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Home Is

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HOME IS

A Thesis

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Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
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in

The School of Art

by

Jodie Masterman

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Abstract

As an exploration of family and personal history, *Home is.* aims not only to chronicle my own experiences and memories, but to touch upon the innumerable definitions of the word “home”. The objects are rooted in personal reflection, but each one refers to an aspect of play, identity, love, loss, or regret, inherent within any family. Although they do serve as a blueprint of my life, they are meant to stand as moments shared by all.

Introduction: Home is

The appeal and power of still life...lie not only in its comprehensible scale, but in the fact that extraneous details are stripped away and what is left speaks to the responsive eye, simply and directly, of matters large and small. Of what do still lifes speak? Of relationships—connections, reflections, support, power, balance; of cause and effect; of things that have happened and will happen; of taste, touch and smell; of man and nature; of markets and appetites and genetics and diet; of time, mortality, and regeneration. If we are to understand what a still life signifies, we must attend closely.

—Jules David Prown, on Raphaele Peale's *Fruit in a Silver Basket*

Objects are the bearers of memory; they do not forget, nor do they discriminate. They are the living proof of times past and moments forgotten. A glove might remember Grandpa Den out in the garden. An umbrella could recall Nan, walking into her house like Mary Poppins. Or a cigarette might allude to Mum, gossiping with her sister into the wee hours of the morning. Objects are imbued with meaning and history, whose significance often overshadow their practical purpose.

When an object is discarded, this information is lost with it.

Swedish death cleaning is becoming popular in America. The ritual happens later in life, and involves packing up unnecessary belongings so that, when you pass, your family isn't left with old boxes of buttons, coupons, and scrapbook supplies. Theoretically this unburdens your body and soul to focus on the important things in life. I feel like there is a flaw in this practice. I think that objects are great mediators between people—especially objects that involve the intimate experience of food; there is no more communal experience than that of sharing a meal.

When I was 13 and my parents decided to move to the US for, supposedly, four years, they performed their own death cleaning of our belongings. I watched as all of my books, toys, dishes, photos, paintings, and baby clothes were unceremoniously packed away in boxes and hauled to a storage unit, where it still resides today.

"We can buy new and better things in America."

There has been a tangible void in my life since those objects were taken away. And the objects that we did take with us have been relegated to cupboards and cabinets, relics of a bygone era. Or they are sitting in the spare room, a dusty shrine to memory, on top of the maple bookshelf that was bought for my christening.

For this exhibition, I recreated these objects as I remembered them. I wanted to bring them back to life, so they might be solidified in my memory.

When my dad lived in China, we visited this little village that had a quaint pottery studio. It was early on in my ceramic education but I had already caught the bug. My dad carefully looked at all the pieces and picked out a purple tea bowl. It felt wonderful to experience a new culture with my dad and for him to support my path. Weeks later, back in Tennessee, I had some friends over for dinner and the tea bowl was knocked off its shelf. It broke my heart.

I wish I could tell you that I got over that loss. I wish I could say that it means nothing to me now. But that physical object made Dad's trip real. I could look at photos but it wouldn't be the same as holding that tea bowl. I want to use it and look at it sitting on my shelf, like a memory sits in the mind.

And just as a mind is full of memories, so is a home full of objects. Each room tells a different story—is filled with different events and recollections. Growing up, the room that told the most stories was always the kitchen. This was true at my house as well as in the homes of both sets of grandparents. Over the last few years, I've spent a great deal of time making tableware, reflecting on moments that revolve around dining, specifically large meals with my entire family. I've tried to recapture the sense of togetherness and belonging of my childhood in Wales. I've striven to reclaim the inherent sense of family that I lost after moving to the states. For my thesis show, however, I wanted to focus on the smaller and more intimate moments in between these dinners. Moments that I witnessed or joined; moments that ended too soon. The still lives bring me back to those places so I can preserve these memories and put these objects back into an environment where they can have the sendoff that they deserve.

There are three distinct still lives in "Home is.": my childhood home in Swansea, the kitchen of my Nan and Grampa's, and the kitchen of Grandpa Den. Within these arrangements, my perspective and participation varies considerably. When thinking about my Grandpa Den, the thoughts that immediately spring to mind are centered around my own regret. I moved far away from him at a young age, and he was always waiting for me, and the rest of his family, to come back. The few tangible memories I have are from summer holidays with him by the seaside. In my house, I was always a spectator; the discussions and activities that took place here were off limits for me. All the glasses and pots looked so pristine and perfect, as did my mother, who was an utter mystery to me. I was forced to look in from the outside, feeling like an intruder in my own home. At my Nan and Grampa's, however, I was (and am) eternally a welcome guest. Whenever I arrived, there would be a place at the table waiting for me, with my own mug filled with steaming hot tea, one sugar, and light milk. The plates and mugs were always brightly painted, a welcome contrast to my mum's soft pinks and greys. I felt like I belonged in their house, and the objects that surrounded me made me feel at home.

Domestic artifacts are more likely to serve as entry points for the telling of stories about the self and its personal relationships. All such content will be referred to as mapping, meaning by this that the self uses the displayed object as a way of plotting its social network, representing cosmology and ideology, and projecting its history into the world's map, its spatial spread so to speak. This is indeed what objects are—dots on a map and connecting links which can be retracted in any direction.

The realization that whenever people talk about domestic objects they are articulating an explication their own selves may encourage an attitude of tolerance and respect to what might at first seem to be long-winded digressions into family and personal history on the part of the informants.

—Stephen Harold Riggins, "Fieldwork in the Living Room"

Memory

Somehow it does not come as a surprise that people wish above all, to be somewhere else, doing something different. The notion that life is better over the horizon is so ingrained in our culture as to have become a commonplace; indeed, this is precisely the goal that defined the identity of the early Pilgrims ('I am a pilgrim and a stranger'). Most people see travel as their foremost goal if they had all the choices in the world. If the only goal mentioned was travel, or some form of consumption or pleasure, we coded the answer escape.

—Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton,
The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self

I feel this urgency to remember the past. I left the UK at such a pivotal age, and I've always had the fear that I would in some way forget those formative years of my life, and abandon my identity and heritage that were forged in Wales. After making the conscious decision in high school to adopt an American accent, the need to maintain a working memory of my past was only intensified. Making these sculptures is a way to acknowledge these ideas in a way that I haven't before. It is, in a sense, a way for me to categorize memory. Putting my fingerprints on the work enables me to recreate the objects and the memories in my own terms; to have control over my childhood and where I came from. Objects help me maneuver through my past and understand my relationships between different family members and their significance to my childhood; they help me see the positive and negative aspects of my upbringing as the youngest member of a large, close-knit family.

In many ways, my parents have been erasing my history without my consent. When we left Wales, they chose to forget about our time there. I remember them apologizing to me, saying, "We are so sorry that we brought you up in Wales, and not the US." They were trying to alter the narrative of our lives overseas. Now that we lived in America, everywhere else became lesser. They made it seem like it was a mistake to have ever lived anywhere else, despite the fact that none of us were any happier.

Looking at it now, one reason for the decline in our happiness correlates to the abandonment of our traditions. In Wales our days were rooted in routine. Every morning we would take our toast from the toast rack and cut it into soldiers; we would drink milky tea morning, noon, and night; we would eat our soft-boiled eggs from egg cups; our orange juice came from a carton, not a pitcher. As soon as we arrived in America, these traditions were rapidly forgotten. My parents complained about the taste of the water, and that the voltage of the kettle could not keep up with the countless cups of tea that we were used to. Without our family and friends to share it with, the tea didn't taste the same. The kettle was relegated to the cupboard, to be replaced with a brand new, large, shiny coffee maker.

My House

We had a “best room” in our house. Growing up, I thought everyone did. The room had a mythic quality. Everything in there was sparkling and shining, and completely off limits. The room had cold grey couches with pink pillows and glass ornaments scattered all around. I remember the “coffee table” being so strange to me as a child because it was made out of the same grey leather as the couch but had a glass top. It looked soft, much like a stuffed animal, but it had a fragile exterior, like a toy I knew was too fragile for me to play with. Sitting on the table were two candles that were always lit—apparently a shrine for no one.

The best room was joined onto our regular room, which I was charitably allowed to enter. You could see through the regular room into the best room through a glass window. Like me, two brass giraffes were relegated to the regular room. Every day they peered in with me, blocking my view. As I spied through that window, I was terrified that I would knock one of those giraffes over and break it.

Occasionally, the best room would come to life. My parents would have people over on the weekend and they would party late into the night. People would arrive after I went to bed, and my dad would come and check on me. “Dad, can you make sure everyone is extra loud?” I felt so comforted by the noises of all the people attempting to sing and dance. I could hear my mum laugh and sing, giving me a glimpse of the mother I thought I could get to know one day.

The best room slept during the week. The blinds were always drawn and the furniture sat empty. Inside, the colors seemed to reflect the dreary Swansea skies. Not only were the couches a stone grey, but the artificial leather was always cold to the touch. The pillows, one of the few glimpses of color, being a light pink, were made of silk and would fall to the floor with a subtle touch. Nothing in the best room, it seemed, was truly practical. On the few occasions that I was allowed in, on Christmas and Easter, I sat on the floor, looking up from underneath the glass coffee table at the meticulously placed objects that lay atop it.

When you entered our house, the best room was through the first door on the right. So, when my mum would throw a “do”, she would turn on the record player and guide everyone in.

There was a decanter set in the best room. Throughout the week it lived on a shelf, next to all the other glassware: picture frames, glasses, and a proper glass menagerie. On Saturday evenings, when company came to call, the decanter was ceremoniously removed from the wall, and placed on the glass coffee table. This was a purely aesthetic decision. The decanter and its matching tumblers would see no use, even during those nights where I would lie awake to the sounds of drunken laughter and song. The decanter was a placeholder; a physical embodiment of the elegance and class that my mother sought to achieve.

My mother believed that she could manufacture the perfect moment by utilizing the perfect objects. As time went on, and these objects were left behind, it became clear that my parents were using these objects to cover up a history that they wanted to leave in the past.

When seeking to re-imagine the decanter set, I wanted to make sure that each piece spoke to one another and reflected the same sense of coldness and detachment. Just like my mother’s set, the pots are mismatched, but from a distance appear playful and quirky. I remember seeing them sit on top of the small, pleather table with its glass top, and wishing they were toys meant for me. But on closer inspection, the muted colors and pointy edges belied my first assumptions, and their somber, jagged identities were revealed. In my set, each pot reflects an aspect of the decanter, but upon closer inspection, they are all

imperfect and asymmetrical. Indeed, even the decanter itself features imperfections as each of its four sides are inconsistent and lopsided.



Image 1. Jodie Masterman, *Saturday Night in the Best Room*, 2018, porcelain. All photos by Vernell Dunams.

The morning after a Best Room “do”, I would walk downstairs and enter the kitchen. The aftermath of the party was almost completely cleaned up, thanks to my ever-diligent father. There might have been a lingering glass or two, with lipstick stains painting the rim. My mother would be sitting there with my aunt, rehashing the previous night, chain smoking cigarettes. I would watch as they continually puffed, never setting down their cigarette until stamping them out in the ashtray. The ashtray forever sat in the middle of their conversations. As they gossiped and bad-mouthed each of the previous night’s guests, it seemed as though the toxicity of their words hung in the air with the smoke.

Next to the ashtray sat a coffee set. Like the decanter, its pieces were off limits to me. Stowed in the top of a cabinet, my eyes would occasionally catch the light from the sun bouncing off the gold and glass French press. The cups were white china with thin silver rims—they were my parents wedding china. My Aunt and mother would sip daintily, slowly muting the silver with lipstick. With pursed lips, my mother sipped audibly, creating the heartbeat of the conversation. She would bring out the crystal, art deco sugar bowl that matched the ashtray in size and style. She poured out the sugar cubes from a bag, carefully placing a pair of metal tongs in the dish, only to pour the same number back in the bag; they both drank their coffee black. I would watch this ceremony from a distance; I was never invited to join them on these mornings.



Image 2. Jodie Masterman, *Sunday Morning in the Kitchen*, 2018, porcelain, lipstick, sugar cubes.

In my exhibition, I made espresso cups to reflect this sense of ceremony. I wanted to create the impression that they were in some way elevated, my mother's being slightly higher than my aunt's. My mom's cup sits on a pedestal with sharp petals, barring the onlooker from touching. In our home, she acted as queen, ruler of all that inhabited her space or crossed her threshold.

I chose to display "Saturday Night in the Best Room" and "Sunday Morning in the Kitchen" as a window display in order to recreate my own experience of looking in through the glass and around the corner. I wanted to give the impression that the objects were for display only, and included "real life" objects to add to the mystery and unease of the atmosphere. As still-lives, they function both as historical recollections and personal commentary; they serve as memory and judgment. Although they are accurate depictions of the objects that lie in my memory, I also sought to reveal how I see them today, as a 29 year-old woman and daughter.

My Grandpa Den's House

In this respect, it is worth recalling the origin of the word 'banal': in mediaeval France, a 'banal' baking day was one when the bread that came from the oven was not owed to the lord of the manor. It was a day of common bread, a day of quiet celebration when life was not owed to the powers that be. It is precisely these innocuous activities and daily little rituals that constitute the eternal bedrock of 'being together'. We should remember that when nothing is important, everything assumes importance.

—Michel Maffesoli, "Walking in the Margins"

Grandpa Den wore grey polo shirts and grey pullovers. He liked two sugars in his milky tea, which he used to wash down his biscuits. He loved pigeons and squirrels and growing cucumbers and tomatoes in his greenhouse. He loved all things great and small and called my Nan Petal. He had the exterior of a cold, hard man, but within lay a generous, warm heart. He celebrated the small moments in life and cherished his sweet treats.

Nanny Barb also loved sweets and would always order a big sundae when we would take them out for lunch. My dad also had a sweet tooth, which wasn't allowed in his own home. I can remember the disgusted look my mum would get when she saw my Nanny Barb and her son eat a dessert. Above all else, Nanny Barb loved daisies, embroidery, cross stitching, and watching the birds in the garden and by the sea. In the summer, my grandmother would teach me how to paint, embroider, and cross stitch.

Nanny Barb's Alzheimer's set it quickly. Grandpa Den would say that it was like taking care of a child, but knowing they would never grow up. After Nanny Barb died he would sit on her chair, holding her ashes while watching "Strictly Come Dancing", a couples dancing competition. It was her favorite show. He would water her orchid every week at precisely the same time, and did so for ten years. I would watch him and ask, "Why are you watering a dead flower?", but every year it would bloom dramatically, like clockwork. He would listen to the TV and his Walkman with headphones because he was worried he would wake the neighbors, despite the fact that he shared a wall with no one.



Image 3. Jodie Masterman, *Grandpa Den's Green Thumb*, 2018, porcelain.

Two years ago, Grandpa Den passed away suddenly. When we moved all of his belongings out of his house, we found boxes of unopened Christmas biscuits, Easter eggs, plastic wrapped boxes of tea, the beginnings of cross-stitchings and water color paintings of Nanny Barb's, old lottery tickets, countless pairs of gardening gloves, and nuts for the squirrels and feed for the pigeons. I was standing in front of 60 years of acquired memory and expectations. It wasn't until we went through all of these objects, hidden away in cupboards, tins, and boxes that I truly began to understand my grandfather. I learned about who he was based on what he decided to hold on to. Now, when I think back on who my grandfather was, my mind pours over those cookie tins, much like family members pour over forgotten photos in shoe boxes. As I stack and organize the tins for my show, I sort through memories of him, real and imagined, that enable me to come to terms with the guilt I feel for leaving him.



Image 4. Jodie Masterman, *I'll Keep the Kettle On*, 2018, porcelain, sugar, biscuits.

In "I'll Keep the Kettle On", there are two stacks of dishes, one for adults and one for children. The color at the top of the pots is faded, as though they have been sitting in the sun due to lack of use. On the table lie plates full of snacks and biscuits, as well as a colander with warm, freshly picked tomatoes--a hopeful offering for nonexistent visitors. A single mug and plate are the only pots in active use, and the tea stains inside of the mug indicate that this lonely ceremony is not unique.



Image 5. Jodie Masterman, *60 Years at 72 Hunt Road*, 2018, porcelain, and Grandpa Den's trinkets.

After he died, Grandpa Den was buried in his Christmas Wallace and Gromit sweatshirt. He always did have an excellent sense of humor, even in death.

My Grandparents' House

Things are at the heart of the creation of a sense of place and its recreation. Far from having an instrumental role, they are at the symbolic centre of the house. It is around these things that the home is symbolically recreated and rebuilt.

Jean-Sébastien Marcoux, "The Refurbishment of Memory"

When I think of my grandparents I don't think of their home (their old home—not assisted living). I think of their oversized fruit bowl. I think of the countless tea pots that lined the walls. The potato peeler that seemed to live in my Nan's hand.

My Grampa is named after Donald Duck. He draws ducks on every card he and my Nan have ever sent me. When he used to give me a kiss goodbye he used to stick out his lips and, on those occasions, he even looked like a duck. My Grampa would collect me at school most days and we would walk home, often picking up some fish and chips before walking by the local pond to feed the ducks. He really loves feeding ducks.

My grandparents have been married for over 60 years. They love their routines and celebrate the small moments in life—like strolling to the shop for the newspaper every morning and sharing a tea scone on their way to grocery shop every Friday morning. On Saturday night, for the last 40 years, they have their date night. My Grampa heads to the fishmongers early on Saturday morning to grab the best catch of the day, while my Nan gets the vegetables peeled and the tables set. The dinner often involves a fresh bouquet of flowers, always a bottle of wine, and always a three course meal. They end with a slow dance to Frank Sinatra, shared stories of their travels around the world, and their ever growing family.

Everything in Nan and Grampa's house was pink, plush or floral, and smelled like lavender and roses. The smell is what stays with me the most. Nan would bathe me before bed, always with imperial leather soap. That soap belonged in the past, even then. Nan would tell me stories of her life as she washed me, and the smell transported me back with her. I'm so thankful that I have never used that soap anywhere else. It belongs in their house, in their hands. She would bring the plastic pitcher out of the cupboard and would pour the water over my head. Nan had the remarkable grandmotherly power to keep all of the shampoo suds out of my eyes. The water would be cold at first and then she would gradually warm it up until I couldn't handle it anymore. I have a tough head to this day. I always wondered why my parents didn't use a pitcher like that. They would always wash my hair in the bath and then I'd stick my head under the tap. There would always be soap left in my hair.

In the mornings, the journey down to the kitchen was so soft. The carpet felt like it was hugging my toes. The house was always so warm. I would pay extra attention to the plates on the walls of the stairway in the morning. They were full of children playing and people smiling. It felt like the little girls and boys playing in the streets were welcoming me into the day. From the very first step of the stairs I could hear BBC Radio 2 playing and my Nan marching around the kitchen: the place she was most alive.

I have always talked about the past with my Nan and Grampa. We look at photos. Everything exists once again; it's not a figment of my imagination. My childhood was, indeed, that lovely. We sip our tea and celebrate every moment from the past to the present.



Image 6. Jodie Masterman, *The Fruit Bowl*, 2018, porcelain and fruit.

When thinking of objects to sit in for my grandparents, one came immediately to mind. In the middle of their kitchen, the centerpiece of so many conversations, arguments, meals, and debates, sat an enormous, artificial fruit bowl. The plastic oranges, apples, grapes, and pears seemed like idle toys for the adults sat around the table, off limits for the probing fingers of us children. Every family gathering took place at their home, and therefore was centered around their fruit bowl. When I was seven they moved to a smaller home a few streets over and consolidated their belongings, holding on to their collection of teapots and the fruit bowl. Four years later, they moved again, to an assisted living home where they will live out the rest of their years, and consolidated again, this time discarding all of their tea pots save one—they held onto the fruit bowl. Throughout the years, Nan and Grampa's has continued to be the meeting place for our family, and the fruit bowl has continued to anchor each reunion.

Like it does for my grandparents, to me the fruit bowl symbolizes our family. I hold on to it and its pieces the same way I hold on to each family member and each memory. Having the pieces settle into the bowl and rest on the base brings me comfort—everyone is in their rightful place and dependent on one another for support. If you remove any individual piece—if you alter the structure in any way, they will all fall.



Image 7. Jodie Masterman, *Breakfast at Nan and Grampa's*, 1994, 2018, porcelain, plastic curlers, fruit, toast, marmalade, tea.

Lemons: all freedom, all ego, all vanity, fragrant with scent we can't help but imagine when we look at them, the little pucker in the mouth. And redolent, too, of strut and style. Yet somehow they remain intimate, every single one of them: only lemons, only that lovely perishable ordinary thing, held to scrutiny's light, fixed in a moment of fierce attention. As if here our desire to be unique, unmistakable, and our desire to be of a piece were reconciled. Isn't that it, to be yourself and somehow to belong? For a moment, held in balance.

—Mark Doty, *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon*

When looking to recreate my Nan and Grampa's breakfast set, I knew that I had to focus on sunshine. I wanted to capture the sun streaming in through the window; the daffodils blooming in springtime; the cracking of eggs into a bowl. But I also wanted to maintain my perspective as a young girl in their home; I wanted to remember what it felt like. The objects that I created for "Breakfast at Nan and Grampa's, 1994" are all circular and full. I didn't want there to be any edges or sides to the pieces in order to indicate the openness and honesty that was inherent in who they were. No matter who you were or where you sat, you were all on the same level, with the same perspective. I included food in the set to juxtapose it with Grandpa Den's. Theirs was an active household, always filled with family and friends; they were not waiting for something that would never come.



Image 8. Jodie Masterman, *Perfectly Perfect in Every Way* and *Winds in the East, Mist Coming in, Like Somethin' is Brewin' and 'bout to Begin*, 2018, porcelain.

I watched *Mary Poppins* for the first time at Nan and Grampa's, and for the next five years it became the only film I watched at their house. When I was at school, I became quite certain that they were secretly *Mary Poppins* and Bert, jumping through paintings and cleaning chimneys. Well, I thought Grampa was Bert during the day and Frank Sinatra at night. He loved listening to Frank Sinatra and would sing "I Did It My Way" to my Nan on karaoke at Christmas time.

Whenever I see an umbrella, I think of my Nan, floating down from the clouds. And whenever I see someone wearing a flat cap, or looking like a chimney sweep, I think of Grampa, dancing on rooftops.



Image 9. Jodie Masterman, *Let's Go Fly a Kite*, 2018, porcelain.

The tea pots that lined the walls were out of my reach. They were brightly colored, playful, and kitschy objects that I desperately wanted to play with. For this show, I shrunk them down and flattened them in order to make them into pieces that I could hold in the palm of my hand, but I left them on the wall to maintain their decorative purpose. They are small, gestural paintings that capture what our adventures looked like, in and out of the home.



Image 10. Jodie Masterman, *The Welsh Girl*, 2018, porcelain.

In the morning, at my Nan and Grampa's, I would be offered a biscuit from a large biscuit jar by my Grampa, as soon as I entered the kitchen. I don't know what became of that enormous jar, but I know that it was covered in flowers and belonged in my Grampa's hands. In remaking the jar, I imagined that I was inheriting it, and with it the responsibility to maintain the tradition. Even though the image of the jar is not clear in my mind, I wanted to hold on to its formal elements. Pulling the two dimensional aspects of the flowers out makes it more playful, and it allowed me to be more suggestive with its elements. The flowers that are pushed in on the sides show his handprints and convey how often the pot was handled. My cup from the breakfast set references the jar and is meant to represent my grandparents' influence and inspiration on me as a young girl.

My Process

It all started with the fruit bowl. The first thing I knew, before any of the still lifes or the pots or the giant yellow umbrella, was that I wanted my show to center around my grandparents' oversized bowl of fruit. It felt like all of the ideas were sitting at the bottom, and I needed to pull them out like apples and oranges. By drawing the fruit bowl it allowed me to step inside my family's history--my history; it helped guide me through our memories.

When interpreting these childhood recollections, I made the decision not to look at old photos. I wanted to focus on the objects that stood out to me, as I remembered them (or imagined them). To help guide my memory, I looked at a myriad of reference images: objects, wallpaper, interior and exterior landscapes, flowers--indoor flowers, outdoor flowers, flowers on dishes, flowers on clothing.

On the functional pots, I used translucent colored glazes to suggest sunlight streaming through the windows; somehow I recall sunlight in all of my earliest memories. I wanted the dishes to shine in order to create a barrier between the viewer and the work--to make them feel more out of reach.

On much of the singular sculptures on display, I cold-finished them with matte-mediums. Their softness, in comparison to the hard reflections of the tableware, is meant to draw the viewer in; to allow them to cast their own recollections and memories upon the pieces. By eliminating the bright shine that is cast off of more glossy glazes, the on-looker is brought into the work, rather than kept out at arm's length.

Though many of the objects are functional, their function was not a concern. When recreating memories and experiences based primarily in meals and family gatherings, I wanted the sculptures to be usable, i.e. plates, cups, mugs. In order to frame all of these pieces in my memory, it was essential that I had complete creative control over them. Using clay allowed me to create specific narratives and highlight specific moments, using objects that, in any other context, would be considered "everyday".

Porcelain is a true blank canvas. As it dries, and the gray slowly hardens into white, its possibilities begin to multiply and its potential grows. Especially when dealing with memory, which is so fluid and hard to pin down, it's important for me to start from somewhere pure and untainted.

No matter how I'm building my pots, whether I throw or hand build, I always, always pinch. It allows me to recreate an object precisely as I imagine it, and I want people to see where my fingers were; I want them to know that it was made by hand. Each pot that I create is in itself a fingerprint; there are no two alike and they are impossible to duplicate. You can trace their history through each pinch.

My Use of Color

Dylan Thomas said that my hometown of Swansea was an “ugly, lovely town ... crawling, sprawling ... by the side of a long and splendid curving shore. This sea-town was my world.” This quote should be the credo of the town. When you look over the water, half of the horizon is a sea of factories, spewing smoke and pollution into the already grey skies. To the right, in contrast, there lie brightly colored houses atop green hills, speckled with wild flowers, reflecting into the grey ocean, smattered with sailboats and buoys. On the rare occasion that the sun decides to grace Swansea with its rays, the entire city prepares sandwiches, orange squash, and packed swimsuits in a mad dash to the beach, hoping against hope that the sun doesn’t change his mind. Out come the bright windbreakers, buckets and spades, bocce balls, and umbrellas. It’s as if Swansea wakes up from a deep, gray slumber.

As a kid, much like candy and dessert, color was taboo. My mom dressed exclusively in blacks and grays and would belittle my father when he put on his shirt of choice—Hawaiian. If my dad could wear what he wanted, I think he would be dressed in Hawaiian shirts, pinks and florals every day. Unfortunately, to my mom, color has always meant one thing: tacky. So, from birth to age thirteen, I lived in a world of neutrals. Even after high school I resisted the urge to go against my childhood color palette and found myself continuing to rely on my mother’s boutique sensibilities. I remember going out with friends and buying brightly patterned dresses and skirts, only to return home to be criticized and mocked for being childish and strange.

In the summer after finishing my undergrad degree, I produced tableware at Leach Pottery. The experience encouraged me to create pieces that would seamlessly fit into anyone’s home and complement the food that it carried. I felt that it was my role as a maker to highlight the food and to focus on pleasing others. I wanted my work to blend in, rather than to stand out. I found myself turning towards the same sensibilities that my mother had spent so many years instilling in me. I was deciding to create that work that was restrained and timid, but that would sit comfortably in someone’s cupboard.

And then I found yellow. My best friend from childhood came to visit me stateside and wore her yellow rain jacket. Out in the rainy Tennessee fall, she looked like a personified Paddington Bear, skipping through the puddles like a ray of sun in the gray wetness. I was inspired to buy one of my own, and my transformation into “The Yellow Girl” began. From then on, I decided that I would always wear at least one item of yellow or a corresponding primary in every outfit.

Making that choice led to something of a renaissance in me. Now I wear colorful clothes. I take pictures of orange construction cones. I collect the bright plastic netting that lemons come in. Color, above all else, makes me happy.

For my three still lives I made the decision to restrain my otherwise bright and decorative sensibilities. I wanted the pieces to speak to one another, without any of them standing out and claiming attention. As my show is focused on the in-between moments and interactions of life, so too are my pots; they are meant to represent the people and memories that have made up my life. And just as my life remains unfinished, I want people be able to insert themselves into my work and navigate through it with their own memories and experience.

My Installation

Because I'm dealing with the past, I chose to paint my tables white with a satin finish; I want it to be clear that these objects are recollections and live in the realm of memory. I want the colors of the objects to subtly reflect off the surfaces, as though they are not completely contained.

Memory has largely dictated the placement of the pieces in my collection as well. The "Saturday Night in the Best Room" and "Sunday Morning in the Kitchen" collections are in the window-alley to replicate my memories of sneaking onto my mum's chair and looking in through the best room window, and peaking around the corner on Sunday mornings to try and catch a bit of gossip. The objects in these sets sit on taller tables to show their unattainable nature to me as a child.

I made the table for "Breakfast at Nan and Grampa's, 1994" round to represent their openness and inclusivity. The sculptures on the wall are placed in conjunction with the table display and the surrounding objects. They are used as dividers, both in space and time, but allow the viewer to draw correlations and make connections between them. These objects also inform the reader of life beyond the walls of the home—to suggest who they are and what they do when they walk out the front door.

In much of "Home is.", I arranged my sets in a way that allow the viewer to see them from my eyes as a kid. In "60 Years at 72 Hunt Road", I want the viewer to see the display as if they were in a cramped closet with a stack of cookie tins. The tins are so low to the ground so the viewer can imagine reaching for them as a small child, as they're filled with dominos, nuts for the squirrels, change for a rainy day, and crayons.

There are also many "real-world" objects in the installation. I included food in my arrangements to further comment on the people and moments that occupied those spaces. In "I'll Keep the Kettle On", the half-eaten biscuits and sandwiches show Grandpa Den's presence at the table, and the pile of plates indicate that he was waiting for guests who never arrived. In "Breakfast at Nan and Grampa's, 1994", the food on the plates indicate that the table is full, and the toast and fruit tell that it's breakfast. In keeping with this sense of realism, in many of my sets I wanted to add a sense of unease and intrigue to the pieces. I made the decision not to make the objects out of clay to ensure that their presence was not deemed comical or cartoonish. For the cigarette, I wanted the viewer to see the pile of ash and know how long its smoker had been sitting—I wanted to transport them to this specific time, in this specific place. The sugar cubes and tongs are meant to reflect the appearance of class and etiquette; no one in my family takes sugar.

I want to make sure the lighting for my show echoes the narrative that I am trying to create. In "I'll Keep the Kettle On", there is a solitary light, illuminating a single, half-eaten cookie on a plate, highlighting my grandfather's loneliness and longing for company. There is a subtle light hitting the corner of the table, inviting the spectator to enter the piece and become the visitor he is so longing to see.

When devising my thesis show, I knew that I wanted an open layout. I wanted the viewer to be able to focus on each set, one at a time, but also to have the ability to see how they all functioned together. As each one represents a different time in my life, and a different stage of my development, it is essential that they be viewed holistically; I want the onlooker to make connections that walls would otherwise obscure.

Conclusion: the past, present, and future.

Our past is constantly communicating with our present. Objects allow me to hold on to the ideas and the people that might otherwise sink beneath the veil of memory. With umbrellas, hats, cups, plates, and fruit, I can navigate through my history and reclaim it. And through making, I can ensure that these objects, too, are never forgotten.

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Vita

Originally from Wales, Jodie Masterman moved to Knoxville, Tennessee with her family as a teenager. She earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in ceramics from the Appalachian Center for Craft in Smithville, Tennessee. She went on to complete a Post Baccalaureate degree from the University of Florida in 2015. Jodie Masterman will be receiving her Master of Fine Arts from Louisiana State University in August of 2018.