Some Form Of Blue

Zena A. Zakanycz

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SOME FORM OF BLUE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Through my art process and material selection, I investigate how interior spaces long to accumulate memories and possessions. I am interested in encroaching floor to ceiling build-up of collected goods kept in the homes of individuals unable to discard or part with possessions. These individual's daily movements through their space and their denial of the surrounding mass informs my work. My work is larger than human scale, made of multiple units, and dense; yet understated by the subtle use of color and repeated materials. When I make an installation it often begins with creating a wall or a floor that delineates itself from the actual architecture of a room. I procure discarded domestic fragments such as carpet, shingles, and blinds. I select one material for each project to emphasize excessive quantities. I seek out donated goods and trash piles, heaps on the edge of consumer waste. The sourcing of these materials is serendipitous. I elevate these mundane materials by taking them out of their original context. The cycle of regeneration moves from material to “art object” back to material again as the work is displayed and dispersed back into the cycle of waste. In this thesis I will discuss how through my process and materials, I investigate interior spaces where memory and possessions accumulate.
SOME FORM OF BLUE

*On Total Collection*

*From childhood he dreamed of being able to keep with him all the objects in the world lined up on his shelves and bookcases. He denied lack, oblivion or even the likelihood of a missing piece. Order streamed from Noah in blue triangles and as the pure fury of his classifications rose around him, engulfing his life, they came to be called waves by others, who drowned, a world of them.*

Anne Carson

INTRODUCTION

The house is a stable unit, protecting us and all of our possessions from the outside world. I am interested in the pathways through space: from my bedroom, through the hall, to the kitchen and back again. I used to look out into a room densely populated with objects. It's dark and quiet now. The few things I do own, I could be without. There must be a shifting logic to why people keep things: sentimentality, value, the physical representation of a memory. Each are accepted and justified.
The way people presently keep things contrasts with the Depression era. Individuals once had a high value for their belongings; possessions were considered irreplaceable. Following the recession in late 2007, financial stability of consumers in the United States steadily increased. Mass consumption and the accessibility of online shopping contributed to the evolution of a throwaway society.

Physical objects are linked to memories. One may have a fear of forgetting a time passed or a piece of their identity once the object is no longer in possession. As one ages, one may be tempted to cling to physical objects as a memory loses its luster. I prefer recording images digitally over collecting possessions to trigger memory. The digital image takes up less physical space and, for me, holds more information than an object. When I am faced with only an object kept as a reminder, I sometimes forget. Why was I keeping this object?

Through my art process and material selection, I investigate how interior spaces long to accumulate memories and possessions. I am interested in encroaching floor to ceiling build-up of collected goods kept in the homes of individuals unable to discard or part with possessions. These individual's daily movements through their space and their denial of the surrounding mass informs my work. My work is larger than human scale, made of multiple units, and dense; yet understated by the subtle use of color and repeated materials. When I make an installation it often begins with creating a wall or a floor that delineates itself from the actual architecture of a room. I procure discarded domestic fragments such as carpet, shingles, and blinds. I select one material for each project to emphasize excessive quantities. If the materials are heavy and burdensome, I manipulate them through folds or cuts, weaving the pieces to form a singular
construction. Lighter materials are stacked, organized, and compressed into piles. The futile stacking falls in on itself, replenishing the chaos that was momentarily gone. Sometimes materials require stabilization, which I respond to by sewing them together. By altering these materials, I assist in adding to their history. I consider the gathering of narratives surrounding the acquisition of materials to be part of the work. I seek out donated goods and trash piles, heaps on the edge of consumer waste. The sourcing of these materials is serendipitous. I elevate these mundane materials by taking them out of their original context. The cycle of regeneration moves from material to “art object” back to material again as the work is displayed and dispersed back into the cycle of waste.

In this thesis I will discuss how through my process and materials, I investigate interior spaces where memory and possessions accumulate.

*The goal of the artist is to create a void, a rift in the texture of the world, opening a clearing in the middle of it.*

**MEMORY/HOUSE**

When one is confronted with the mass of their own possessions and incentivized to contemplate them they can gain control over their fixed self. Through my research with individuals in private space it is becoming clear to me the purpose is not to achieve an empty modernist home over the overflowing one. Instead, it is to actively consider the collection or the possession of things in order to aid an individual's ability to construct the self of their choosing.
Consider a larger part of identity is shaped not only through one’s experiences but also through interactions with others about these experiences. *From very early in life one constructs an autobiography from stories others tell about them; these are the first memories.* Each person has individualized understandings of how they construct identity through memory, but one is immersed in the unpredictable specificity of our own memories. *When I meet myself in memory I’m surprised at how insubstantial I seem, as if I were meeting the memory of a person who is composed only of memories.* It is undeniable, memory is an essential tool in one’s sense of personal continuity. *The concept of the extended self states that one is the same self in the present moment as well as all past moments.* One will recall the particular past that allows one to connect to others in various social situations even in instances where their thoughts and actions are contradictory to their concept of self.

Memory is fabricated not from reality but from emotional reactions to reality. When something is particularly traumatic it is forever burned into memory. One will return continuously to a singular moment for years or a lifetime. *A study on memory reveals that the more absurd or out of the ordinary the situation, the easier it is to remember.* If the same thing happens every day for a week it is more difficult for our mind to separate the events, feelings and thoughts. Alternately if the same situation, setting, character and action occurs again later on, it is easy to recall and forms one’s projection of déjà vu. Even mundane events through repetition become more familiar and significant in the idea of self.
Individual's perception of events can consequently be easily determined by a source and response they have experienced in the past. The mind will repeatedly take familiar pathways of thought especially in times of stress or intense sadness. This tendency makes it difficult to escape negative thoughts unless there is a conscious effort, environmental change or rupture in one’s perspective.

Gaston Bachelard

*Domestic space is the most intimate place for the creation of self through the alternating construction and reflection of memory.* This particular phenomenology is explained through poetics, as the typical order of prose and understanding of the written word inhibits our conscious comprehension of things. Place is designated as part of identity. Consider a house with more nooks and corridors as a place that has more potential to store personal histories. *The basement is the dark entity; even if it is well lit it is dark to the subconscious. This is where childhood fears metaphorically buried, beneath the home in the dark place of a dormant psyche. The attic, as its polar opposite, is a place of light, weightlessness and reflection of beauty. Here things are filed away, amassing and waiting patiently to be attended to.* When one recalls past homes, one revisits a holder of experience rather than a completely clear image of place.

These ideas of the house in relation to the body, and the fragmenting of self and eventual loss of place are explored in the art of Rachel Whiteread. She primarily casts the inside of domestic spaces or domestic objects. They are, in a sense, monuments to the essence of the everyday. Her work reconfigures the tangible relationship of full and empty spaces through self referentiality but a translation occurs as the material shifts. Space and time are called into question as the viewer experiences misaligned
perceptions of the underneath of chairs or interior of buildings. The house can be considered a mere tool of utility, constantly filling the inhabitant’s needs. When a house is a tool one can never reveal the layering and dynamic quality of the life lived within the home. This is why abandoned spaces are saturated with melancholic and nostalgic qualities; these places reveal a greater suggestion of time, autobiography and the fate of humanity.

I am interested in how parts of the home relate to the body, and which spaces tend to go unnoticed. The staircase references the spine; the hearth is the heart for which all activity occurs around its center. The bath and bed address the skin, the chair reflects body postures, the staircase evokes movements, whereas the room speaks of inhabitations. In this way the floor delineates a line for the eyes and body to pause. The floor also holds the concrete weight of the labor that has bent over and tended to it. It is one of the most modified spaces in the home. It is constantly being worn away by the tread of feet and the weight of the body in the present.

From an early age I was asked to visualize full spaces empty. My mother was a realtor and she would take me on her jobs. I enjoyed seeing the inside of other’s houses with all their things but I was especially delighted in the empty houses. They were out of use. A place that seemed to be more of a void then a home.

I moved every year as I was growing up, constantly packing up my stuff, leaving parts of my identity behind and reassembling my possessions in a new space.
I never developed an intimate relationship with any of the houses I occupied. I increasingly felt the only home I knew was the one of my own skin.

Anthony Vidler  
The house-machine is a house used only by the occupant to live in. It is a white cube of modern domestic architecture. It has been stripped of its oriental rugs and dust bunnies. Yet this house cleaning inevitably produces its own ghosts haunting the history it is trying to forget. In this way it can never truly escape its role as a domestic space but this is no longer the individual’s private space and more the collective experience of domestic space.

If the house were no longer haunted by the weight of tradition and the imbrications of generations of family drama, if no cranny was left for the storage of the bric-a-brac once deposited in damp cellars and musty attics, then the prison house of memory would be released from its unhealthy preoccupations to live in the present.

This statement supports a larger notion that it has become impossible for one to dwell. One cannot separate one’s self from the mass of one’s possessions; they lose control of their destiny. They become trapped in their conventional hole, between four walls, fixed in asphalt, which can never sink back into the world.
Yesterday I picked up a speck of blue I’d been eyeing for weeks on the ground outside my house, and found it to be a poison strip for termites. Noli me tangere, it said, as some blues do. I left it on the ground.

A male satin bowerbird would not have left it there. A male satin bowerbird would have tottered with it in his beak over to his bower, or his “trysting place,” as some field guides put it, which he spends weeks adorning with blue objects in order to lure a female. Not only does the bowerbird collect and arrange blue objects—bus tickets, cicada wings, blue flowers, bottle caps, blue feathers plucked off smaller bluebirds that he kills, if he must, to get their plumage—but he also paints his bower with juices from blue fruits, using the frayed end of a twig as a paintbrush. He builds competitively, stealing treasures from other birds, sometimes trashing their bowers entirely.

When I see photos of these blue bowers, I feel so much desire that I wonder if I might have been born into the wrong species.
Perhaps I’m Building a Bower:

I process architectural materials with a textile sensibility. My inclination is to accumulate these materials and alter them. They are touched by my hand, shredded, mended, stacked and organized to reference pattern in a system. Blinds off their stringy armature become once again structurally sound when sewn overlapping in stacks. Cardboard walls create their own beauty in linear quality and tactility. Markings on the cotton tile reference architectural planning but are actually stitched. The labor is made visible. Each unit of material is attended to and altered, in the same way, through my process.

If I am a bowerbird my obsession is the process of making. *I Can Always Get More* was a verbal threat to me but is also something I have found myself thinking in relation to my own material possessions. Using stacked cardboard, I created an installation whose boundaries bled into the warehouse space. As I drove through the alleyways of Richmond, I saw cardboard everywhere. The project required more cardboard than I had anticipated. As I kept adding it would compress. Like objects in the house, each sliver became less important as a wall was created filling the space between the two support beams.
The hallway structure is an attempt to access liminal space. The viewer is transported from the space of reality by entering the installation. The installation space becomes a place holder until they enter back into the space of reality once more. Borrowing the language of theatrical performance, I wanted the viewer to move through my installation like performers go through the motions within a set. The space was oppressive with its inward leaning walls. The aging cardboard, salvaged from the alleys muffled the sound of the surrounding warehouse and gave the hallway a distinct smell. This interior space was an alternative from the warehouse; an interior space that feels like an exterior in its vastness. At the end of the hallway a grouping of mantles signified the home in a state of transition. Behind the mantles there was a singular lavender plant whose view is partially obstructed by a small cardboard box. This created a singular
intimate moment of smell and breath, triggering the hope of life outside of this psychological space.

Fig. 2: Detail of I Can Always Get More, 2015

Two Stories: Untitled #1

*It seems long ago now; the feeling was desperation.*

*It was early and he was asleep.*

*my first experience, what would happen, when he wasn’t there?*

*Progress, or so I felt necessary*

*I kept looking at that thing, used so much it was useless if he rested there it could crumble under him.*

*There was no clearing to remove it.*

*I had work to do.*
where to start?

overwhelmed till it became obvious

start from the door, create this pathway that was all.

I still don’t know where the logic or order came from,

mostly I was just breaking down boxes

when it emerged into the daylight it was hauled away on a truck

I wish I could say my work was done.

Zena Zakanycz

I consider my artist practice to be different from a more traditional form of making. My practice is driven by the process of collection and altering of my materials. When collecting, I can get into a rhythm of accumulating. I have a hard time locating the mass of one material that I need for the installation in the beginning. As I collect, the process becomes intuitive and then difficult to stop. The stopping point is the amount of space the installation is able to fill. When the artwork is done it is an artifact of my process more than it is an art object.

I use installation as an immersive bodily experience suspending the viewer from the mundane. I intend for the viewer to enter into an emotional space that evokes empathy. This experience might be one of navigating through a space that is almost filled to the brim. This space is in a state of transition, as it can always be added to or taken down and reconfigured in a new installation of the material in an alternative site.
Collecting Dust and General Cleanliness:

I collect white things that become coverings. Like the snow they blanket over and muffle reality.

One day driving down the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles, I saw a building and the lot it was on coated in white paint. It was perplexing and surreal. After I had passed it, I saw the lot from a panoramic view in my mind like I was from a distance looking down on this little utopia. It was an art project by Vincent Lamouroux, who had appropriated this landscape and covered it in white paint to delineate it from reality.

Another reason I like hues of white are their ability to collect. All my white clothes are stained.

In my work, off-white objects collect dirt, dust, and hair. In I Have Tried to Keep Clean, I laid cotton tiles out on the floor; when I turned them over they had collected dust.

I took these tiles around collecting dust privately in my house, the studio and classrooms. I felt comfortable dragging the tiles around picking it up to reveal what it looked like on the other side. This became an inversion of the expected, I was cleaning the dust by adhering it to my own fabricated floor. I only collected in places I had cleaned before. These were the places I inhabited, cared for and wanted to keep clean. One night in the critique room I turned the light off and did a performance for myself. I skated around the room listening to the dragging of the tile underneath my foot. I
became aware of the empty room, the floor and the walls as barriers designating the space of collection.

Fig. 3: Detail of I Have Tried To Keep Clean, 2015.

MATERIAL

Strange Encounters:

The following are excerpts of conversations I had with community members in Richmond, VA while sourcing my materials.

For The Love of Jesus Thrift Store South

Ed:

This is a warehouse space with a sparse collection of always changing goods.

My roommate and I would frequent this thrift store. Ed, the guy at the front desk would call us "Thelma and Louise" which I liked because it made me feel like I was coming into the thrift store and haggling the prices of my materials down.
One day I was by myself, I asked “Hey Ed, where do you think most of this stuff comes from?” In particular, I was referring to the architectural remnants and hardware assortments I often purchased. He explained how large contracting projects often have excess after a job that they can’t use, so they donate these objects as a tax write off. Then he said “…or from dead people’s houses”.

Habitat for Humanity, Restore, Richmond/ Henrico

Jane Helfrich:

   Jane got her start by being involved in the Junior League of Richmond, an organization that has been around since the 1920s. They describe themselves as a group of women who seek to find solutions to the community’s problems. The Restore is part of a model, adopted by the Junior League, as a diversification of funds has been around since the 1940s. It serves as a way to raise funds for Habitat’s Mission, to build and renovate houses for families in need. It is not intended to be a platform for people to buy low cost gently used architectural material and hardware, even though it functions this way. The Restore does not serve as a donation hub for the actual building of these habitat homes of course there are a few exceptions. Jane describes these as common misconceptions of the Restore and hopes that everyone feels comfortable shopping there and is inspired to bring in more donations to increase the raising of funds for the mission. These profits will go toward buying specific materials or services for the affordable housing side that will offer individuals in the program this opportunity.

   The Habitat Restore attempts to curate the material donated as much as possible. They seem to track purchases in order to continuously stock materials that are
selling and not take in more materials that are considered waste. This is not to say they
turn away useable materials such as mismatched fan blades or cabinet fixtures.
However, they don't see half used paint cans as a profitable thing to stockpile. Since the
turn around on particular items is not as fast and the storeroom floor is valuable real
estate.

Craigslist, Richmond/ Norfolk

Kenneth:

After my construction of I Can Always Get More I had a hard time figuring out
how to return the cardboard into circulation in a way I felt good about. As with most art
exhibitions the work had to come down and be removed from the space. I looked into
donating it to the recycling plants or paper companies for two months and the prospects
were going to cost me financially and physically. I realized that I had so easily collected
my way into this mess but I had no way to get rid of it. I posted on Craigslist desperate
for the community to help me by taking some of this cardboard off of my hands. Within
24 hours I got a call from Kenneth who demanded I take the ad down because he was
“going to come get all of it.” I held up my end and a week later he showed up with his
pickup truck and his son. They loaded 9 truckloads to take to the recycling plant to get a
return. I went back one day to check on the progress. They made a cart out of cabinet
doors to use to move the cardboard from the installation to the truck. At the end he said
I had collected 4,500 lbs. of cardboard. I didn’t ever see them move it. Now I feel like
this is the only way it could have been done. I had a physiological block and felt that I
couldn't move the cardboard by myself. I don't even think I could have been there for
the installations removal but I felt so relieved when it was over.
AC Filters

“Where did you get these from?
Why are you getting rid of them?”

Man #1: “I bought them from a wholesale store and thought that I could use them in some of my properties but they weren’t the right size. I tried cutting them down but it didn’t work very well. So I decided to sell the rest of them for what I bought them for. Normally I sell stuff on eBay but I didn’t want to bother with shipping so I just put them up on Craigslist.”

“Where did you get these from?
Why are you getting rid of them?”

Man #2: “My buddy had these just lying around when he was cleaning out his garage. I don’t know where he got them from but I guess he couldn’t use them. I told him I could get rid of them for him.”

“Where did you get these from?
Why are you getting rid of them?”

Chad: “I’m always looking for stuff on auctions, one night I was pretty drunk and I got on an online auction and saw these filters. I got so excited and thought that I could use them for my house and I would never have to buy filters again. I figure I could save a lot of money this way. I went and got them from the school it was three truckloads. When I got back to my house I realized they were not the right size. So I tried selling them, I contacted a few heating/cooling places but they weren’t really interested. I was going to
have to sell them individually but that was going to be a lot of work so I really wanted to just sell them as a lot.”

The filters took up most of a room in his house and as we were moving them out I felt really good about clearing out this space for him. The room was also occupied by an assortment of other projects and collectables he had. Every time we would go into the room something else would be uncovered: an old control board for a local television station and some old stage lights he planned on converting into industrial lamps. He explained the few cars in the yard that he was planning to Frankenstein together to make a one of a kind ride. He said he had an ATM machine in the kitchen because he saw it on an auction and had to have it. I also saw a collection of dead plants on the patio as we were leaving. The initial feeling of excitement around the clearing of space faded as I drove away. I realized the room was likely to be refilled with accumulations again. I’m still trying to find meaning in my making. I settled on the process being more important than the product. In this way my movement of the material from this house to the gallery and the collection of this story create a practice I feel important to express.

Dust As Metaphor:

156. Why is the sky blue? - A fair enough question, and one I have learned the answer to several times. Yet every time I try to explain it to someone or remember it to myself, it eludes me. Now I like to remember the question alone, as it reminds me that my mind is essentially a sieve, that I am mortal.
Dust is a metaphor for my practice. I try to remove possessions from their location and evaluate their value in how people construct themselves. But like dust these possessions are always regenerating. Objects are produced and consumed at such a rapid rate. I cannot make an impact. Through my work, nothing will slow or ever reverse. No space will remain empty and out of use but full of potential. My practice feels futile when these things are brought to the surface. I find comfort in the words of Maggie Nelson and thinking about dust.

Dust is a common particle, the thing from which everything is made, consistently present, airborne, settling and cycling back. Dust is accumulating on the ground around our feet, silently on all our possessions. It is in the air and causes us to see the atmosphere in different colors, refracting light, sending us information. Dust creates beauty in our natural surroundings subtly creating colors of sky, shaping clouds and making each sunset unique. While it is essential to diffusing daylight it could also be vital to one’s very being. In this way at times it even alters our mood. Dust is the evidence of time passing. Existing in the past and the future simultaneously and in the least substantial way. It documents bodies movements through space by stirring and
settling in the most stagnant places. It questions value within each home as an indication of dirty or clean space.

My work has shifted from making objects to a form of architectural space. This takes the form as alternative space as opposed to a covering of the preexisting space within the site of the installation.

The tile floor is appealing and relevant to my practice, specifically a particular pattern that seems both abundant and neither low nor highbrow. It is one of a white grid with smaller grids inside the tile. In my childhood home it was white it was always clean until it was not. Then it was steam cleaned so thoroughly it made me question the value of cleanliness. Is the floor the most important or the easiest thing to keep clean?

![Image](image.png)

Fig. 4: *I Have Tried To Keep Clean*, 2015.

In *I Have Tried to Keep Clean* I needed a tile that was as malleable and available to be altered as it was begging to be dirtied and then cleaned. The process involved
using the tiles to clean the floor of my own places. It seemed poetic to collect the fragmented scraps of life left in the corners of rooms I have occupied, been responsible for and returned to. After these tiles were used to clean and covered with a trace of existence in the form of dust they became samples of place. I quilted the back by sewing through the tiles to an additional layer of fleece on the back. This technique made them stable, singular units that no longer fell apart. One side would be left white and untouched, pristine and synthetic bearing only the polyester fleece.

The second element in the installation is a stack of 64 gallons of tile cleaner enough to clean a floor of my installations size for 64 weeks. The cleaner will never actually be able to clean my floor. It will absorb into the cotton just as the dirt, dust and hair has. It is futile, an ability to clean that is never fulfilled and thus is only a spectator to the floor. The jugs of cleaner become artifacts of a repetitive process: a continual preparation for an event that will never occur.

Two Stories: Untitled #2

We moved,

this was a space left over.

A time capsule from that moment,

What was not good enough to move or not to exist in that full house in the first place?

It wasn't even worth keeping but we had to keep it.

It was in a hallway. Isn't it always?

Actually it was in front of my room, maybe I added my own things I had tried to get rid of one step closer out the door.

It was kept. He paid its rent for 7 years, 90 dollars a month.
Where is it now? How could we move it into the house now?

But it's back there, right by the door.

This one was different, it moved from new jersey after he died. Old tools, furniture, papers. Keepsakes, valuable stuff, who knows where it is in there? No one.

Or if it's even worth it?

Is anything even worth it? Would he be happy? Would anyone? He, He, Them or me

She would be happy, my mother, thrilled at the organization, the progress, the lack, clutter in her cluttered life.

Maybe I would too. Looking into that blank, white, vista, in my mind, the space is empty.

Loneliness:

71. I have been trying, for some time now, to find dignity
in my loneliness. I have been finding this hard to do.

Maggie Nelson

72. It is easier, of course, to find dignity in one’s solitude.
Loneliness is solitude with a problem. Can blue solve the problem, or can it at least keep me company within it?
—No, not exactly, it cannot love me that way; it has no arms. But sometimes I do feel its presence to be a sort of wink—Here you are again, it says, and so am I.
If You Can’t Care for Yourself,

How Could You Care for Anything Else?

For this installation, I made three separate components: clearance or dead plants, new and used air filters, and mop water collected from the Depot Gallery. I took care in the collection of each item and the duration of collection was delineated by the show’s opening date. I put out a call for dead plants and went to Lowe’s every weekend to buy the clearance plants. I sourced the air filters from the Habitat for Humanity Restore, Craigslist, thrift stores and the dumpster behind the art building. Before the installation I collected the mop water from cleaning the depot space.

Mop Water

I wanted an element of immediacy and site specificity with this installation. Upon entering the Depot Gallery, I was drawn to the floor and the crevices between the wooden blocks. I highlighted and increased the impact of the separation of my room, drawing attention to this boundary and to my own emotional space. I settled on the task of cleaning the wood floor and saving the mop water. In a way the mop water would preserve other remnants from this building’s past history into the new function as a gallery and then the site of my installation. The mop water preserves my own trace and those that experienced the space with me. It is a distilled artifact of time and the labor to clean the floor. This action is a recurring process in domestic space but could be in any
place where humans dwell. The floor must be cleaned and maintained. This artifact is just dirty mop water, valueless, distended for disposal.

Air Conditioning

This wall is repetition of air filters used for the collection of dust. They are a replaceable lung for a building. The compacted dense cloth of an air filter is designed to catch all unwanted particles. Overtime, it traps all bodily or environmental matter. They are supposed to be changed out and discarded every three months in each house and building that humans inhabit. This dust seems to speak to a duration that could range from significant to mundane by the individual dweller. As one inhabits multiple places, the home, work or school this trace is maintained through space. My dust particle seems the same as those that have
lived before me and every individual who inhabits the space alongside me in the present. My dust was left in old houses, all of them, even if only in small amounts.

![Image](image.png)

*Fig. 6: Detail of If You Can’t Care for Yourself, How Could You Care for Anything Else?, 2016*

Plants

There is denial in keeping dead plants. We can't actually communicate with them. “Are you going to make it out of this okay?” “What do you need to survive?” “Do you like it here?”

I am reminded about the lack of communication an individual has in a community. This lack leads to their inevitable failure, in an attempt, to help each other. These plants are symbolic; they represent the hope for a breakthrough: a condition will be improved
and they will suddenly spring back to life. They would presumably stay healthy for some years and then drift back into death at the first freeze or sign of neglect.

Two of my father's interests seem to overlap at this point: gardening and helping others. Since his retirement, he has served the community as a master gardener, working in community gardens that contribute to the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables to low income people in his community. This humanitarian instinct has affected me and my interest in sourcing materials for the betterment of my community. I find myself looking to secondhand locations and donating back into non-profits that outreach to local individual's needs.

Another display of his humanitarian compulsion is his collection of unwanted, dead or dying plants. Ideally these plants would flourish but they are at a disadvantage and my father is unable to care for them. I think he spreads himself too thin trying to care for all of these possessions, contributing to his identity as a caretaker and a giving individual. He becomes overwhelmed and can't take care of them all. The plants dry up or freeze in the driveway waiting for the next season where they can sprout anew. Maybe some part of them is still alive in this dried up soil. If not there will always be more to be collected maybe this time to be restored or to meet the same fate. The result does not seem to have the importance as the process. In this way I feel bonded to my father. We are linked in these same psychological states. In an endless cycle of experiencing hope and loss. We now live apart and I turn to a feeling of loneliness within us. We are lonely together with others.
Each new phase of aloneness reveals that you were previously less alone than you thought.

This more profound isolation may register, at first, as paralysis.

If it soothes you to lie back in the dirt, then lie back,

The moon shines everywhere.

Jennifer Egan


