

Dear House:

An Exploration of Home and the Inner Self

Integrative Project Thesis

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When I was a child, my home was the world, and I behaved as any curious being might – exploring my world. I set out to discover the place I lived, to understand my surroundings. Naturally, my exploration began with climbing, to get a better view. I climbed on top of the columns in between the living room and dining room, my hands wrapped around the girth of wood, while thick leaves from the hanging plant entangled themselves in my hair. The floor became a massive entity, stretching the span of the house, and the light diving in through the French doors quietly froze across the dining room table, a sheet of golden ice.

Next, I explored the lowlands, hovering close to the ground. I put my ear to the floor vents, to find the source of their howls. I followed the grooves between floorboards, taking note of where the gaps widened and where each board met for a kiss, unified beneath me. Then I turned to the sky, the ceiling above me. I lay on my back and imagined the ceiling had turned into the floor, so that I had to step over ledges to enter each room. Sometimes the floor curved up, sloping into the wall, while in other rooms it slanted at steep angles, leaving a narrow valley between the bases of two mountains. During my exploration, I adapted to my world, becoming a creature suited for my environment. I discovered the intricacies of my home, which in turn, became my own intricacies, thus our identities became inseparable.

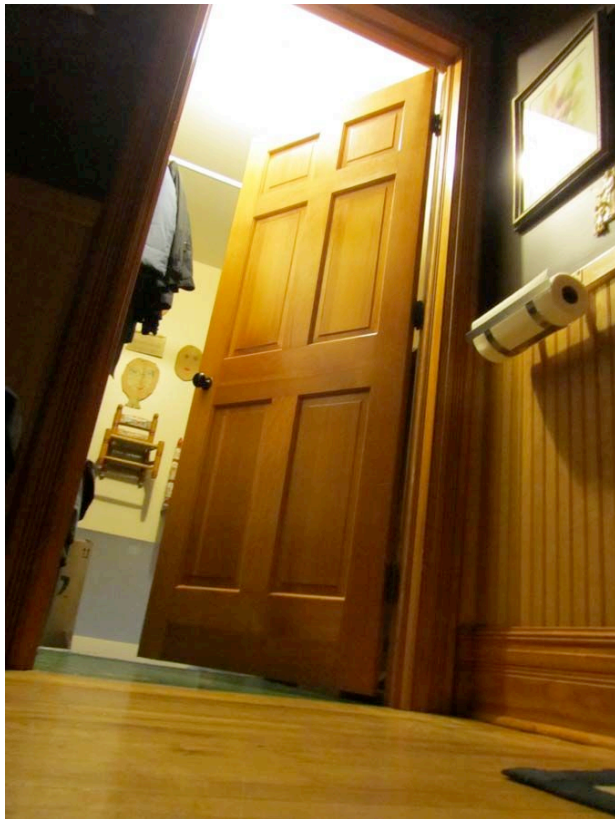
Beginning this project, I did not know what I was searching for or trying to answer. Instinctively though, I was drawn to the idea of home – a place of security and belonging, and a relief from outside pressures and obligations. I was drawn to the idea of making myself comfortable in places that I am not, in essence finding home within myself. To do this, I referenced the home I have always known and kept close to me, my childhood home. Through intimate knowledge of my childhood home, I began reconstructing the interior spaces that I grew

up in. I did so not to recreate my childhood, but to rebuild the comfort I knew as a child. My project is an effort to find security within myself and strengthen the frame of my inner house.

It was not until I left home that I realized how attached I had been to the space. It wasn't a feeling of homesickness, like the first night spent away from home as a child. Leaving home as an adult was something different because it had a sense of finality to it, and although I return home on occasion, the experience is not the same. Living in my house as a child had a seamless sense of belonging, whereas now, I am a separate entity from my house; our relationship has changed, and we no longer have solidarity. According to Gaston Bachelard, "If we return to the old home as to a nest, it is because memories are dreams, because the home of other days has become a great image of lost intimacy." (Bachelard, 100) Such is true of my relationship with my childhood home. It represents a lost intimacy that I am trying to regain within myself.

The process of recovering that lost intimacy has been an evolving one, but it always begins with a visual depiction of the interior space of my childhood home. In order to find that sense of familiarity within myself, I work from spaces that I know and recognize. As Gaston Bachelard put it, "Every corner in a house, every angle in a room, every inch of secluded space in which we like to hide, or withdraw into ourselves, is a symbol of solitude for the imagination; that is to say, it is the germ of a room, or of a house." (Bachelard, 136) I like to think of the specific architectural traits and characteristics of my home as different aspects of my personality. The crooked angles in the ceiling, the uneven floorboards, and the concrete foundation, all built by hand, labored over, worked, reworked, and worked again. The idiosyncrasies of my house are my own, and that is why it is so important that my work exaggerates and emphasizes specific architectural quirks in each space.

I begin my work by taking photographs of my childhood home, paying careful attention to the light, angles, reflections, and perspective of each image. The photographs are vital because they provide me with the freedom to explore my home, much as I did as a child. I use the camera to rediscover familiar spaces, and I follow my instincts to capture what I am looking for. According to Clare Cooper Marcus, “The call of the soul, first encountered in childhood, is reencountered again and again through life.” (Marcus, 252) It is the soul of my house - the soul that I have lost - that I am searching for, and when I find it, I feel a spark, a reminder that it is still within me, waiting to be rediscovered.



Once I have the initial images, I begin to draw in grayscale, focusing on light and shadow. The light and shadow in each space are crucial because that is what conveys warmth, comfort, and a sense of life within the space. After the initial drawing, I move on to making monotypes of the spaces in parts, later piecing them together to create a whole. It is important to

me that I start the pieces using only black ink, building the frame, or base layer that will tie the final image together. It is also significant that I work in parts before assembling because I respond to the inconsistencies and shifts within the final image. I find it fascinating to figure out how each part fits, where each line should connect, and how my hand will meld the incongruous fractions with color, line, and shape.



As I draw on top of the final monotypes with oil pastel, they become reflections of my inner self, of what I want: comfort and contentment with myself and with my place in the world. At some point in the process, the images depart from the reality they were based on, and they become meaningful depictions of my soul. Even though the printing process produces a flipped

image, in my mind they are more authentic than the photographs. The process, layers, and work that have gone into each image bring them to life, and I believe that they actually exist inside me. Along with the visual work, my writing has also been an important part of my process. Putting into words my feelings, worries, and anxieties about losing my literal home and finding my inner home has been a key aspect of my project. As Olivier Marc has stated, “In one’s dream life the house is the image of the dreamer’s self, that it reflects activity going on in the psyche, and that it therefore is part of our inner landscape.” (Marc, 67) Therefore, my poetry has been a way to define my inner landscape and record the shift I have made from literal home to the metaphorical home within me.

Throughout this project, my work has been strongly influenced by the work of Evan Summer, Andrew Wyeth, Edward Hopper, and Jim Dine. I became captivated by Evan Summer’s work after meeting him and learning that his images are derived from childhood memories and dreams. Hearing him speak about his process and seeing his etchings and collagraphs in person really strengthened my connection with the work, and I found myself looking deep into his



mysterious landscapes, wanting to explore the unknown. It was Evan Summer who helped me realize that I wanted to use my own life and experiences as the basis for my project. Similarly,



Andrew Wyeth’s work has a mysterious emptiness, and I get the feeling that his spaces are inhabited, but at the same time, abandoned. I am hypnotized by his paintings because I find myself imagining that I am the inhabitant, which is something I strive for in my own work.

Edward Hopper's work has also been very important to me because of his harmonious use of color, and because of the clean delineation of light and shadow in his paintings. Looking at his work has been very valuable to the development of my



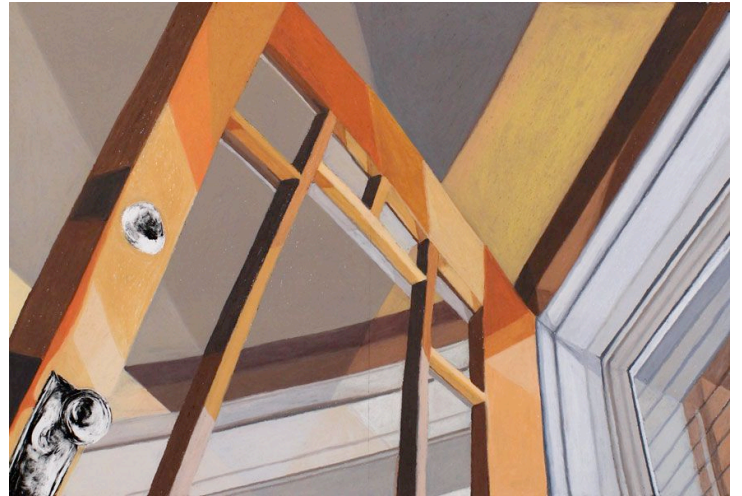
own use of color, light, and shadow. Lastly, Jim Dine's process has been very influential to my own. The way black ink bleeds through color in his work is so intriguing, and I have adapted his process of painting and drawing on top of prints for my own work.

Gaston Bachelard, Olivier Marc, and Clare Cooper Marcus have also influenced my work through their writing. During the ideation of my project, *The Poetics of Space* propelled my work, and I was illuminated by Gaston Bachelard's explanation for the allure of home. It was as if he had articulated all of the thoughts and ideas that were circulating in my mind, making sense of them for me. Similarly, *Psychology of the House* taught me about the history of the house, and Olivier Marc's connection between the house and the inner self helped me process the link between my own house and inner self. In *House as a Mirror of Self*, Clare Cooper Marcus's belief that the bond formed with a house during childhood continues into adulthood has also contributed to my work by making me more aware of how my connection to home has continued into adulthood and changed over time.

Through my research and personal experience, I have developed a process of conveying my ideas of home through images of interior spaces and poetry. Beginning as a project about home and memory, my process has led me to discover new notions of home that delve beneath the surface of the literal. I have discovered more about myself than I realized was buried within. As Clare Cooper Marcus put it, "We hold on to childhood memories of certain places as a kind

of psychic anchor, reminding us of where we came from, of what we once were, or of how the physical environment perhaps nurtured us when family dynamics were strained or the context of our lives fraught with uncertainty.” (Marcus, 20) My search for the inner home is one that has brought me comfort and a better sense of identity, and with that gained, I intend to continue my process of discovery, in anticipation of what I may find next.





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