load - bearing

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

DOCUMENTATION OF THE ONE-PERSON EXHIBITION

A DOCUMENTATION OF THE ONE-PERSON EXHIBITION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE MASTER OF FINE ARTS

SCHOOL OF ART AND DESIGN

BY

ELYSE SAWKA

DEKALB, ILLINOIS

MAY, 2018
CATALOG

One-Person Exhibition

By
Elyse Sawka

The following work is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts degree at Northern Illinois University. The work was produced between October 2016 and April 2018. It was presented in an exhibition from April 9, 2018 through April 13, 2018 in the Annette and Jerry Johns Gallery, Visual Arts Building, Northern Illinois University – DeKalb, Illinois.

List of Work

1. Familiarity, Inkjet print on acetate, 59.75” x 4.75”, April 2018
2. Conflux, Archival inkjet print, 144” x 43”, November, 2017
3. Tunnel Vision, Concrete, pine, zinc brackets, construction chalk, 144” x 60”, April 2018
4. Spread Thin, Archival inkjet prints, 134.75” x 16.5”, April 2018
5. Echo, Archival inkjet print, 13” x 9”, October 2016
6. Conflicted and Composed, Archival inkjet print, 40” x 30”, September 2017
7. Accent Corner, Archival inkjet print, 30” x 23”, February 2018
8. When the Dust Settles, Archival inkjet print, 13” x 9”, February 2018
9. Sisters, Inkjet print on acetate, 32” x 22”, May 2017
10. Recurrence, Inkjet print, drywall, & mirrored mylar, 128” x 210” x 32”, April 2018
This paper fulfills the requirements to fully document my one-person solo exhibition “load - bearing”: MFA Thesis Exhibition documenting the confluence of memory, identity, and place.

Main Objectives:

Through the utilization of domestic space my work expresses ideas of displacement, construction and deconstruction. I use images from my childhood home and the home of my aunt as a springboard to create manipulated images, installations and small sculptures. Both of these homes were lost to foreclosures. I utilize photography to capture details, textures, patterns and objects that I no longer have access to by creating large installations and altered photographs that take over a new location or gallery space.

This body of work explores the understanding of literal and metaphoric attachments to intimate spaces I once had access to; my interest lies in memory, identity, and place. This investigation began with photographic documentation and then image deconstruction, either digitally or physically. I employ the practices of photography, installation, and sculpture in a constant state of examination of space, form, and perspective.

load - bearing occupies the space between familiar and foreign. Through the re-contextualization of images, intimate objects, and raw construction material, I edge closer to understanding the lasting impression of space and the way memory can eclipse experience.

Historical Influences:

This body of work has required the influence of other artists who are using similar concepts or techniques. Do Ho-Suh, Letha Wilson, and Latoya Ruby Frazier where the artists who I researched while I produced load - bearing.

Do Ho-Suh an installation artist, was someone who I researched early when I began this series. He recreated his childhood home and other homes that he lived in from all over the world. He intricately sews translucent fabrics together for large installations and creates small objects called ‘specimens’ to go within these installations. He includes traditional Korean sewing techniques and combines 3-D modeling and mapping technologies to create these large pieces. Suh has been able to form a relationship between historical practices with a contemporary idea
by examining the home and identity and how they play a role in our global society. When I began my body of work, I was seeking artists who I could relate with and Suh was the first artist who's work I was drawn to and could relate to. His installations displayed that using personal history and intimate spaces an idea that could be further expanded on. 

My body of work is in conversation with Suh as I am pulling imagery from my personal history of a home that was a part of my life for twenty years. While working with my images that are printed on transparency paper, I thought of how Suh was putting homes within each other and how the translucent rooms allows for a viewer to look beyond the room that they are in but also see into the other spaces. This idea resonated with me as I searched for ways to transform my photographs. When I worked with transparency paper, I physically merged fragments of the same space/room together to create a sense of confusion for the viewer. First, I was creating this work with archival inkjet prints on luster paper and overlaying transparent images that were installed on the wall. I made a shift from this application and began to work solely with transparency paper and suspend them from the ceiling. The next shift with these transparencies was print them life size so that a viewer has larger sense of the spaces that I am transforming and convoluting. In a way I am challenging Do Ho-Suh formally. While we are both recreating a space in some format, he does it inch by inch while I am using photography as a way to document a space having the idea of fleeting memories. As I create the work, I allow the rooms to change through overlaying images and physically alter them as my memory of them has changed. Suh doesn’t let the memory of these rooms fade, but I challenge his ideas by merging the images together and allow them to become confusing and enveloping.

Letha Wilson is another artist that has influenced my practice, with her mixed-media work that starts with the photograph. Her landscape photography is not particularly riveting on their own but the way that she transforms her images into something more tactile is what drew me to her work. She appropriates her own images to fold, bend, curl, slit into walls, pour concrete on and creates works that activates the viewer. While exploring her work, I’m captivated by how she utilizes gallery space and doesn’t limit herself to the constraints of a

1 https://art21.org/artist/do-ho-suh/?gclid=CjwKCAjwt5DXBRAAtEiwAa3vyEnlXfYSWbfppOg8oi8VH811kCmpTSyzENWv36ZBgK3Tuz8PAvCQhoCjUsQAvD_BwE
specific medium. She utilizes photography as her starting point but then transforms the images with different materials regarding the photograph as an object. She pushes the boundaries of sculpture and photography with the way that she cuts into gallery walls and floors.² Formally, her work is pushing the idea of the plain photograph and she brings in the question of materiality with her work showing that there is more than just an image.

I reinforce Wilson’s ideas as I explore the idea of materiality within my own work. While most of my work starts with a photograph and sometimes stays a photograph, I am also finding ways to transform my images by suspending them from the ceiling, wrapping them in a corner with the image stretched out, bleeding the images onto the ceiling or floor, and creating larger installations with drywall panels. To install my photographs, I do not use frames and instead use screws or a material showing a relationship between the imagery and materials of a house that could be used. Stepping away from my direct photographs, I utilize blueprints of my family home and use them to create small concrete sculptures. My choice of material is important in that it relates to the underlying concept of construction and deconstruction of a domestic space.

Latoya Ruby Frazier is a photographer that I have been able to relate to, not by direct concept but how she delivers her messages. Her body of work, *The Notion of Family*, showcases herself, mother, and grandmother going through the hardships of living in Braddock, Pennsylvania. This personal work has showed me that while making personal work can be difficult to relate to, she has done it in a successful way of showing a broader message. She has been able to deliver a message of activism, showing a town that was brought down by the steel industry, the shutting down of the factory, and the ramifications of health issues that were brought unto her family and members of the town as a result from the air pollution. By making this body of work, she has been able to branch out and create other bodies of work that have a much broader message, but her strongest body of work has been *The Notion of Family*, holding a personal narrative with a larger issue unfolding within the work.³

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Technique and Process:

My material choices propel the medium of photography forward by the way that I display and apply my images. Instead of utilizing an image to be framed and static on a gallery wall, I discovered ways to multiply and repeat my images through site-specific installations and discover ways to treat the image as a material going beyond the frame. With the peeled photographs, *Echo* and *Conflicted and Composed*, I print images that were taken of my childhood home and reflected on the spaces there were photographed and peel away sections of the image, leaving the peeled portions still attached. *Accent Corner* and *When the Dust Settles* are photographs that are taken in a studio setting. I showcase objects that were in these homes, being paired with construction chalk. I create still lives that display objects that are considered a ‘finishing touch’ and pair them with a construction planning material.

I chose to work with housing materials, for *Tunnel Vision* I thought about the relationships between building a domestic space, utilizing archived blueprints, and 3-D modeling programs to create castings from a one point perspective. These small casted concrete forms are meant fit into someone’s hand, so they can hold onto the structure and feel weight of the events that occurred from losing a home. These castings are a way for me to show what the house looked like, but is skewed to a one-point perspective, displaying that this experience was from my point of view.

I am pushing the boundaries of photography by the way I apply the use of the medium, with repetition and a unique way to display my images with site-specific installations. *Recurrence*, the large wallpaper installation, relates to the mirror in an Single Lens Reflex camera, discussing the relationship between how we see an image and the repetitive nature of reproducing photographs, and the foreclosures occurring within my immediate family. With the pieces *Conflux* and *Spread Thin* I wanted the image of the wood paneling to reinsert itself back into another corner of a room imitating where it originated. *Spread Thin* is an image of brackets from the garage door of my family home, I created this image with intentions of it taking on a new shape (the way it was applied to the pillars in the corners of the gallery) and became a piece that is stretched, worn out, and almost unrecognizable. The installation, site-specific pieces are taken out of their original context and are put into a space taking it over in demanding and subtle ways.
Familiarity. Inkjet print on acetate, 59.75” x 4.75”, April 2018
(Acetate installation in glass inserts on gallery doors)
(Installation view inside gallery: *Familiarity, Conflux, and Recurrence*)

*Conflux* (Detail)
Conflux, Archival inkjet print, 144” x 43”, November, 2017
Tunnel Vision. Concrete, pine, zinc brackets, construction chalk, 144” x 60”, April 2018

Tunnel Vision (Detail)
Spread Thin (Installation view on corner pillar)
Spread Thin (Installation view on corner pillar)
Spread Thin, Archival inkjet print, 134.75” x 16.5”, April 2018
Echo, Archival inkjet print, 13” x 9”, October 2016
Conflicted and Composed, Archival inkjet print, 40” x 30”, September 2017
Accent Corner, Archival inkjet print, 30” x 23”, February 2018
When the Dust Settles, Archival inkjet print, 13” x 9”, February 2018
(Installation view of *Echo, Conflicted and Composed, Accent Corner, and When the Dust Settles*)
Sisters, Inkjet Print on acetate, 32” x 22”, May 2017
Sisters (Installation view)
Recurrence, Inkjet print, drywall, & mirrored mylar, 128” x 210” x 32”, April 2018

Recurrence (Alternate view)
Recurrence (Mylar backing)
(Installation view of *Recurrence* and *Sisters*)
load-bearing

Élyse Sawka

MFA Thesis Exhibition
NIU Jack Arends Art Building
Gallery 214
April 9 - April 13

Closing Reception:
Thursday, April 12
6 - 9 P.M.