

The background is a complex, multi-layered collage. It features a central figure, possibly a person, rendered in a stylized, almost cubist manner. The figure is wearing a white shirt and blue pants. The surrounding space is filled with various colors, including shades of purple, pink, blue, and yellow. There are also some geometric shapes and patterns, such as a grid-like structure on the left side. The overall effect is one of a rich, textured, and somewhat chaotic visual environment.

I'm Home Here
by Caitlin Martens





Artist Statement

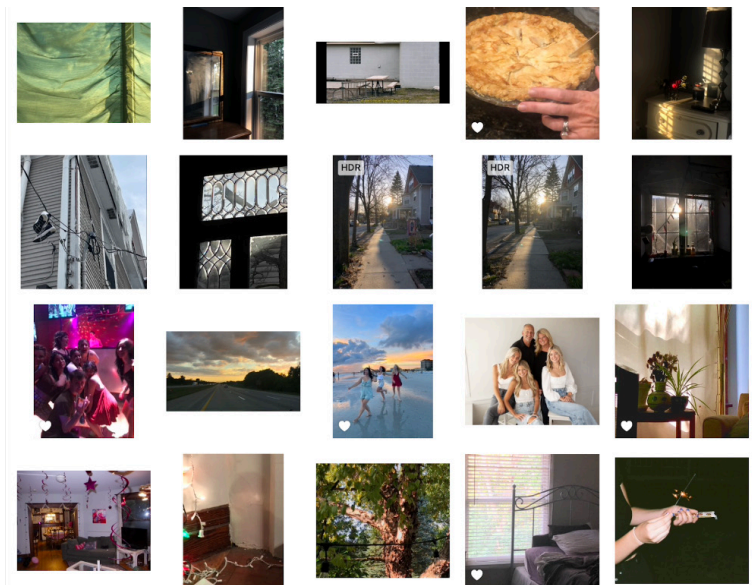
Home is not a house, place, person, or thing- and the lack of any of these does not mean a person has no home. I like to think that home is an extension of ourselves. It's an amalgamation of memories we cherish, community we love, and objects of significance that reflect who we are. It's also not one-size-fits-all. The elements that create the feeling of home are unique to each individual.

I'm home *here*. Collected within this painting are moments throughout my life when I have felt the most at home- surrounded by friends and family, lying in my bed, seeing the sun shine through a kitchen window, immersed within my posters and books, sharing a meal, seeking joy and peace. I created this painting to inspect my personal relationship with home in order to gain a better understanding of "where" my home is, and what makes it so special.

The Story Begins

I've had multiple homes, all of which have overlapped in one way or another, throughout college. My parent's house, the three places I've lived at school, with different friends, in my favorite park, sitting on a porch with a good book. I text my roommates, "I'm on my way home!" and I mean that I'm returning to our apartment on campus. I ask my mom, "Can I come home this weekend?" when I'm in my apartment, and I mean that I want to return to my parents house. I reflect to my friends, "I feel so at home with you guys," when we're at a cabin, in a town I've never heard of before yesterday. Home means so many different things to me. This exploration is an attempt to make sense of it all.

I began this project by identifying and collecting imagery that exuded my, at the time, undefined feeling of home. This allowed me to view all of the imagery at once and clearly identify thematic throughlines so I could build a visual representation of my home. From this, I was able to see that light & shadow, interior spaces, figures, windows, and special personal belongings were a common thread. I created two initial paintings to "test" this imagery; I was essentially throwing pasta at the wall and seeing what stuck. One painting was



Collection of personal photos.

realistic, the other had elements of collage with light overlays. I felt as though the collage-esque painting held a stronger emotional response for me, and my peers agreed. Yet, I still did not feel like it was “right.”

I knew that home is not just a person, place, or a combination of the two. Home transcends living situations, financial statuses, friends, families, cultures. There was something that I was feeling, but missing the language for.



Door. Initial experiment. 2022



Beach. Initial experiment. 2022

Research

Thus began my search for a psychological approach to what the feeling of home is. This search led me to Graham D. Rowles' book *Home and Identity in Late Life: International Perspectives*¹. Rowles offers international and multidisciplinary viewpoints, examines the meaning of home to elders, and the ways in which this meaning may be sustained, threatened, or modified according to changes associated with growing old. Within the book, Rowles surmises that "home" ties together life experiences (or, memories), and the self is connected to that as well. These elements (home, memory, and the self) are intertwined. The self relates to how "home" is a sociophysical concept. As humans, we create these spaces to be reflections of who we are; they are entirely constructed by each individual.

One of my biggest takeaways from *Home and Identity in Late Life* is the idea that home is an extension of the self through tangible things (objects, places, etc.). It was validating to read Rowles' thoughts and theories on the concept of home, because similar ones were circulating in my mind long before I read this. This book put into words the concepts that I had been trying to convey visually. I felt as though I was forming an accurate definition of home; one that pertains to how home is an extension of the self, and how that extension manifests as objects and memories.

Yet, something was still missing from my definition.

I turned to Paul O'Connor's *Home: The Foundations of Belonging*². Chapter 4, "Landscape of Memory," proved to be incredibly useful in completing my definition

¹ Rowles, Graham D., PhD. *Home and Identity in Late Life: International Perspectives*. Springer Publishing Company, 2005.

² O'Connor, Paul. *Home: The Foundations of Belonging*. Routledge, 2017.

of home. O'Connor perceives memory, specifically memories shared amongst groups of people, anchors identities together and fosters a sense of belonging—a sense of home. This is called collective memory. These memories become the foundation for a fulfilling social life (or, for example, family life) and can give meaning to physical places as well. Objects of significance within personal spaces (photos, gifts, crafts, etc.) preserve memories of community, and preserve landmarks of a person's life. Essentially, O'Connor is arguing that memory is what binds communities, gives meaning to objects, and renders experiences and places meaningful.

Knowing how and why themes of memory, objects of importance, and community are bound together is useful information. Each of them informs the other, and they arguably do not exist without the other. I believed that it was important to include each in my definition of home, and to have limited my definition to only them.

My definition: Home is an extension of the self through themes of memory, community, and objects of significance.

At this point, I was able to narrow my visual exploration to only include imagery that suggests myself, my community, my memories, and my objects. While these terms have a very large scope, it was specific enough that I could more intentionally choose my collection of imagery.

Precedents & Influences

Gerhard Richter is an artist whose work I referred to a lot when seeking visual inspiration for my painting. His photo paintings combine unidentifiable and recognizable imagery that create a soft, memory-like atmosphere. The pieces feel as though they are memories. Seeing this atmosphere captured in Richter's photo paintings felt relevant to the "memory" aspect of my definition of home. I wanted to emulate this softness,



Richter, Gerhard. 10.2.98. 1998

cloudiness, and balance of unidentifiable and recognizable imagery within my own painting.

Uta Barth was another influential artist to this piece, both conceptually and formally. Barth's photographs intentionally depict mundane or incidental settings, and she often returns to these settings over long periods of time.

Her work explores the nature of vision and the act of looking,

as well as the mundaneness of incidental settings- and she does this through photographing compositions that are abstract, evocative, and atmospheric. Her photos are of light on surfaces, and how that light changes or remains constant over a period of time.

Viewing light as a method of acknowledging change and the passing of time is really interesting. Of course, humans have been doing that for centuries, but Barth really takes it a step further by documenting the same wall, for example,

every week for an entire year to study how it changes. At this point, it was clear to me that light had become a visual throughline for my work. Using light as a measure of change and/or sameness relates to how I conceptually view home. The memories I hold onto, the objects I find significant, and the communities I find myself a part of may all change over time. Yet, these elements consistently exist in my life- they make-up who I am.

With all of these different visual and conceptual elements, I knew a collage-based approach to this painting would be appropriate and allow myself to say everything I needed to say within one piece. I think the biggest strength of collaging is the ability to combine multiple smaller ideas into one cohesive, nuanced thesis.

I used Photoshop to create the collage I would use as a reference for the painting. I organized the collage into vertical, narrow splices of photographs to allude to fleeting memories. I allowed elements of each spliced photo to overlap or interact with neighboring photos, and overlaid additional visual elements to unify the collage. Everything in the collage, whether legible or not, is a piece



Barth, Uta. Deep Blue Day. 2012

of what home means to me. This process required many, many iterations in order to ensure the color-scheme, focal points, etc. were satisfactory and intentional.

Then I discovered David Hockney's piece, *Snail Space with Vari-Lights*.

Snails Space, 1995-1996, formally consists of two attached canvases and a floor piece to look like a tiny, tangled world blown up to a preposterous size. As the light shifts over a 9-minute cycle, the painting becomes a time-based performance and the world Hockney created transforms. To sit in this installation through the entire cycle of light shifts is to take time for what Hockney called "the pleasure of looking" that leads us to understand "how beautiful the world is."

I had been toying with the idea of using a projector to elevate my final painting, and to nail the conceptual role light plays on this piece in a pretty literal sense, but had not yet succeeded in my attempts. The projections seemed to drown out the art and distract from it. Hockney opened my eyes to the possibility of colorful lighting. Thus began my journey of taking a page from Hockney's book and creating lighting that transforms over the course of 5-10 minutes. Not only that, but I was curious about creating a light pattern that follows the natural daily cycle; a lighting setting for dawn, sunrise, midday, sunset, dusk, and nighttime. This pertains to the passing of time, in a literal sense. Conveying a sense that time is literally passing within a painting is really interesting because it plays with the idea of what a painting is. Painting is traditionally still, it does not move or change once it is finished. Adding a time-based element to the viewing of a painting is unexpected and captivating.



David Hockney, Snails Space with Vari-Lites, "Painting as Performance", 1995-1996, oil on two canvases, acrylic on canvas-covered masonite, wood dowels, overall: 84 x 260 x 135 in.



I'm Home Here. Digital collage. 2022

The Painting

The painting process, from the time I acquired the canvas until the time I properly cleaned and put away my brushes, took 3 full months. The oil painting is 9x4ft. and references the digital collage I previously created. The dimensions of I'm Home Here are so large because this idea, this concept, this point of reflection is so heavy on my mind. It's something I've spent so much time pondering over, that it would feel unjust to create something that did not dimensionally match that.

For me, painting is about layering. It's about building. It's tedious and thought provoking. It allows me to process what I am feeling. In order to capture my sporadic, nuanced feelings towards home, I thought very critically about how each shape I painted connected to the concept, and how I felt about it. Even though the digital collage was intentionally crafted, having the ability to work with my hands on this piece allowed me certain freedoms that the digital sphere cannot do for me. For example, if a photo within the collage was cropped strangely and did not extend to the edge of the canvas, I was able to paint it to the edge of the canvas; how I wished it was originally. There is also a strong appeal to visible evidence of the artist's hand. When you see my painting, you can see visible paint strokes. You can see where I layered colors and where I implemented different painting techniques. You can see that a human being created this work of art.

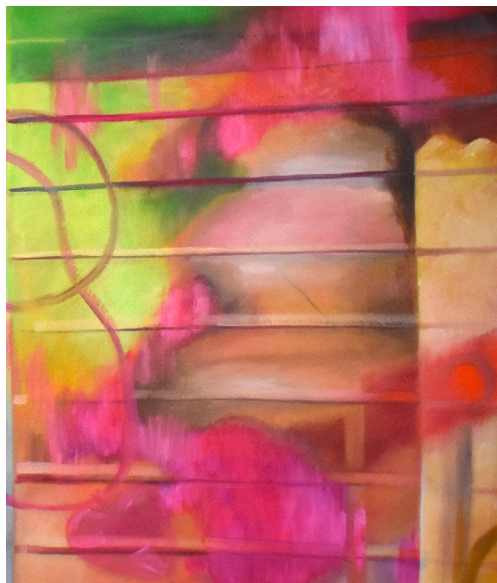


I'm Home Here. Detail. 2023

**This painting is packed full of personal sentiment.
I'll guide you through some of it.
Just don't let this overshadow your own interpretations.**



A heart locket. To fill with love, to remind you of home wherever you go. An object.



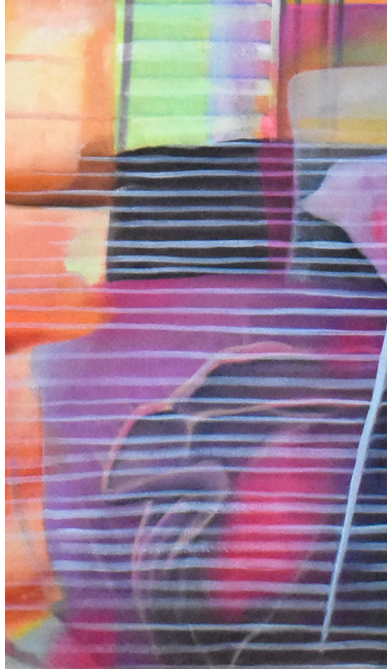
My roommates and best friends hugging on one of their birthdays. Community.



My plant, comfortably growing in my roommate's pot, lit by the morning sun we get in our living room. A fond memory. Objects.



My mom cutting into the Thanksgiving pie. That year, due to Covid, I spent Thanksgiving with just my immediate family. Community. Memories.



My bedroom at my parents' house. Memories.

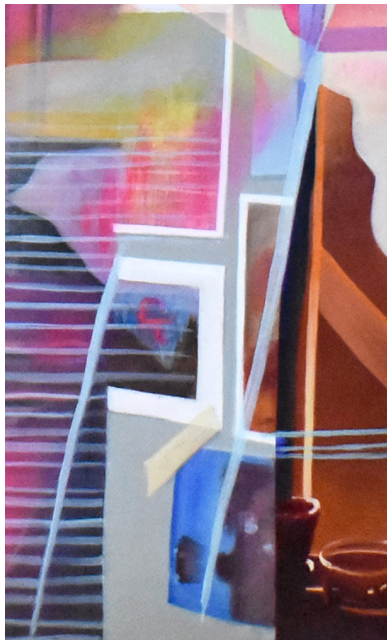


Photo mementos and posters, collected over the years. Visual memories in the form of objects.



Two people, tenderly holding hands. Community.



My shoes. I essentially wear the same three pairs of shoes over and over. I feel as though where all of my favorite shoes are, that is a place I can comfortably call home. Even if it's only temporary. Objects.

The Installation

I'm Home Here would not be complete without how it is installed into a space.

I left the canvas unstretched and susceptible to movement. The material is as malleable as the definition of home is. The canvas is then hung from a concave frame that is attached to the wall. The painting hangs parallel to the wall it is hung on, but is curving in towards the viewer from the right and left edges- almost as if the painting is embracing the viewer. This provides a panoramic, immersive, and intimate viewing experience that differs from traditional paintings.



Top view of wooden frame.



Wooden frame attached to wall.

The projection is a part of the installation as well. I created a video to project over the painting that loops over a 9 minute period from white light, to yellow, orange, pink, blue, purple, back to yellow, and again to white. About four minutes of this video is white light- it's the color the viewer is most likely to see when they view the painting. The color shifts are very subtle, and although they very much do change the perceived color of the painting with each shift, it's not hard to miss. The shifting colors are a reward to the careful viewer, and an incentive to look deeper into the painting and reflect on the concept and abstracted imagery.

The light cycle loosely mimics the circadian light cycle. White light reflects early afternoon light from the sun. Yellow and orange light move into the late afternoon and evening. Pink is sunset. Blue and purple is the shift from dusk, to darkness, to dawn. Back to yellow for early morning light. Sometimes home is felt at a certain time of day. Sometimes it grows lighter or darker depending on other factors in a person's life. All I know for sure is that home changes, and is something that we (or, at least, I) feel differently about day to day. Sometimes home is good, other times it's overwhelming. Sometimes home is a best friend, other times it's alone in bed. The change of lighting would reflect the change in attitude I have towards home.



I'm Home Here. White light. Hung from wooden frame.



I'm Home Here. Yellow light.



I'm Home Here. Orange light.



I'm Home Here. Blue light.

Now That it's Over

Now that it's over- I'm looking to the future. This process really solidified how integral photo references and digital collages are to my work. I am better able to explore broad concepts with these tools. I am also looking forward to working at a large scale again. As tedious and exhausting as it is, it's encapsulating and rewarding. I love possessing the ability to create something that can grab a viewer's attention whether they are standing 20ft. away from the piece, or are sat 20cm away from the piece. I would love to apply *I'm Home Here* to galleries, so more people can have the opportunity to see my take on this concept and on painting as a medium.

This piece also has made me excited to explore other unconventional ways to display and view a painting. Subverting the idea of a still, flat painting filled me with wonder and curiosity. I enjoy how I have done that in the context of *I'm Home Here*, but I know there are more boundaries to push. While the door is closing on this project, I feel satisfied knowing that it has opened more doors down the road. I am left with more to learn, experiment with, and discover.