosy cheeks. The noses of the figures in *Letters Home* are more reminiscent of head colds and are intensely red, intentionally antipode to the stylized button noses of many children in illustrations. As mentioned previously, the actions in the watercolor paintings are referential to a personal history, and the noses are no exception, all inspired by my own nose.

The watercolors in the exhibition are not only composed of figures but also domestic objects and house structures. These houses are not sound structures, instead, all of the windows and angles of the buildings curve, often unable to exist in physical reality. These images present the house as an unstable structure and remove the foundation of the home. The drawings present a house as a mobile, wavering, and unstable structure rather than the over glorified haven that is the rock of a family is built upon. These houses blurred the perspective and sequencing for the viewer, enabling them to question the connotations of home and how they qualify the stability and permanence of their own homes.

The six sequences within the show are bookended by such homes, presenting them as façades of a dwelling place that serves as a mere shell for more important and influencing actions that are depicted by the figures in the bookended watercolors. These

homes are placeholders for a starting point in the process of sedimentation and a final resting place through the lens of a subconscious home. The sequences in the exhibition are to be viewed as we read, from left to right. Each house structure on the left serves as a representation of a place of residency from my own childhood, directly inspired by that place, but not a reproduction. The house structures that appear on the right and thus the end of each sequence serves as an image for a subconscious home. Each of the six sequences represents the six individuals who make up my immediate family, including myself, and each of these subconscious home images are visually influenced by desires my family members have expressed for their dream homes. These houses have not only been influenced by aspirational future homes and past homes but the illustration work of Richard Scarry, the beloved children's book author.

Richard Scarry is most famous for the series of books that centered around the daily operations and unique adventures of Busytown, a town populated by a vast array of anthropomorphic animals. Despite having an animal population, Busytown is designed like any town intended for human occupation, and the houses in the *Letters Home* exhibition reference the houses in Busytown, specifically through the eye level and forward-facing perspectives. These houses are contained with heavy outlines, and detail is layered in using line work, rather than large gradients and hue shifts. The coloration of these buildings is largely flat and of high saturation levels, which are all elements that appear in the houses in the *Letters Home* exhibition. However, Scarry's houses are designed to provide context to the remainder of Busytown, unlike the houses in my own work. The houses in *Letters Home* instead are isolated and employ the technique of occupying an undefined space as mentioned in the discussion of the

work of Quentin Blake. Additionally, while the perspective of many of the three-quarter view houses in Scarry's work appears incorrect, they are in fact structurally accurate.



Fig. 3. House Hunting and Head Hunting. Watercolor and pen on Strathmore watercolor paper. 11"x14", 2017.

Instead, the line of sight for the panoramic views in his works are elongated, and three-quarter homes are often depicted from an aerial line of sight, looking downward on the houses; providing the impression of a helicopter view of the town. In contrast, the watercolor houses in *Letters Home* are presented on eye level with a front facing view, all with imperfect lines and intentionally structurally insecure style lines. Those houses that are in three-quarter view are additionally warped to expunge a feeling of stability and permanence when the image is viewed.

Throughout art history the home has been a staple in depiction, serving numerous purposes. In the time frame from Skara Brae to the contemporary, the concept of home has undergone mass change and development and has become imperative in the identity of an individual. The illustrators and artists discussed above were those imperative to the visual development of *Letters Home* and my aesthetic as an artist. The work that appears in the show is above all else honest, and this honesty is consistent throughout the works of Tudor, Blake, Cutler, Scarry, Greenaway, Wiinblad and Lawson. All contain an aesthetic that makes their work unique to them, and through their inspiration have fostered the development of the visual narrative of the *Letters Home* exhibition.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF *LETTERS HOME*

Letters Home is an exhibition composed of forty-seven watercolor and pen paintings on Strathmore paper. Thirty-three pieces are divided into six sequences with the remaining images operating as supporting single image paintings. The exhibition opened on March 31, 2018 in rooms A and B of the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Museum and the museums' main hallway.

Many of the installation choices for the exhibition were directly informed by common modes of presentation found in Western homes, specifically, my own. The gallery space is broken up into three different areas, rooms A and B of the University Museum and the main hallway. As such, these three spaces were treated as if they were individual rooms in a home. Similar to how a home may have an aesthetic or pervasive taste, the unity and cohesion of the show was considered and implemented, however, specifications of individuality were given to each sequence and single pieces as seen through matting and framing. Rooms A and B of the University Museum were ideal for the exhibition, given the architectural details, carpeting and natural lighting, which provided a more relaxed and comforting environment.

All of the pieces within the show are uniquely framed, being different styles and designs, but similar in size. For visual variation there are five frame sizes within the show: 11x14", 16x20", 12x16", 8x10" and 14x18," all directly correlating to a sequence or a single image in the exhibition. All of the forty-seven frames in the exhibition are painted the same color, a light grey that will be referred to as "Rebecca Grey" here. This is a similar grey to that which appears on the doors, window sills, and molding of

the gallery, a neutral grey that has gained popularity within homes, clothing and textiles within the last ten years. In this situation, the name Rebecca Grey is used in reference to the affinity my sister has to the color, as well as the recent development of the color as the staple home renovation choice of those under thirty. This current fad of color choice that is considered crisp and modern serves as a juxtaposition against many of the more opulent and heavy frames that appear in the show. Additionally, the frames that appear in the show not only provide unity through color, but also aid in providing both individuality to the sequences and a hierarchy within the show.



Fig. 4. Installation of Letters Home One. University Museum. Indiana University of Pennsylvania

The sequences, *Plots and Plans for Blustery Days*, and *A Swimming Pool Shaped Like a Peanut that Tastes Like the Sea* are the longest of all the sequences and are representations for those individuals with the longest life experience. The paintings are the largest, 11x14" and are in 16x20" frames with pure white matts, being the most

imposing and demanding the most attention. However, these two vary with framing, the sequence *Plots and Plans for Blustery Days* is presented in more ornate and detailed frames, while the frames of the other are straight lined and austere. The five-piece sequence, *What's Eating Bridget Bardon* has the simplest framing treatment, with thin, simple wooden frames that call the least amount of attention to them. This provides the pieces with a breathy, airy quality that reads as subdued and reserved. This is in contrast to the other five-piece sequence, *Good Luck Old Lady*, that has heavy, opulent frames that demand attention and provide a solidness and weight to the pieces. A similar solidness and weight is provided by the frames to the six-piece series, *The Bird Bath Became the Court House*. The hierarchy of the sequences is further developed by a size increase, this sequence notably being in 12x16" frames as opposed to the 11x14" frames of the three other sequences with 9x12" images in them. As previously mentioned, the sequences are representational of those immediate family members who influenced my own idea of home, and the sequence, *The Bird Bath Became the Court House* possesses a size increase because of the age of that individual.

Each space in the University Museum was treated like an individual room in a home and there are two sequences in every space with supporting single works. The framing and matting effected the decisions for where each sequence went and the ways in which they were paired. The sequences, *What's Eating Bridge Bardon* and *Pin Curls and Perms Make for A Shirley Temple Day* are in room A, and the sequences *Plots and Plans for Blustery Days* and *A Swimming Pool Shaped Like a Peanut That Tastes Like the Sea* are in room B. The sequences *The Bird Bath Became the Court House* as well as *Good Luck Old Lady* are both in the gallery hallway.



Fig.5. Installation of Letters Home Two. University Museum. Indiana University of Pennsylvania

While differing sizes, the images in *Good Luck Old Lady* are in larger and heavier frames to balance the size increase of the frames in *The Bird Bath Became the Court House*. Additionally, because of the space provided by the hallway, they are hung at larger distances from each other than the other sequences. This allows for the two to have a clear divide between them with an emphasis on the differing matt colors, as all the works in 11x14" frames have ivory matts as opposed to the white matts of the other three sequences. This differentiation in matts was done as a way of further grouping and defining the sequences. The sequences, *What's Eating Bridget Bardot* and *Pin Curls and Perms Make for A Shirley Temple Day* were designed to be presented together and both have similar frames. However, the three-piece sequence of *Pin Curls and Perms Make for A Shirley Temple Day* is the most narrative and thus is distinguished from the works in the longer, five-piece sequence.



Fig. 6. Installation of Letters Home Three. University Museum. Indiana University of Pennsylvania

As discussed in the visual influences section of this paper, micro and macro-narratives are at play within the exhibition. All of the pieces in the show work together as one macro-narrative with an overall aesthetic and unity of framing and color. Each sequence, as well as singular pieces, are intended as micro-narratives and can be viewed as detailed portions of the grand narrative. In order to provide hierarchy and individuality to each micro-narrative there are differing matt colors. The three shortest sequences have ivory matts, while the longer three have white matts. Additionally, many of the supporting images are framed and matted similarly to those in the sequences, with either white or ivory matts in Rebecca Grey frames. However, there are three supporting images that while still in Rebecca Grey frames, have colored matts. The

matting of these pieces was done so to provide visual contrast and variation to the rest of the show.

In contrast to traditional vinyl lettering, the show title appears on a hand painted, rod-iron sign, similar to those that were commonly attached to cottages and businesses in the turn of the century. While small, the sign is not supposed to be obstructive and provides a dated aesthetic that is maintained by many of the frames in the show. This sign is echoed in the first image the viewer sees upon entering the museum from the outer entrance. Additionally, while the sign has a historical connection to the identification of private dwelling to business, it symbolically stands as a real-estate sign. This serves two purposes: identifying the exhibition and alluding to signs of stability and transition within the home.

As previously mentioned each of the sequences represents a member of my immediate family, including myself, however, specific meanings and symbols are within each sequence. The sequence, *What's Eating Bridget Bardon* is the sequence representational of myself and visually addresses emotions of moving, and fluctuation in permanent residencies. All of the figures are in a state of gathering objects and mobilizing. Two images depict women toting small houses on their backs, in a similar way to backpacks. The façade of a home serves as a symbol for everything within it, and the viewer can understand these house backpacks as transitions where the figures carry their lives from place to place. Additionally, the figures are seen gathering objects that fall from the sky in a bombardment. These objects fall with no organization and are representations of the chaos and stress of moving. All of the images in the sequence

have an abundance of lamps and these lamps serve as an intimately personal representation of striving to achieve a subconscious home of my own making.

While the sequence, *What's Eating Bridget Bardon* is dedicated to moving and fluctuation the sequence, *Pin Curls and Perms Make for A Shirley Temple Day* is entirely dedicated to the creative process of making for oneself, particularly in homemaking. The three-piece sequence is the most narrative of all of the images, starting with the selection of fabric for make a dress, the sewing process and the final result. The subject matter has more to do with the concept of making and creating by hand than the manufacturing of dresses. This creative outlet was used because the individual who the sequence represents is an adept seamstress. The three pieces are a representation of a creative struggle, much like the creative struggle that can appear in a home, and often result in a lackluster result. The final piece in the sequence, with the completed dress is not a triumphant one. Instead the figure seems defeated, throwing her arm up in frustration while she is surrounded by wasted scraps. The sequence serves to illustrate the frustrations and failures that occur in the creative process of compiling a home, and how these frustrations either spur the homemaker on or deflate them.

As outline above, there are three sequences with 9x12" images, all in 11x14" frames. The last of the sequences in this smaller size is *Good Luck Old Lady*, which is dedicated to the theme of stability and support systems. The images in this sequence depict figures taking part in seemingly useless and trivial tasks but are more concerned with the fellow figures that occupy the space than the tasks. Unlike the figures in the *What's Eating Bridget Bardon* sequence the figures in the *Good Luck Old Lady*

sequence have permanence to them. They are stable and there is no chaos that threatens this stability, instead the figures are comfortable in the space they occupy. In one of the five images, two figures are seen in a state of shock. One is being struck by a swinging overhead lamp while the other is seen smashing her foot into a contorted position, breaking it. The latter figure is more concerned with comforting her friend than addressing her own pain. Here the viewer sees the most blatant support of one figure for another and this image is positioned in the very middle of the five-part sequence, serving as the climax. As mentioned in the discussion of Amy Cutler's work, while the images in the *Letters Home* exhibition may seem quaint and innocent, there are darker undertones that challenge the overidealized concept of home. Only one image in this sequence has a singular figure, and this image serves to undermine the others.

Depicted is a woman straddling a grandfather clock, a furniture piece that alludes to ancestors and heirlooms. This symbolic grandfather clock is in the early stages of catching fire with a small campfire burning below it, isolating the figure and undermining the support systems set in place by the four other pieces in the sequence.

All of the pieces in the exhibition are part of a larger macro-narrative, and each sequence connects to one another in differing ways. For this reason, the last piece in the sequence *Good Luck Old Lady* leads into the sequence, *The Bird Bath Became the Court House*. Of all of the sequences this six-piece micro-narrative is the most volatile and hostile in the images depicted. Women are seen being attacked by a flock of birds, straddling rabid foxes, being pulled into quick sand, tangled in tree roots and balancing precariously on a buoy that is drifting out to sea. The actions depicted in this sequence are fantastical, yet unnerving, with all of the figures highly vulnerable. It is the

vulnerability and emotional taxation that can come along with constructing a concept of home that this particular sequence addresses often due to the interpersonal relationships between those in a family unit.

While the action filled images in *The Bird Bath Became the Court House* sequence address the interpersonal exhaustions that occur within a home, the sequence, *A Swimming Pool Shaped Like a Peanut That Tastes Like the Sea* addresses the sometimes turbulent responsibilities of maintaining a home in the process of homemaking. This refers to the physical activities and chores that keep a household in working order. Both interior and exterior scenes are depicted in the images and all are depicted going awry. Women are seen moving and mining rocks, tending to gardens, struggling with lawnmowers and rounding up livestock, none of which are carried out with grace or ease. Instead, they carry out these duties with placid and mundane faces, alluding to the fact that creating a concept of home is a never-ending process of failures and successes with no foreseeable end.

The last of the six sequences is *Plots and Plans for Blustery Days*, this sequence is representational of my mother and the most adventure filled sequence. Like the five-piece sequence, *What's Eating Bridget Bardon*, the longer seven-piece sequence addresses concepts of moving, but the adventures that occur within moving rather than the frustrations and chaos. These whimsical adventures can easily be seen in the first piece in the sequence, which was inspired by a Quinton Blake illustration, where a female figure hoists the sail on a makeshift land sailing buggy. While many of the figures in the other sequences appear disinterested in the occurrences that happen around them, the figures in *Plots and Plans for Blustery Days* are fully engaged and

alert to their surroundings. They possess a self-awareness about themselves and are fully engaged in taking action in determining their fate.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

“Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful”

- William Morris

Letters Home is dedicated to pondering the idea of what a home is and what makes up our idea of home. For many the consideration of how individuals compose a home is unnecessary and disappointing, serving little purpose beyond Cryptozoology. However, the development of such a concept has been an integral part of the development of human existence and the ways in which we give meaning to our lives and establish a place of belonging. This thesis has considered such elements that assist with the understanding of a home as a fluctuating process of sedimentation. The act of homemaking through the accumulation of objects, physical homes, incorporation of people and the creation of recollections as well as the practical application of the “right to return” create the basis for our homes. Through these processes, humans develop homemaking philosophies unique to them and employ hybrid traditions in the claiming of their own home structure. These processes of accumulation are then implemented in the development of a subconscious home, which an individual may spend their entire life attempting, but failing, to achieve. Through the arrangement of things in the process of homemaking, we give meaning to our lives and this fosters a form of personal identity, which can be challenged and filled with implications of isolation and alienation through the influence of localism. The work and thesis of *Letters*

Home have been designed to be a tool to enable individuals to debate this topic, serving as a research aid rather than a solidified answer for my views.

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