

**A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Alfred University**

Heirloom Artifacts

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STATEMENT

I collect artifacts of the people, places, and events that hold my roots. My inspiration began with the experience of looking through boxes of unsorted ancestral photographs in my grandmother's attic. I would like people to have this same sense of discovery and time as they use my pieces. The intimacy of ceramic wares readily offer a platform from which to examine how we retain memories and recreate stories from their fragments. This idea of containing captured moments is expressed through cropped imagery, historical patterning and the tactile surface.

Functional ware is a natural vehicle for comparing cultures and storytelling while bringing beauty and elegance to a domestic environment. The preservation and display of my great- great grandmother's image on ware used daily honors her memory. The tactile quality of my work and ornament are intended to engage the user and draw attention to the ritualistic actions of sharing a family meal.

Each piece is a visual and tactile conglomeration of patterns, colors and cropped images that stimulate and act as the skeleton of a story. The images are pictures of my ancestors, dating back to the late 1800's. In this way, the work becomes a self portrait. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard wrote "We have within ourselves an entire assortment of images and recollections that we would not readily disclose." Each image is like a page from a diary; each piece, a core sampling of my life and my history. While this makes the work personal to me, it is also universally accessible because the full story behind each image is obscure.

My ceramic place settings readily offer opportunities for stories to slowly unfold through use. At first, the images and patterns seem haphazard in their assembly, but soon stories begin to develop between the characters and their surroundings. The arrangement is important and, as the objects circulate on the dinner table through use, different images connect and create new dialogs. Images cropped to small focal points propose a story while making the prompts vague enough to encourage curiosity and individual interpretation.

The act of collecting becomes a ritual to gather specific moments and to recall past memories. This act begins to alter reality, giving it a sense of surreal idealism. We are each a collection of stories, ideas, moments and memories and we often choose to surround ourselves with specific décor that reflect these things. Collecting and surrounding ourselves with objects we deem special, beautiful or curious is a natural and instinctive way to mark our places in the world.

We develop many ways to mark our progress through time; objects serve as treasured symbols and physical reminders of important moments in our lives such as births, rites of passage, marriages and deaths. The images I have chosen depict these events and the vessels that frame them become their reliquaries. The dishes are stitched together like an old family quilt; as each patch is carefully taken from a father's shirt or mother's dress and reassembled, each of my images is carefully cropped and applied to create a more permanent family heirloom.

A sense of time is a quality that I strive for in my work through imagery and ornament. The clipped photographs act as hints to a broader story and create an illustration or timeline, much like an old family album. Objects that bear ornament are more likely handed down through generations due to a perception of decoration's value beyond functional necessity. The

vocabulary of ornamentation, specifically pattern merged with imagery, has been used around the world to pass legends and cultural history from generation to generation. The Victorian wallpaper design I have chosen references the late 19th century, a time of lavish decoration and excess. My pieces physically demonstrate this period of extravagance as the patterned sections rise from the surface, creating a tactilely stimulating experience through use. This draws attention to the images on the ware, the ware itself and the ritual of dining. Historically, images on pots were often used, among other things, as storyboards. I am interested in continuing this tradition of surrounding ourselves with memories and legends.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF SHOW WORK

In my Senior Exhibition, there is a shelving unit of 30 cups on the back wall with a 2 foot by 11 foot long table leading down through the center of the space. A place setting is at each end of the table, with a number of candlestick holders and vases in between. The extreme dimensions of the table emphasize and exaggerate the distance between the two settings. Four tall pedestals bearing candlestick holders and vases surround the table. The candlestick holders range from 10 to 15 inches not including the 12 inch hand dipped black candles. Because of their height, these pieces have a formidable presence and act as a procession of heirlooms, accentuating the atmosphere of exaggerated pomp and circumstance.

The wall of cups is a collection of framed moments. There is a simple beauty and accessibility in small things like cups as they are the most intimate of functional vessels. Because of this, they are the most effective tool through which to demonstrate my thesis. Each

of my cups is like a core sampling from a wall in a house with photographs of ancestors, hung over antique wallpaper. Because of the scale, each frame seems to preserve minute details and transient memories, making the vessel a precious keepsake.

The table setting depicts the ritualized ideal of a family banquet- an event that is intended to bring people together to celebrate connection through heritage and maintain family bonds but in reality, is defined by exaggerated propriety, separation and individualism. The resulting atmosphere is sterile and surreal. In continuing my work after graduation, this is the point that I am most interested in investigating.

PROCESS

This body of work was made with white stoneware, cone 6 glazes, decals and gold luster. In making each piece, I throw the form, apply the sprigs (the textured designs), coat them in wax and then wait for the piece to dry enough to trim. I found that applying the sprigs as quickly as possible after throwing reduced the amount of cracking and the sprigs almost always remained attached. Brushing vinegar on both the body and the sprigs microscores them and makes attachment both faster and cleaner than any other method. The wax retains the moisture in the sprigs, allowing them to dry at the same rate as the body despite the varied thicknesses of the pieces. Uniqueness is the signature of intimacy. This is why I make each piece by hand-throwing, trimming and decorating them individually so that no two are the same. This ritual of production and decoration became another unseen layer of time in the content of the work.

Having been born with a 'disorder' called Synesthesia (the switching and interaction of senses), I am very aware of the power of colors. My perceptions of people, places and relationships equated very specific colors. As I grew up, this 'disorder' began to fade and the world was neutralized to a grayscale. Because of my childhood memories of these experiences, colors still carry specific and potent implications and I use them sparingly. In this show, the work is gray and white with moments of a rusty orange that is one of five defining colors of my childhood memories of home. While my experiences with color give this series a personal sense of nostalgia, the grayscale also traditionally implies a similar passage of time and departure from an idyllic past to others.

Formally, my work addresses breath and elegance, exploring the effects of volume and constriction to play with the visual weight of each piece. For example, the feet on my cups are cut in at a sharp angle so as to appear as though they are floating when they rest on the table. In contrast, one of the candle stick holders has an exaggeratedly heavy base with a top that seems to soar up and project the candle.

The patterning on the pieces conforms to the surface and stretches around it with the lines serving to exaggerate the form. The designs resemble quilts and collages because of their intrinsic ability to reflect the passage of time. Much like ancestral scrapbooks, by physically stitching pattern and image together, I am unifying and creating tangible portals to the past.