



HOUSE
&
HOME

House & Home
Cindy Blažević, Zoe Kreye and Gwenessa Lam

Home: it warms the heart, triggers fond memories, and uncovers repressed fears, uncertainties and unsettling thoughts, sometimes all at once. No matter how seemingly personal, the homestead is undeniably political, charged with expectations of social norms and gender roles. Such a dwelling is equally private and public—a sanctuary of escape on one hand, and the face presented to the world on the other¹. So, what makes a house—an architectural structure—a home? Home is as varied as the people who occupy and create it. As a psychological construction, home fluctuates between perception and reality. More than a roof over one’s head, home materializes in the connection between the physical site—the house—and the interpersonal relationships that transpire through space and time². This concept draws out deep personal memories and experiences while reinforcing cultural and societal assumptions, introducing multiple layers of meaning within one simple word. Intricately woven, home exists within the past, the present and the future simultaneously³.

Within the alchemic transformation of space into place, a house becomes a home. Through lived experience, an objective and generic site becomes something more—a subjective place, filled by its inhabitants, past and present, with unique characteristics and stories⁴. The intimate closeness between a person and a place can be as strong as the bonds between people⁵. The idea of home possesses a “seductive embrace” that captures our hearts and minds⁶. In the exhibition *House & Home*, presented in the Campbell House, a historic house museum, artists Cindy Blažević, Zoe Kreye and Gwenessa Lam offer a nuanced and thought-provoking examination of the creation of home. Their different interpretations of family and self within these spaces stir personal responses and remembrances about a common idea that although shared by many remains particular to each viewer.

¹ Blunt and Dowling, *Home*, 16.

² *Ibid.*, 1; Ward, *A History of Domestic Space*, 6; Fisher et al. *Performance, Fashion and the Modern Interior*, 10; Hornstein, *Losing Site*, 86.

³ Hodge, “A new model for memory work,” 131; Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 8.

⁴ Lippard, *The Lure of the Local*, 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*



Fig. 1. Cindy Blažević. *Gaetano* (2005). C-print.

The photographic series *Generational Living Rooms* (2005–) by Cindy Blažević captures thirtysomething males in their childhood homes. These portraits draw a sharp divergence between subject and backdrop and between the generational values they visibly carry. The living-room setting stands in for an older generation. The men with their distinct personalities, quirks and personas, represent a younger generation, trying to define alternative ways of living in the world. The men in Blažević's images challenge the preconceived notion that at thirty a person should be "settled down," instead recognizing that many people choose or, due to economic and cultural conditions, are forced to pursue unconventional models of prescribed life stages. Traditional inheritance of property, money and objects reveal a deeper lineage of beliefs and a pedigree that may be adapted or left behind. The material deviations reflect personal and societal shifts, evident not only within the images but also in the

relationship between photographs and their site of display⁷. "Somehow," explains Blažević, "seeing them interact with this room—the soul of a home, one measure of stability—hints at the gap between the value and aspirations of our generation and those of our parents," a disparity further emphasized in the contrast between the portraits and the 19th century living room of the Campbell House Museum⁸.

Among the many complex components that affect personal development, the changing physical space of a "home," which no longer takes the ubiquitous form of a single family dwelling, influences personal values and goals. Situated in the interior living space, the historically gendered place of the female (in contrast to the masculine public sphere), these men demonstrate "changing expressions of social subjectivities such as class, gender, family belonging and social status" that play out within the family home as a microcosm for larger society⁹. The men sit framed—slouching on the couch, feet up on the table, leisurely reclining in a wing-back chair and hiding beneath a pillow fort—by the furniture, pictures, rugs, lamps, books and art of their unseen parents. Generational values compete against the backdrop of interior design. Décor, fashion and individual performances for the camera reveal how presentation functions as a tool for self-representation¹⁰.

Blažević's photographs perform a dual function as both a portrait of an individual and an example of an ideal. Titled with the names of each person, these images invite an intimate connection between subject and observer. Yet, while we, the viewer, are privy to the private family homes of Andy, Matt, Drew, Jason, Chris, Rex, Jay, Clint and Gaetano, the camera remains bound by its frame. The viewer can only see within the picture frame, and one picture presents only fragments of insight into the story of how these men conceive and construct their current and past ideas of home.

⁷ Oram, "Sexuality in Heterotopia," 535.

⁸ Blažević, *Artist Statement*.

⁹ Oram, "Sexuality," 536.

¹⁰ Pavoni, "Towards a definition," 16.



Fig. 2. Cindy Blažević. *Drew* (2006). C-print.



Fig. 3. Gwenessa Lam. *Interior Passage* (2010). Oil on canvas.

In stark contrast, Gwenessa Lam's *Interiors* (2010–13), haunting and void of individuality, provoke an intimate connection. These hyper-realistic but subtly distorted paintings depict doorways, floors and walls, empty of the signifiers of a family home. The images—suggestive of a familiar place, a past or future apartment, doorways crossed and rooms inhabited—capture the viewer's imagination. The paintings encourage a quiet need to understand why this room remains empty. What stories would be told if walls could speak?

The emptiness of Lam's paintings reinforces the psychological construction of home as much more than a physical site. Depicting different versions of the same room, the artist repeatedly draws attention to the fallibility of memory as recollections of place become distorted over time. Stripped down and bare, the room awaits the inhabitation staged in Blažević's photographs. Lam's partial spaces uncover "layers of time" within architecture where "multiple meanings [are] attached to space" by those who inhabit, either physically or through viewing a representation, the dwelling before them¹¹. Unoccupied and lacking a narrative, the room functions as "image-as-*aide-memoire*," so that the paintings allow viewers to respond from their own experiences, projecting a unique and singular perspective of home on the images¹². Thus it is the viewer who fabricates the sense of connection and familiarity with an otherwise ambiguous site.

Lam's *tabula rasa* spotlights the fiction we create through recollection. Memory blurs reality and perception into a narrative of our past that we bring to our present, ultimately constructing our future¹³. By distorting the proportions of a room, Lam draws attention to common but easily overlooked architectural details. Defamiliarizing these elements—doorways, white walls and baseboards —Lam also transforms them into unique objects. She creates a new awareness "of the ordinary," in which "the object draws attention to itself," resulting in a refocusing of attention on how architecture, as a set for life's unfolding drama, is also an actor in these stories¹⁴.

¹¹ Oram, "Sexuality," 535.

¹² Hornstein, *Losing Site*, 2.

¹³ Hodge, "A new model," 131.

¹⁴ Hornstein, *Losing Site*, 92.



Fig. 4. Gwenessa Lam. *Single Spotlight* (2013). Oil on canvas.



Fig. 5. Zoe Kreye. *Audio Blueprint, Mauro House* (2003) Wood, glue, audio.

Zoe Kreye's exterior shell of a house, *Audio Blueprint, Grifford House* (2004) presents the skeleton of a family home constructed from adult recollections of childhood memories. A recorded interview, which plays alongside the house, provides the blueprint for this model home. While the house itself is imprecise, the interview fills in the rough outlines with specific remembrances. Surprisingly detailed in his telling, the interviewee recollects the architectural layout, furniture choices, décor styles of the era, and funny anecdotes about his family. Like segments of a daydream certain details become clear, while others fade into the background. Octagonal window, peeling white picket fence, a central staircase and pitched roof—these features frame the experiences and feelings that make this house a home.

Just as Lam relies on memory to reimagine a physical space, so too do the subjects of Kreye's research. The interview reveals the lasting imprint of how place and memory intermingle. With a love of a specific place—a childhood home—"the dreamer constructs and reconstructs" the poetics of the house¹⁵. "In this remote region" of dreams, "memory and imagination remain associated, each one working for their mutual deepening," allowing the dreamer to envision past experiences in places that may no longer exist physically¹⁶. Employing recall, *Audio Blueprint, Grifford House* demonstrates the way we operate in "architecture of the heart"—a phenomenon described by architectural historian Shelley Hornstein (2011) in which "a place within us" affectively connects memory to a specific location¹⁷. Each new descriptor gives way to fragmented stories: of a spot on the kitchen floor where dog's habitual haunt wore away the linoleum; to the upstairs, where for an unbeknownst reason, the mother never ventured; to the Holly Hobby wallpaper that decorated his room because his parents expected a girl. Situated between the void of Lam's paintings and the fullness of Blažević's photographs, Kreye's architectural sculpture frames the transformation of house into home, from physical structure to a community of people.

¹⁵ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5

¹⁷ Hornstein, *Losing Site*, 3.



Fig. 6. Zoe Kreye. *Audio Blueprint, Grifford House* (2004). Wood, glue, audio.



Fig. 7. Capewell House Nail Co.

Exhibited in the second floor ballroom of the Campbell House Museum, surrounding the fireplace—the hearth, the symbolic soul of the family—the artworks in *House & Home* animate a space frozen-in-time. Built in 1822, the Campbell House is the oldest remaining building from the original town of York. Once a family home, this dwelling is more than an example of Georgian architecture; it is a site of heritage and a relic of personal and collective memory. Originally home to Sir William and Lady Hannah Campbell, the Campbell House, at Frederick and Adelaide, later served as a vinegar factory and the headquarters for the Capewell Horse Nail Company and the Otis Elevator Company before the house was relocated to its current home at Queen and University in 1972. The house, in various forms—as representational image or physical structure, as memory or reality, as private dwelling or historic museum—highlights societal values and cultural conditions of an epoch. As a platform for shared experiences and memories of home, the house museum acts as a locus of reimagination¹⁸.



Fig. 8. Campbell House with pink flowers.

¹⁸ Hodge and Beranek, “Dwelling,” 99.

The artworks of this exhibition present only a few possible narratives for personal and collective understanding of home in relation to family and self identity. The works emphasize where these ideas expand, contract, and change focus and importance based on societal and individual growth. The artists demonstrate how concepts of home are constructed and how they change over time. At the same time, they draw the visitor's awareness to the historical performance of "home" within the Campbell House Museum. Blažević, Kreye and Lam manifest memories, representations and reality experienced: in the transition from house to home, in the shift from physical structure to community, and in morphing ideas of selfhood and societal values.

Katherine Dennis, Curator



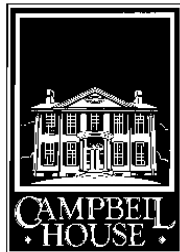
Fig. 9. Cindy Blažević. *Jay* (2005). C-print.

About the artists: Cindy Blažević is a Toronto-based, Canadian-Croatian visual artist who uses photography to document private narratives within the shifting landscapes of larger social and political spaces, exploring themes of identity, authority, and access. York University's Osgoode Hall Law School named Blažević the inaugural Artist in Residence for the 2013/14 academic year. Zoë Kreye's art works looks to engage the public in relations beyond aesthetics, with the goal of building inclusive, bottom-up associations that have the potential to be small catalysts for change within dominant social systems. She is currently based in Vancouver and teaches studio and Social Practice at Emily Carr University of Art & Design. Gwenessa Lam is a visual artist and educator. Her artwork stems from interests in perception and the compression of time and memory within images. Gwenessa lives and works in Vancouver, BC.

About the Curator: Katherine Dennis is a Toronto-based independent curator, writer and researcher. Dennis won the inaugural Middlebrook Prize for Young Canadian Curators at the Elora Centre for the Arts and will curate an exhibition, *As Perennial as the Grass*, for the gallery in October 2013.

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