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UNTIL ONE RESEMBLES THE OTHER

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

By

Chad Mundie

B.A. Studio Art & B.A. Digital Studies at University of Mary Washington, 2018

Program Director: Stephen Vitiello

Committee: Bob Paris, Pamela Taylor Turner, and Will Connally,

Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA May 2022

“When we inherit, we also inherit the proximity of certain objects, as that which is available to us, as given within the family home. These objects are not only material: they may be values, capital, aspirations, projects, and styles. Insofar as we inherit that which is near enough to be available at home, we also inherit orientations, that is, we inherit the nearness of certain objects more than others, which means we inherit ways of inhabiting and extending into space.”

- Sarah Ahmed, British-Australian writer and scholar¹

¹.Sara Ahmed, “Orientations,” in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 86.

VITA

Chad Mundie was born in Fredericksburg, Virginia in 1996, and raised in a three-bedroom, one story house in Louisa, Virginia. He received his BA at the University of Mary Washington in 2018, and his MFA at Virginia Commonwealth University in 2022.

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For your conversation, encouragement, patience and support:

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ABSTRACT

A written accompaniment to Chad Mundie's thesis exhibition titled *Until One Resembles The Other*, conceived during the years 2021-22 and installed at The Anderson Gallery, Richmond from April 9-22nd.

The following writing explores themes of labor within the home, generational knowledge, interiority, exteriority, and emotional residue through a series of essays surrounding areas of interest within my practice. The writing concludes with documentation of the show and an accompanying explanatory text.

FOREWORD

One summer in high school, my dad called me out of my room to help him with something in the crawlspace. After rummaging through the laundry room closet to get all of his tools we stepped outside and went around the side of the house to a small hatch that served as the crawlspace entrance. Opening the half-size door there seemed to be no interior, just a wall of black. Unfazed, my dad hunched over and disappeared inside. I followed suit and we walked in a half-walk half-crawl as we made our way a few feet to a silver sheet metal box that housed the main hub of the air conditioning system. Over the past few days my dad had noticed that the condenser was starting to drip and wasn't being caught by the internal mechanisms meant to collect this runoff. The water was pooling down to the foundation line, weakening the base of the entire home. Unless it was addressed, the leak would eventually send our home crashing down on itself.

My dad started a career as a floor installer over two decades ago, a job he picked up out of necessity when I was born. Often sharing the jobsite with other tradesmen, he slowly accumulated experience in his trade, as well as a grab bag of facts and figures learned through his interactions with others working in and around the home. Fortified by this growing material

knowledge, my dad could figure out a way to fix anything that would go awry in and around the house. Most of the time this did not mean a by-the-book remedy or fix that you would get a specialist to come to your house to do. These fixes would often include a bricolage of disparate items from every corner of his existence. My dad would bring home the scraps from newly built homes or other buildings he worked in and they would accumulate in different areas, a stockpile. A lot of the time he didn't know where they would end up, but he knew that one day that 2" x 3" piece of wood would come in handy and be exactly what he needed. He supplemented these construction off-cuts with items he would happen upon in his day-to-day life. He would, on many occasions, pull over while driving for what he deemed a "perfectly good bungee strap" laying on the side of the road.

In the predicament of the leak, my dad cobbled together an old fish tank, a motorized pump from the hardware store (something he eventually caved in and bought due to the lack of anything that functioned in a remotely similar way), and a bit of garden hose to not only collect the water, but funnel this runoff safely away from the foundation of the home. This collage of items, never before combined in any circumstances, still operates under my childhood home.

The water slowly rises and activates the sensor on the pump, which in turn springs into life and sends the liquid out from the crawlspace. If you are quiet on summer nights, you can hear the

mechanism cut on and off, a quiet performance and sculpture never meant to be watched or seen.

HIDDEN LABOR

A coupling of material knowledge and ingenuity is a trait that I value in my own practice as a sort of generational knowledge. Nearly all my family members have worked in blue-collar trades in and around the home. My grandpa painted houses, my grandma restored antique furniture, my dad installed floors, and my mom was a homemaker. Throughout my life I was given access to the knowledge of what brought together the livable spaces we inhabited, as well as an extensive understanding of the systems in our walls and under the floors that made the living space function. On many occasions I would be helping someone fix something in these in-between spaces while hearing people going about their lives in the domestic space. The muffled voices and groans of the floors gave me a feeling that bordered secrecy and intrusion. There was a sense of privilege and power to having the knowledge of what made up the life force of the home, and being able to touch it all with your hands.

Holding the flashlight serves as the entry point for many kids when it comes to the passing of knowledge in trades. Nearly every weekend of my childhood would involve me being called into the living room to help with a project, and by “helping” they meant serving as an

armature to hold a beam of light onto the work area. These tableau orbs, surrounded by darkness, resembled the spotlight in a theater, framing a scene in which two hands communicated back and forth. The scene would change when we would move a few feet or to another angle, all our attention focused on the interplay of flesh and fixture.

These experiences of labor within the home push me to work faithfully with the objects and settings I am creating. I am thinking about the authenticity that comes with making sure everything is right and mirrors the way it would appear in the interior of the home, but also thinking about the assemblage of components that come together behind the scenes to support and enable the appearance of cohesion and structure. Film sets often follow the same premise, focusing solely on the facade offered in front of the camera. All the backs of the sets show the labor that went into the construction. In much of the sculptural work I have been making, film sets have inspired the way I construct sections of the home. In this way, I am able to offer the viewer a glimpse at the intricacy of the interior scene, and the forces at play that support and facilitate the scene.

*“I do not doubt interiors have their interiors, exteriors have their exteriors, and that the eyesight
has another eyesight, and the hearing another hearing, and the voice another voice”*

- Walt Whitman, *Assurances*²

² Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass*. Trubner, 1881. 461



Image of a space between walls pulled from the internet³

³ <https://weburbanist.com/2008/05/11/5-modern-secret-room-dreams-and-nightmares-from-creative-hideouts-to-dreadful-spaces>



Theater spotlight⁴

⁴ <https://stock.adobe.com/video/Empty-theater-stage-with-red-velvet-curtains-with-spotlights./284926843>

BEYOND THE INTERIOR

In 1972, Bruce Nauman created the work *Audio-Video Underground Chamber* under the initiative of Anny de Decker and Bernd Lohaus at their Antwerp Gallery. The work consists of a concrete void buried outside the building, with a microphone and camera feed relayed inside the gallery. Both feeds relay a perpetual stillness, with nothing visual or audible coming across the feed. The lack of stimulus brings attention to the interior displayed in the work, the four corners, a floor, and a ceiling, all the basic elements of what could be viewed as an interior space. In fact, the work shows us an interior within an interior, something akin to the model of a 4d cube. The room within the earth, the room displayed inside the gallery, the room inside the monitor, all of these views on the work blur the boundaries of what we deem to be interior space. Much of Nauman's other work also looks at the relationship between architecture and interiority. In Nauman's *Performance Corridor*, we see ourselves within the confines of the corridor on two stacked television screens. We are sandwiched in interiority, we are inside the gallery, inside the corridor, and inside the video.

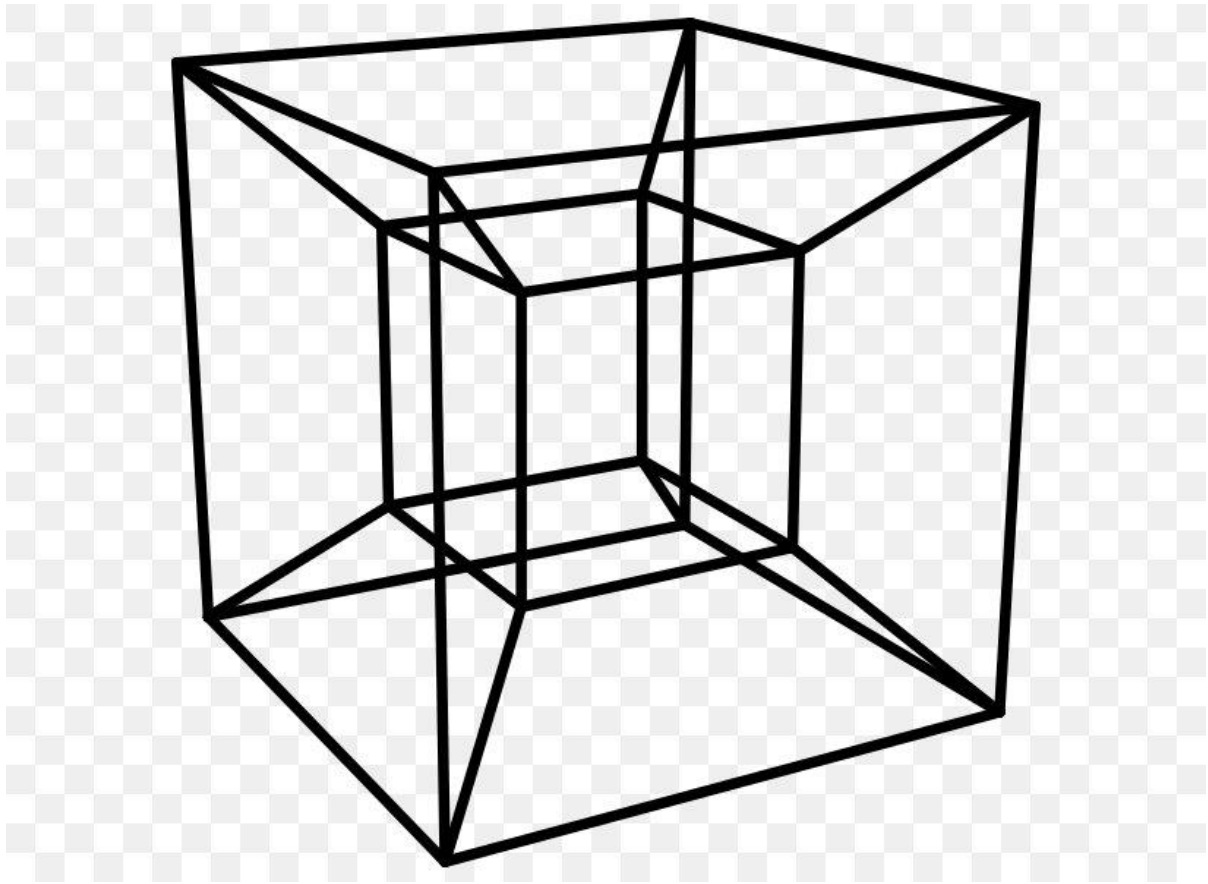
In some of my recent work I am also delving into this layered interiority, thinking about how even the interior we conceive of in a home, is surrounded by and envelopes other interior spaces. The living space we deem as the interior is flanked on all sides by the spaces in which the pipes and wires run. We operate our domestic lives nested in a perpetually folding system of what is interior and exterior. How do we interact with these spaces? Where do they stand in our perception of the home and its environment?

I think of this same quandary of what is interior and exterior when it comes to the setting and feeling of the domestic space at a given time. We can all recall a time when we walked into a room and felt an emotional tension palpable in the air. This tonal shift reacclimates the way we interact with the space and the people in it. I believe this same effect happens on a larger and more intricate level. The home serves like a sponge for our emotions and the interior of our mind becomes mirrored in the external environment around you.



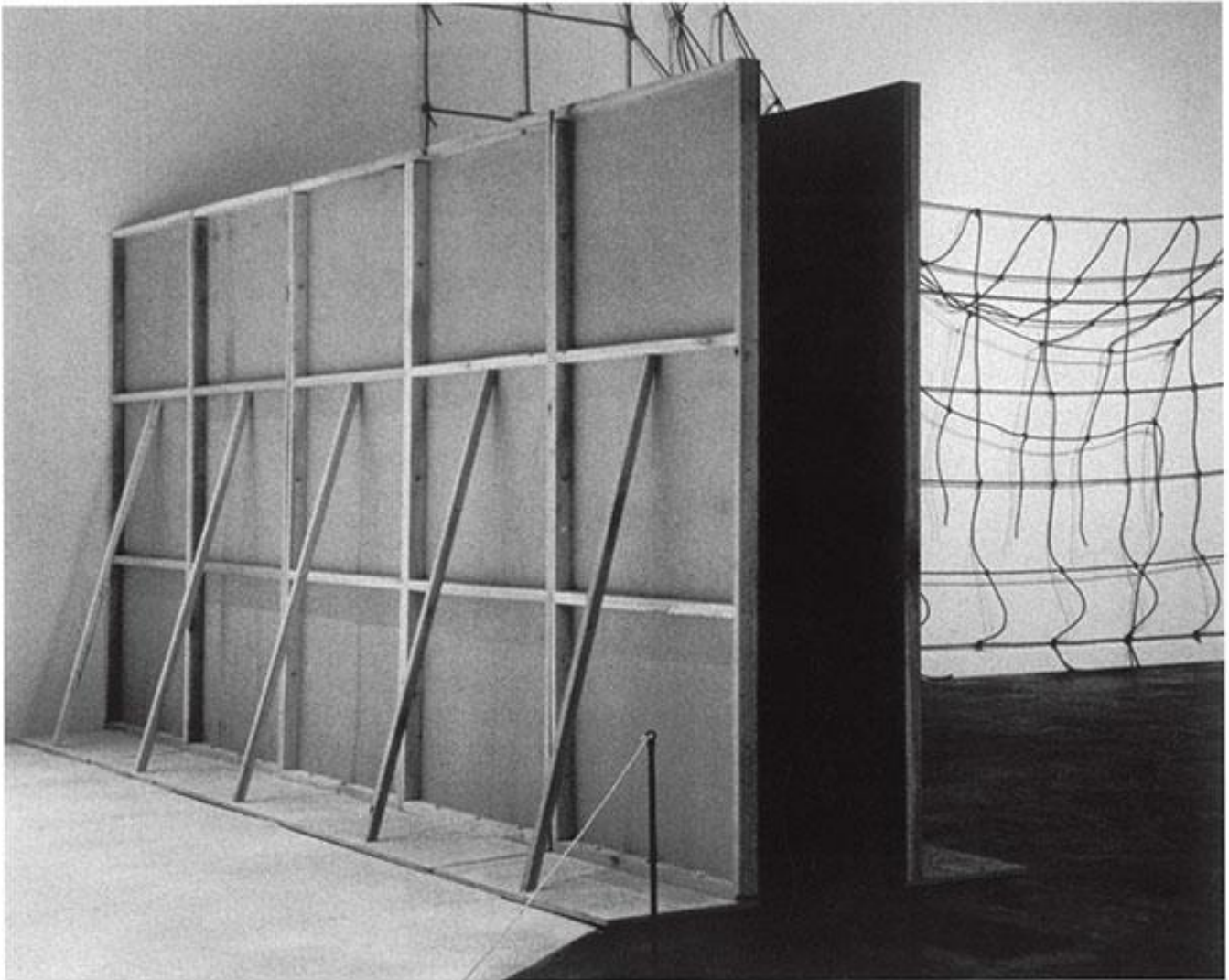
Audio-Video Underground Chamber, Nauman⁵

⁵ Ines Gebetsroither, "Bruce Nauman, Audio-Video Underground Chamber, 1972/1974," mumok, accessed April 17, 2022, https://www.mumok.at/en/blog/bruce_nauman.



Transparent model of a four dimensional cube⁶

⁶ Yinweichen, "File:Tesseract Mark.svg," Wikimedia Commons, December 21, 2015, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tesseract_Mark.svg.



Performance Corridor, Nauman⁷

⁷ 2014, THE EXPERIENTIAL TURN Dorothea Von Hantelmann, 2014,
<https://walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/experiential-turn>.



*View inside Performance Corridor*⁸

⁸ Janet Kraynak, *Dependent Participation: Bruce Nauman's Environments* (MIT Press Direct, 2003), <https://direct.mit.edu/grey/article-abstract/doi/10.1162/15263810260573245/10393/Dependent-Participation-Bruce-Nauman-s?redirectedFrom=fulltext>.

EMOTIONAL RESIDUE

In the Bible, Leviticus 14 begins by describing what to do when someone gets leprosy. It lists all the necessary actions to attempt in order to heal the afflicted person. Later, in Leviticus 14:37, it describes what to do if a house gets leprosy, with stains deeper than the surface of the wall. It describes a home being susceptible to disease, catching it from its inhabitants and mimicking the symptoms we show. Depictions of the home having life of its own date back millenia; they have been seen as entities with consciousness, eagerly observing and taking note of the conditions within, which it then begins to follow in its own way.

When working on a home, you always offer a bit of yourself: sweat, blood, and your breath fills the empty gaps between the walls. You take care of the home because it takes care of you. This symbiotic relationship folds in on itself in perpetuity. The dust around you is 20-50% dead skin, blanketing the surfaces in micrometers, circulating through the air ducts. Our fingerprints, oils, and acids from our skin smooth the imperfections on furniture and the walls. You become a part of the home, and the home a part of you. In the *Ma'aseh Tuviyah*, an encyclopedia published in 1707, the flayed torso

of a man is placed parallel to a diagram of the home. The organs in the image are labeled and matched with rooms and fixtures within the home. The domestic is shown as bodily, and mirrored in the same way that the bodily is domestic.

Philosopher Jean Paul Sartre says he can remember every bedroom he's ever slept in, and in the same sense of imprint, most of my dreams are set within the confines of some version of a space I've been in. These familiar spaces collide with emotion, anxiety, and relationships to morph and act as stages for events manifested from the subconscious. In a sense the spaces I have occupied are inescapable in that they stick with me forever. On the opposite side of the equation, I believe who we are and what we do lodges itself into the essence of a space, imparting a lasting effect I examine in my practice.

Paranormal experts often attribute intense energies in an environment as the catalyst and fuel source for apparitions. Unfinished business, tragic demise, and passing away suddenly have all been touted as reasons why someone's soul embeds itself into a space. In my objects and videos, I use the same rationale, imagining that objects and spaces come to life and morph as a result of feelings and interactions in the home.

Imagination and association transform mundane objects and scenery into living incarnations of the home within our mind. Erupting from a shell of mundanity is an undercurrent of what happened in the object's past life. How can the concept of something being haunted, or having embedded emotion, be shifted and explored as a mode of storytelling? Can it be a collaborative fabric of emotion woven by all the events, conversations, and emotions enacted by its residents?

“If I’m sitting alone at home on a dark and stormy night, and I glance nervously up towards the bedroom doorway, my fear is not that my house is being haunted by a spirit called Mabel who died in the 19th century at the age of fourteen and is constantly seeking her favorite teddy bear...because all of these details both humanize her and make her ridiculous.

My fear is that there will be something standing in the doorway, because the doorway is where things come to stand.

Because unoccupied spaces, in our imaginations, must find something to fill them.”

-Mike Chapman (writer of Eskew podcast)⁹

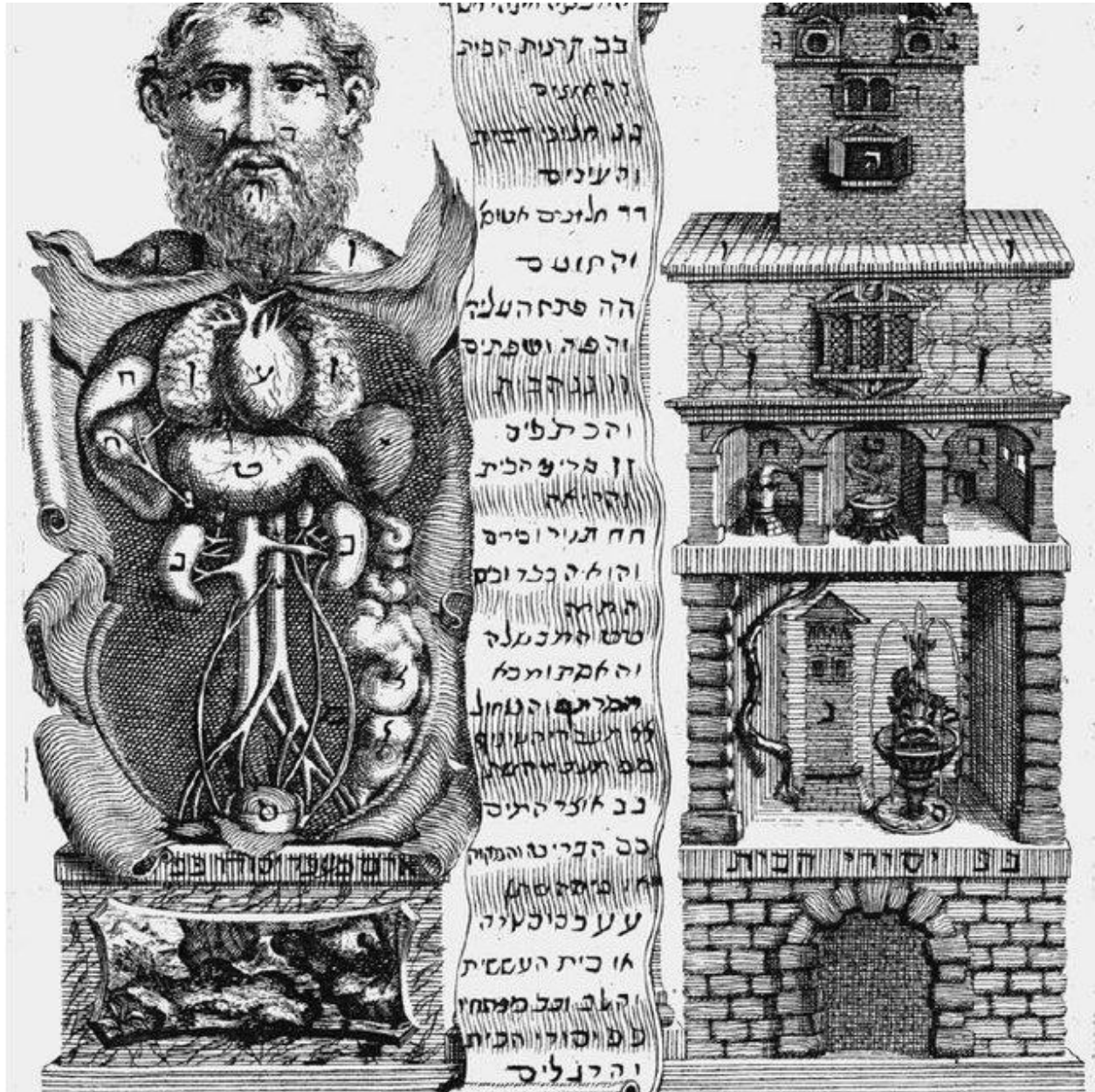
⁹ Mike Chapman, ed., “Mike Chapman - Eskew Interview,” Mike Chapman - Eskew Interview (Google, January 20, 2020), <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gCvH2GMNPuij-HI0RmORofqTKhONnKalLBxwanjje2I/edit>.

For much of my childhood I was afraid of the scenario in which *something* came to get me as soon as I slipped up and left my foot outside the blankets or I couldn't get up the stairs quick enough after cutting out the light. It wasn't a fear of a ghost: we lived in a house built in 2001, we knew the previous owners were both alive and well. At a certain point I knew it was all in my mind, but I couldn't help but think about once something got into your home, a sense of comfort that we often take for granted is shattered. I think I was more afraid of that sense of comfort leaving me, and to lose that mindset of the home being like a fortress. I knew that at home I was vulnerable.

In Mark Fisher's *The Weird and the Eerie*, Fisher posits that one of the reasons the horror within the writings of HP Lovecraft land on a personal level is due to the setting in which it occurs. "It is the irruption into this world of something from outside which is the marker of the weird."¹⁰ The unremarkable landscape of New England serves as a point of reference for the reader, in which Lovecraft's eldritch terrors contrast. We are to understand that the world in Lovecraft's writing is our own, which grounds us and

¹⁰ Mark Fisher, "The Weird," in *The Weird and the Eerie* (Random House Inc, 2017), p. 15.

allows us to imagine ourselves in the character's situation. Much in the same way a landscape painter will place a figure within the frame to show the monumental scale of the scenery. The home acts as this "figure in the frame" in my work, serving as the setting in which the forces of emotion and memory materialize and interact with the domestic. The home offers a blanket of comfort that is familiar to many and creates a connection of shared experience. Walls, floors, and doors become anyone's through this shared totem, but the scenes and objects begin to tell a more singular story.



The human body as a house, from Tobias Cohen, *Ma'aseh Tuviah* (1708)¹¹

¹¹ Etienne Lopicard, February 2008, ResearchGate, February 2008, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5669155_An_Alternative_to_the_Cosmic_and_Mechanic_Metaphors_for_the_Human_Body_The_House_Illustration_in_Ma'aseh_Tuviah_1708.

UNTIL ONE RESEMBLES THE OTHER

Until One Resembles the Other is an exploded room, four walls and a floor, cross sections and holes in the structure of the home revealing sections of cast plaster bodies serving as frozen gestures of a home changing and altering itself slowly. These gestures and scenes are lit by focused spotlights, mimicking the appearance of both the flashlight and the stagelight. Flesh and fixture are in stages of mirroring, morphing to what lies beyond their spaces. On one of the walls is a projected video alternating between shots of labor happening inside and outside of a wall, contrasting with shots of the wires and pipes that reside in these utility spaces. This looping video serves as a record of the labor that happens within the home, as well as the interior environment inside the walls and under the floor. In the middle of the configuration of walls lies a section of floor cut open to reveal a dirt lined crawl space where a hand has been ensnared by a rodent trap.

The way in which the components of the room are presented, free-standing from one another, is intended as a means of separating the immediate functional role of the structure. Distancing them from each other allows the viewer to regard the wall or floor as an object, lifted from another place and come to rest in the gallery space. Much of my

practice operates under this same approach, displacing fragments from the home in the starkness of the gallery space as a means of highlighting mundanity and how the home and the objects within it become odd when separated from the environment we have become so accustomed to seeing them in. The home is our corner of the world, but what happens when pieces of it migrate to other spaces? How do we delineate space and pick which objects live in each space? Does the space choose the object, or the object choose the space? All of these questions were considered in the fabrication of the installation and where each aspect of the work was placed.

Ultimately, this exploration of interiority and exteriority is a lifelong endeavor in my work. For me the way in which we chose to occupy space, and our effect on it, is what interests me to work with the home in contrast with the gallery. Outside the home we are free from it being the domineering structure, we can look at it from a new perspective, free from its influence. I consider this installation a biopsy of the ever-shifting hallucination of home that inspires my practice. The structures and elements are cut open in an anesthetized state for the audience to witness before the specimen is sewn back up and comes to.

DOCUMENTATION



Until One Resembles The Other, 2022

Installation; Lumber, Drywall, Carpet, Paint, Spackle, Joint Tape, Plaster, Vanity, Tile, Mortar, Electrical Outlet, Watercolor Paint, Wire, Painter's Tool, Joint Compound Containers, Mud Bucket, Putty Knives, Dirt, Mouse Trap, Budweiser Can, Drinking Glass, Unmixed Part-A Epoxy Resin, and Projected Video

Dimensions variable



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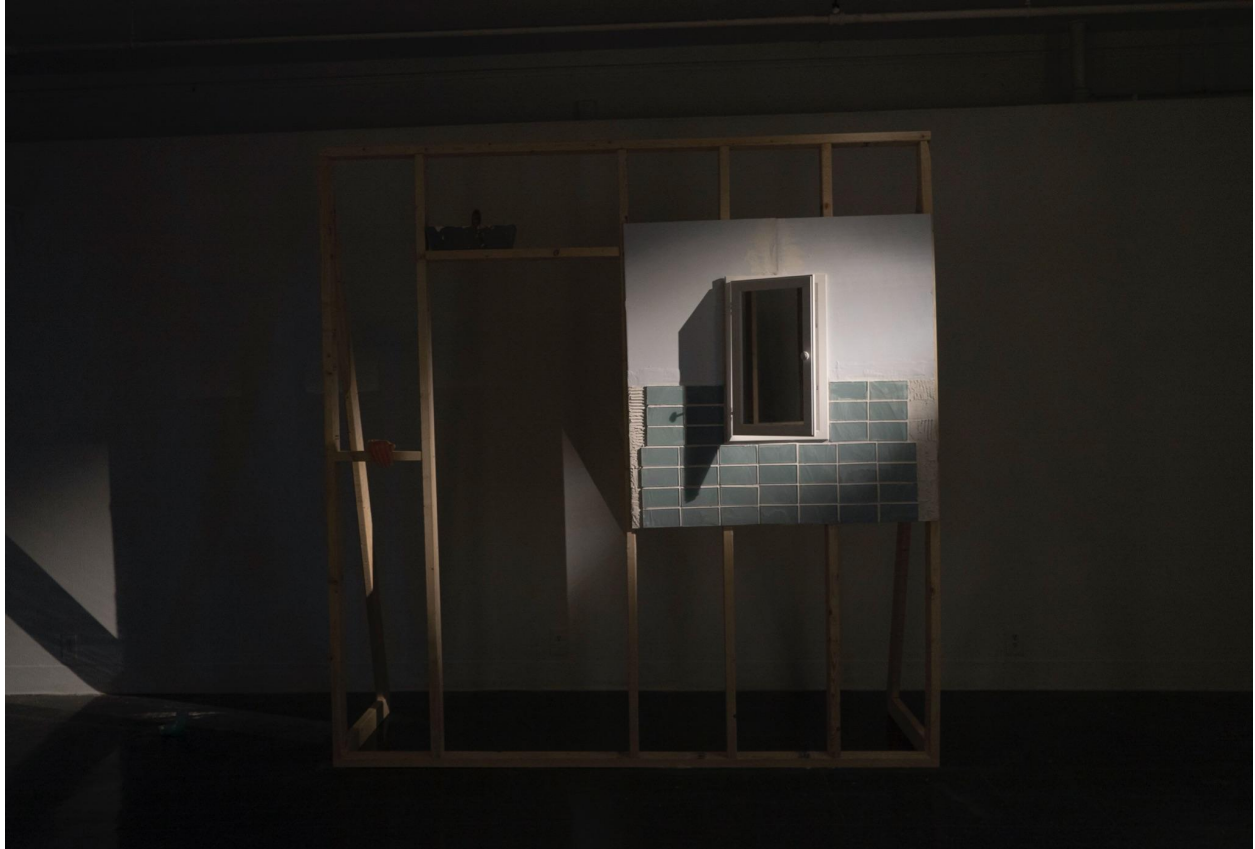
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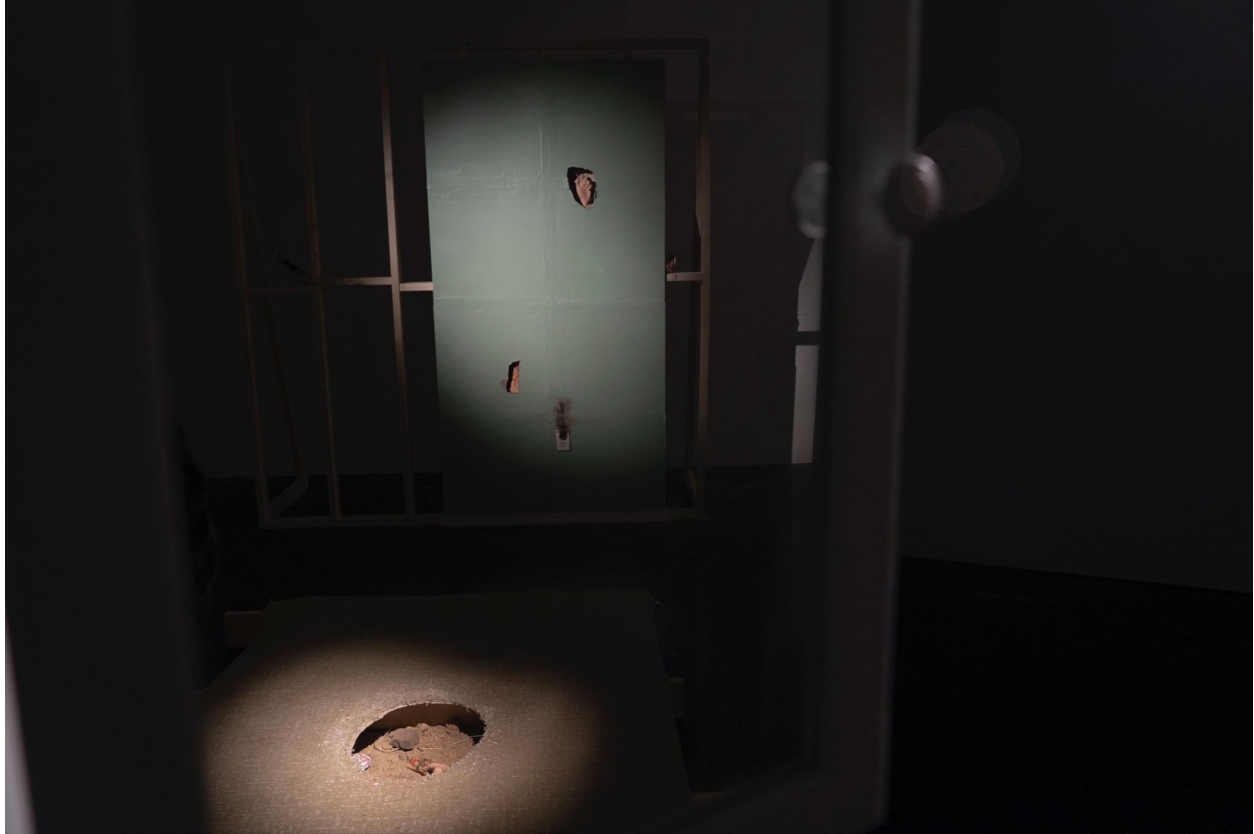
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