House vs. Home: Defining Place Through Identity

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HOUSE VS. HOME:
DEFINING PLACE THROUGH IDENTITY

by

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ABSTRACT

A house is a place of safety. A home is a place of belonging. Though different a house always desires to become a home, but it can only be so through a connection to self. It is a home that is an extension of one’s identity. Through the mirror, which is the home, and through an understanding of schema theory a person’s being can be understood through one’s ideas, place, self, family, rituals, memories, and feelings. Each of these factors act as a layer of brick building a strong foundation or a crackling fireplace adorned with family portraits making the rooms feel cozy for the image of the home as well as self. Exploring the melancholic drawings, paintings, sculptures, and installations the relationship of self and place become more evident thus separating what is a house from a home. It becomes clear that the definition of home does not come from its physical boundaries but from the thoughts and interactions that reside within its walls. A joyous person creates a joyous home and a melancholic home creates an artist that is inclined to create melancholic art in search of what they don’t have. It is along this emotional journey the artist can truly understand what this sense of belonging means. Through his art the worn wallpaper and the cracked plaster of this darker world hold in the emotions of the artist showcasing the authenticity of self and opening a door for others in a similar search.
To everyone that acted as the foundation
and framework for my dream
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INTRODUCTION

We walk through life always in search of something. Love. Belonging. Purpose. What our end goal is depends on who we are and where we come from. With each moment we attempt to cross off an item on our mental checklist to happiness. For some this process can be quite simple. For others the weighing down of mental illness continuously extends the list presented. With every move closer to the objective the constant fog of emotions acts as a distraction. Personally, I attempt to find belonging in my art. Due to the life I’ve been given I’ve always felt like an outsider even in my own home. This process allows me to create melancholic images that explore the relationship of self to places and objects, specifically the home. Through my interdisciplinary exploration I depict my personal struggle of identity within the home. Though this may seem therapeutic there is a larger aim. Since people enjoy the art that they can relate to I create art for those outsiders to belong.

At the root of the sense of belonging is the idea of home. Not a house but a home. If a house does not necessarily determine it to be a home then what factors convert a house to a home? The key to this transformation is identity.
HOME IDENTITY

Where we come from has always been an important factor in our development. As McClay says, “There is no evading the fact that we human beings have a profound need for “thereness.” (2) This “thereness” is a sense of place, a sense of belonging. Place is not merely the physical location, but it also can include political, economic, and cultural activity. McClay defines these dynamic locations as “living places” due to the offering of diverse experiences. (8) These experiences aid in making up our identity, or place identity, and its factors continue to affect individuals well into the future.

My place identity stems from my hometown of Buffalo, NY, the second largest city in New York State. To me it is a city full of history and intrigue. An intrigue that comes from the many ruins that adorn the streets. Though it has had its moments of glamor around the turn of the century it has slowly seen its decline. Over the past 30 years, Buffalo’s population fell by around 200,000 people and with this decline many of these once prestigious places have seen their wear. But within this decline I still find comfort and beauty in the worn down city. To me the juxtaposition between what is and what should be acts as a metaphor for how I have looked at the home.

For example, there is a magnificent asylum complex at the heart of our city that entrapped people against their will if someone found them different or a threat. But yet in the same light it is not. It is abandoned and cannot be a hospital without any patients. Though my understanding of it has been created through years of personal experiences with psychological treatment and I have known this asylum my whole life there is a disconnect between reality and
the idealized. The asylum like many buildings in Buffalo have been stripped away of their initial function. Thus, Buffalo a playground of allowing a new way of understanding space. And as Piaget says, “Children require long, uninterrupted periods of play and exploration.” (Zhiqing 85) And it is seeing this decay that I am able to begin my search for a new classification for the home.

Though McClay says that this place identity can consist of a wide range of locations, including supermarkets to churches, I am focused specifically on the home. Instead of place identity, I explore home identity in my art because even at the very edge of the city where the quiet suburbs of middle-class, conservative, religious families resided factors that came from our city’s decline were felt which caused diverse experiences for myself. One part of my understanding of home identity is looking at schema theory.

Schema Theory

As an elementary art teacher I have been taught how the identity of a person is constructed of various understandings that support their perception. This idea of compartmentalized knowledge comes from Jean Piaget’s Schema Theory. (Zhiqing 84) Piaget states that schemas are essential to how we perceive the world. In Schema Theory all of our knowledge is arranged in compartments or schematas. Then when we are stimulated by an external object our mind attempts to assimilate using a schema as reference. Using what we know about the object or idea helps determine if the object is or is not what was thought to be perceived. For instance, we learn that a bird has feathers, wings, talons, and a beak. When we see an object with those parts we can then call it a bird. It is easy to comprehend a house. As Gaston Bachelard says, the primary function of a house is intuitively a shelter. But when it comes to a home it can be more
difficult to perceive. And it is this yearn to understand the home I began my artistic journey. I was taught in Catholic school that “home is where the heart is” or as novelist William Goyen states, “They knew and called with love, and call it home.” (Bachelard 58) But for me it has always been difficult associating home with such love. At first I was not sure what my schema of home was. This not knowing began my exploration to better understand the in-between nature of the reality of the home and the ideals of the home, but firstly I needed to know what the typical understanding of one was. A characteristic understanding would be:

A house is a shelter that is consistently resided in.

A home is a place of comfort.

If it is a house with a sense of comfort, it is a home.

If it is a house that does have a sense of comfort, it is not a home.

But I have already concluded that my thoughts of home are not archetypal. Love was not what I felt within those pure white walls, which meant that I needed to look further inward to progress on this understanding of home. But how can identity and personal experience play a role in this argument? To better understand the relationship of place identity and continue my understanding of home I looked at French philosopher Gaston Bachelard further.
The Poetics of Space

In examining Gaston Bachelard’s ideas of the home I was able to create a definition of home that also holds true for McClay’s idea of a “living place.” In solidifying a definition I found concepts that reoccurred in Bachelard’s work. These concepts were:

1. “The house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace.” (Bachelard 6)
2. “House and Space are not merely two juxtaposed elements of space. In the reign of the imagination, they awaken daydreams in each other, that are opposed.” (43)
3. “The house’s entire being would open up, faithful to our own being.” (15)
4. Family
5. “But over and beyond our memories, the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us.” (14)
6. “All we have to do is ask ourselves how, in the case of certain naïve daydreams, the simplest images can nurture traditions.” (116)
7. “The house, even more than the landscape, is a “psychic state.” (72)

Using these quotes I believe that a home can be defined through seven facets. These facets are ideas, space, self, family, memories, rituals, and feelings. Each will act as a lens to understand what makes up a home. So with this knowledge I commenced my MFA program in search of home while using utilizing these factors as parameters as well as opening the discussion about the secrets of the home since every home has their imperfections. Though my work delves into various mediums the core question remains. What is my schema for the home and how does it compare with the average understanding of one? With the answer to this question I am able to create a definition of home.
HOME

Home as Idea

“Its reality and in its virtuality, by means of thought and dreams.” (Bachelard 5) The first facet of the home is the idea. Before there can be a place of residence there must be an idea of what the home should be. How should it look? How should it act? At this stage a homebuilder questions what is wrong with the world and what they can do to make it better. And though it might seem an impossible feat the idea of a home appears to conquer these issues. For in a time of turmoil a home can comfort. For in a time of chaos a home offers order. For in a time of hustle the home offers relaxation. It is with this similar thought that I began to construct my home. Through my art which allowed me to “dream in peace.” (6)

In the beginning of understanding the ideals of home I latched onto my history of theatrical design and looked at work of MC Escher and Adolphe Appia. Though one a visual artist and one a scenographer both used space to mean more than just the physicality of being. Appia had a way of expressing his ideas by creating architectural designs made of purely stairs, light, and fabric. While Escher manipulated architecture to express his ideas of mathematics. It is this relationship between space and ideas that I first explored in my art making. What does a home need to offer for me?

Growing up in a conservative family I was faced with the challenge of not fitting in. If it was political, religious, or social views I was met with trials. Instead of running away I found a way to embrace my feelings and escape the world I knew. With my overactive imagination I allowed myself to be caught up in a place where I can call home. This idea of escapism captured
the essence of Appia and Escher while discussing my ideals. This discussion of my ideals can be seen in Figure 1, which focused on mindscapes or psychological spaces.

![Figure 1 Ryan Michael Gleason, Ascension, 2016, Digital Rendering](image)

In creating this mindscape I made a digital representation of the idea of a place of comfort. This rendering contained aspects of the physical world but in an unconventional way, like Escher’s and Appia’s work. In these imagined realities natural law is inferior to the concept. Ascension tells the story of the struggle of life. The generic person is seen climbing and falling in various moments of their life, a very relatable topic and the reason the subject is undefined. In Scott McCloud’s book Understanding Comics, he states that the more generic the image the easier it is for someone to put their self in the narrative. (10) This allowed for the discussion of home with others that struggled with understanding as well as with life within the home. For me
Ascension was an emotional narrative of the feelings within a broken home. Thus, Ascension paved the way for creating art that was not always typically understood to be pleasant.

Another point that this art piece allowed me to develop in my work was cultural symbols since the idea of the home is what the symbol of the home means. For example, Challenging journeys are seen in many religious forms such as the Catholic Stations of the Cross. Similar to this service, my character also finds a way to ascend their earthly bind. Not only did the mindscapes venture into my religious history, but it also associates my personal struggle within the religion. Though I attempted to create a perfected reality inside a religious home I was not able to. Thus, the creation of my broken schema of the home became more evident. Broken and twisted like the stairway in Figure 1. To further development my exploration of the meaning of home I began creating symbols as metaphors.

Figure 2 Ryan Michael Gleason, Utopia, 2016, Mixed Media Assemblage

One of these symbols I began using was the bird to further discuss the topic of freedom and ascension. In the sculptural piece titled Utopia a young finch is trapped in a synthetic
enclosure that promises limitless freedom. The encasement in the form of a dodecahedron symbolizes the perfected universe. However, as outsiders we can peer in and see that the freedom is merely a trick as the enclosure is lined with one-way mirrors. The yellow finch represents a naïve, simple self while the enclosure represents the constructions of society like a child knowing only what life is from their surroundings. It was this realization that I knew that it was time to look into how environments could be symbols.

As I delved deeper in the ideals of the home I began to understand that ideas or just abstract entities without having a place to pin them to. In this case my idea of the home was that a home is full of turmoil and challenges and contain a desire to escape. I took the study of enclosures to develop a symbol that paved the way for my practice, houses. These empty shells are meaningless without the lives of inhabitants within. As Michael Ann Holly suggest in *The Melancholy Art*, we go our entire life making and using items. Each item starts to move away from it being a reflection to it becoming a different meaning. (18) Thus, I was able to take these ideas of home to a physical examination.
Home as Space

The second facet of the home is space. It is in the layer the ideas become a reality and the concrete stands along with the abstract. No longer is comfort merely a part of the mind, it is the studs and framework for the home to rise around you. It is here that I feel more of a connection with my own self and with the ideas of others. Even though any image can reveal a person’s psyche, a house is more complex and intimate. However, what if it’s not a house but a home? “All great, simple images reveal a psychic state. The house even more than the landscape is a “psychic state,” and even when reproduced as it appears from the outside, it bespeaks intimacy.” (Bachelard 72) An artist that explores the home is Rachel Whiteread.

Rachel Whiteread has made a career by “asking us to pay attention to the empty spaces contained, tightly or casually, by the everyday objects among which we spend our lives.” (Wilkin) Whiteread does this by creating large and small-scale casts of the negative space of objects, primarily buildings. In her work titled House she uses an abandoned flat and fills it with concrete upon removing the walls a positive of the house remained even though the house is no more. In a way this concrete positive acts as the physical presence of the house’s spirit and is closer to the idea of a home than the previous structure. There is a relationship between idea and place.

Whiteread has also done a number of sculptures with the use of resin. The sculptures due to their transparent nature creates a ghostly entity. We’re forced to question the validity of the object. Though we can see the object before us it is only a copy of the object that used to be. One of such sculptures is Ghost, Ghost I. In this sculpture, a clear miniature house is presented. The house represents the ideals of the home though we can see the interior spaces due to the
medium of the sculpture thus realizing it is empty. We inject meaning to the symbol when there are no additional clues.

**House Heads**

In looking at this idea of home as place and thinking about Whiteread’s study of allowing the space to speak for itself I began to work on an idea known as house heads. A house head would represent an individual, both hiding and describing their truth. The first iteration of the house heads was one that was created of a Victorian woman titled *Victoria*. I was channeling my memories of the women in my family and the gender roles that they took on. In this digital print a traditional Victorian woman is engulfed in an intricate Victorian home. Both appear to be mirroring each other’s beauty; however, with closer inspection the various jobs and
responsibilities of the woman is showcased throughout the home. Thus, the initial beauty is replaced by the feeling of expected burdens and the turmoil I explored in the idea of home. Though Figure 3 showcased the connection between person and space I was curious to incorporate Whiteread’s thought of letting the place speak for itself further.

![Figure 4](image)

*Figure 4* Ryan Michael Gleason, *Untitled, Walls Series*, 2017, Ink on Paper

In doing so I began to create paintings that focused on the physical pieces that make up a home, such as Figure 4. Even with a small bit of information the idea of a home was still present due to the evidence inhabiting the image. Even though there is a lack of people there is still signs that people lived within the space due to the damage that was created. Damage that could not occur naturally thus leaving a doorway into the inhabitants’ psyche.
It was this minimalistic painting that inspired me to create the piece known as *House vs. Home*. In this piece I digitally rendered seven rooms from my childhood home. Each was modeled purely using my memory. This meant only including furniture pieces that I was sure of and lighting that I would remember filling the room during the time I would usually utilize the space. In a way this piece creates abstract snapshots of my home. And though it may contain enough information as to the layout of my home it begins to raise the question if this is truly a home or a house, a pivotal moment for my exploration.
In looking at Figure 6, it appears to be a photograph but upon closer inspection the photo becomes blurrier and the lack of information becomes clear. It is because this art piece balances between the idea of clarity and uncertainty that the question of is that a house or a home comes to the forefront. This art piece forced me to continue further inward into myself. As psychologist Anne Balif stated, “Asking a child to draw his house is asking him to reveal the deepest dream shelter he has found for his happiness. If he is happy, he will succeed in drawing a snug, protected house which is well built on deeply-rooted foundations.” (Bachelard 72) The same can be said for the reverse. If a child is not happy, they will not creating a joyous home. So what did it mean if in this art piece I created confined voids?
I continued this idea of my childhood home through the next work titled *Homeward Memories*. “We feel calmer and more confident when in the old home.” (43) I aimed to explore the place of the home differently than with *House vs. Home*. Instead of focusing on the digitally rendering the inside I used acrylic paint to paint the exterior. By using my memories to fuel my art I began to feel the art becoming more important. It is in Figure 7 that I created paintings based off memory and accepting the denial of information as large sections appear unpainted, much like with *House vs. Home*. Instead of creating intricately detailed paintings that fill the surface the paintings become obvious that they lack some information.
Furthermore, the small paintings are placed on a board that is painted as an interlocked wallpaper. The juxtaposition between the incomplete sections of home and the gate like design discuss the entrapment and submissive aspects of the home that yearn to be forgotten. This idea of forgetting is continued as the use of metallic paint causes the images to shift in and out of focus with the reflecting light. So though I approached the place of the home differently a similar result occurred, the sense of void or detachment.

Figure 8 Ryan Michael Gleason, Deconstructed Home, 2017, Mixed Media Dimensional Painting, 40”x 30”

What I learned from Homeward Memories and House vs. Home evolved into a new piece titled Deconstructed Home. As with Homeward Memories I selected pieces of my home and
collaged them together to create an object that could capture the presence of a home without showing its entirety. Like with Whiteread’s work, the viewer is asked to piece the home together by projecting their understanding of a home onto the painting. Consequently, the three-dimensional painting allowed oneself to connect the various framework of a house and create a home.

In exploring these works as well as looking at the works of Rachel Whiteread I conclude that the place associated to my understanding of home is detached from the world and myself. It is in those cold rooms and on that unkind lot that a sense of void is created. As Whiteread uses concrete to fill the voids of spaces to best explore them I must embrace the voids of my home to continue the development of my definition.

Creating art focused on my childhood home allowed me to relive some forgotten memories and realize my art, like my home was still vacant without life within its walls. Without discussing myself further I felt my art was still about houses and not homes. Even with the ideas of the home and the place of a home there still needs to be an essence of life. It is within this crafted comfort that we can be ourselves and further explore what lies beneath the surface. It is not until we inhabit a space that we feel an “essence of the notion of home.” (5) It is with these pieces that I knew my schema for a home was not about warmth, but about void and turmoil. It is with this understanding that I could now delve into the complexity of how I acted as part of the home.
Home as Self

The third facet of the home is the self. Within this layer I explored the reason of how I and the home relate. Taking into consideration my personality and thus my identity I could see the similarities between both. In this facet the self begins to shape the home further and solidifies the link between identity and place. It is also within this moment not only does the identity affect the home but the home also affects the self.

In my series A Place to Call Home I explored this concept. For this series I laid out various places that I have called home over the years and modeled them as those they were a
mask for myself. This idea of these buildings becoming a mask focused on how the location can describe the person and how the location can also hide in the true identity of the person. These pieces were directly inspired by my earlier house heads this series started with the first moments I was able to distance myself from my family all the way to present day.

![Image](image.png)

*Figure 10 Ryan Michael Gleason, *Childhood Home, A Place to Call Home, 2016, 3D Print and Ink on Paper, 5” x 7”*

The first piece, Figure 10, starts off in my family home and the journey continues until my current job as an elementary art teacher. Each image acts as an important event where I was able to have a better understanding of myself and needed a place to call home. I continued the discussion of the places by creating ink drawings that acted as backgrounds for the 3D prints. Together they raise the conflict between the perfected idea and the mental state. Another
juxtaposition is that the model is painted in white while the background painting utilizes grayscale. Though I may have been blinded by the façade of a place I was quick to hide the flaws when I found them.

![Image](image_url)

*Figure 11 Ryan Michael Gleason, King of Melancholia, 2017, Acrylic on Board*

I continued to explore this idea of self through a self-portrait. The *King of Melancholia* was done in a reductive style of painting. The painting would begin with an image that was reminiscent of the home due to wallpaper and wall textures and then I would begin to cover the image completely in black. Next I would remove the layers of black paint to create a darker image that blended myself into the background and vice versa. In this process of removing paint and working reductively I was able to create paintings that appeared worn. These visuals
connected my art to my mental state at the time of the memory. Though the initial images started off as a strong portrayal of myself I covered it with black to show the barriers that stop myself from feeling that way. Though I attempt to break the barriers down there is no way to achieve the initial feeling, or in this case picture.

An artist that inspired my self-portrait was Marlene Dumas. Marlene Dumas is a South African artist who creates expressive paintings and drawings. Her paintings use personal memorabilia, news clippings, and photographs. Instead of focusing on depicting the person’s physicality, Dumas captures the subject’s emotional state. This focus on emotion in her paintings stems from her theme of the psychological nature of people in relation to race, sexuality, and violence. Her use of grayscale with pops of colors and her loose brushstrokes inspired me to continue in my journey of self.

Seeing Dumas’s connection of portraits and emotion allowed me to see my connection to my self-portraits and emotion. I learned that I adapted to my surrounding. The disorder that resided in my home was brought onto myself. Also, the thoughts of myself were projected onto the home. It is these adaptive quality that was part of my schema for the home.

However, the childhood home does not consist of just yourself. What is a home with only yourself? No family photos. No big dinners. Though I had not been close to my family I realized what little interaction I had with them was important. Once I was able to accept myself I allowed myself to welcome my family into my understanding of the home.
“It is as when a family, your neighbors, return to an empty house after a long absence, and you hear the cheerful hum of voices and the laughter of children, and see the smoke from the kitchen fire.” (Bachelard 96) This is the ideal home. Upon the barren walls family photos and proudly hang. There is a general warmth emitting from the fireplace below the mantle where the family portrait hangs. By comparing my home to this version I began to reflect the representation of my family and memories associated with them. In order to explore them I needed to discover my idealized versions of people using my understanding of my schema. With this being said I created *Man and Woman* using my reductive painting method. In this diptych an iconic man and woman are shown without any further information from the background. In creating them I used reference images of couples from the 1950’s, such as the Cleavers from the television show *Leave It to Beaver*. Though I knew the Cleavers should be this perfect happy couple they frightened me. I was not used to these wide smiles and these gleaming eyes. Because I was not
used to this they made me feel uncomfortable and more alarming than my eye-less versions. In *Man and Woman* I didn’t need to avoid their eye contact or need to respond to their smiles with a smile hinting at my antisocial nature. An understanding of my schema for a home was forming for me but I needed more proof.

![Figure 13 Ryan Michael Gleason, Mother, Family Portraits Series, 2017, Oil on Board](image)

Now visualizing my understanding of my schema of people I was able to venture to more personal subjects. In my first journey into exploring the relationship between family and home I created small iterations of my family such as Figure 13. *Mother* uses my reductive technique like my earlier portraits. This style allowed me to transport my feelings onto the images of my family. Through the course of painting the board I was forced to confront the memories of my mother through the reference photos. Each second staring into her eyes another amount of black paint was removed. By the time I had finished her portrait the painting was transformed to a
version that was closer to my self-portraits than the reference photos, yet it was more truth and revealing than the family photos.

It was then that I began to see similarities between my schema of perfect people and the style of *Mother*. How could the idealized be comparable to the realized? Thus, I solidified what visually made the pictures alike. The physical similarities were that they were slightly abstracted images with a monochromatic color palette. Beyond the initial look the images also created a dialogue between the subject and the background. In some images the background became the subject or the background was blank to isolate the subject.

![Figure 14 Ryan Michael Gleason, A Family of My Own, 2017, Digital Collages](image)

*Figure 14 Ryan Michael Gleason, A Family of My Own, 2017, Digital Collages*

With an understanding of my evolving aesthetic I then aimed to take it and apply it to existing images. This was done in the piece titled *A Family to Call my Own*. I looked through historical photos of anonymous people and began applying my style on to them. In some cases a
majority of the person’s face would vanish into the background while other photos seemed to emerge from their surroundings. In *A Family to Call my Own* I also wanted to explore this idea that family truly elevates the notion of home. With this in mind I framed the stylized portrait to describe my ideal family. Each portrait is hanged together as though to show off the perfection of family and a group to belong to similar to photos.

However, when I stood back and looked at the three pieces, *Man and Woman, Family Portraits,* and *A Family to Call my Own,* it was clear what my family’s schema was. With my discussion of family I concluded that my family was distant and over ears of knowing this I became accustomed to this fact. It was this buildup of memories that allowed this to happen and this led me to explore memories as a major staple for creating a home.
Home as Memory

The fifth layer of the home is memory. It is in this stage that I attempt to recall as much information on those that have passed as I can. A search through family albums, keepsakes, and inquire with those that still surround me. And though I’m not able to fully remember I am able to piece together a fragmented version of them.

An artist that focuses on unfolding his memories connected to home is Do Ho Suh. Do Ho Suh is a Korean installation artist that creates architectural pieces out of silk. These installations accurately depict that the artist’s identity in terms of space seeing that these installations recall moments in his life, such as his childhood home. Though these monstrous forms occupy large gallery spaces they still appear light as they can be seen through.

His use of translucent silks to create beautiful architectural forms that illustrate his past is quite poetic. Just like Suh I have a passion for using layers and deciding how much to hide or reveal. Since a lot of his work incorporates these I believe *Gate, Reflection, and Home Within Home* are great examples for including self in the home.

The reason that I chose *Home Within Home* was the fact that it engulfed the viewer into the piece of art. Instead of it purely being a piece that the viewer walks around, this piece forces the viewer to enter this designed space and have their vision controlled by the artist. Since the artist focuses on searching for the perfect home through his past and current experiences the use of fabric is perfect since the viewer is on this same mission. While in the home a second home can be explored further. Since the installation is quite large it never feels too massive due to the use of fabric. Plus, the fabric is able to be manipulated in various forms while still remaining
transparent as if the structures are only fragments and not a solid home yet which is the reason I like it.

*Reflection* also utilized space well. Instead of viewing the installation on one level, the viewer is encouraged to walk up a flight of stairs to continue the experience. From these different perspectives the idea of a reflection is effective. Another great element is the continued use of silk. The horizontal plane that separates the two identical forms, creates a haziness to the opposing structure. This haziness gives the illusion that there is a floating body of water. This idea of water may express Suh vision of the perfect home floating on the ocean but it helps me understand that the ideal of perfection transcends the world’s physicality.

*Gate*, stood out to me because of its use of projection. I felt that the majority of Suh’s installations are shells waiting life within them by recalling memories or from the viewers interacting with them, however, *Gate*, is more dynamic. It uses projections which cause the installation to seem alive. Since this installation was more of a commission piece it is clear to see the differences to his work. I like this piece separate from the artist. Since Suh’s concept is quite synced in is work this seems like an outsider and I expect to see the ghostly gate I am used to.
Going through this time of battling with the idea of knowing and not knowing I began to experiment with the idea of fragments. I created *Fragments of a Lady*. In this piece I continue my process of finding historical photos of women and painting them, such as *Man and Woman*. Since I did not know them and could only comment on their impression they left on me I found a way to paint only pieces of them. Just as a screen can separate people and environments it can also act as an object to separate recognition and refusal. By using acrylic paint through the screen ghostly images appeared on the paper. This is similar to how Do Ho Suh creates limited colored structures and allows the viewer to occupy them physically and with their own thoughts. *Fragments of a Lady* yearns for the viewer to be active in filling in the blanks of the squares.
In a reverse fashion as how I worked with my ideal family portraits I took what I learned from the historical photos and applied them to my own family members. During this time I created *Lady in Waiting*. This painting utilized various methods of painting such as ink, stencils, and textures. With the painting I created an impression of my late, great grandmother who was very close to me as a child. She was a very strong and stubborn woman who made it hard to get to know her yet she and I were inseparable. In the painting I used an old photograph that showed her in a softer light since she always wore pants when I had known her. Using the photo as I starting point I layered it with my own personal impressions and style. It was her mysterious nature that always intrigued me as a kid and that can be seen in this painting with the fragments covering her face. This idea of mystery only grew stronger as she fell prone to dementia and I captured that by having her environment slowly fade around her.
Thus, my understanding of memories in the home were similar to Do Ho Suh’s. These memories were fading yet strong. Reflecting on these memories I began to start thinking about the traditions that took part in my home. To a typical family member they could be seen as just that, a tradition. For me, due to my religious upbringing, I saw these events as rituals. These rituals helped me understand the connection and layout of the home.
**Home as Ritual**

The sixth facet of the home is the ritual. This layer of the home where I attempt to strengthen a connection with myself, family, and my memories within the home. I begin to find the importance of traditions that I once dismissed. I look back at religious rituals and the traditions of a family and find the threads within my work. Instead of suppressing these ideas I let them blossom.

To understand the home as a place of ritual I looked at the work of Hans Op de Beeck. His work sets up a dreary depiction of the home through images and sculptures. In his work he will either take a recognizable object and distorted for meaning or assemble various objects to create understanding.

In *Vanitas Table*, Op de Beeck takes the idea of a vanitas stilllife and creates a moment in 3-dimensional spaces. This sculpture is assembled with both objects that would be found in traditional still-life paintings and contemporary objects. The juxtaposition of the different timeperiods call to mind the development in human nature. The table acts as a pedatial showcasing what is and was important. This idea of raisng up continues the idea of rituals.

Another work by Op de Beeck is an untitled piece of a christmas tree. Op de Beeck uses watercolor to capture the light and the shadows that would be presented with a lighted christmas tree in the home. This attention to lighting also creates a theatrical and dramatic appearance as well. It is this attention that elevates the tree from only being a christmas tree to the Christmas Tree surrounded by the rituals that take place in reference to it.
I took the idea of idolization from Op de Beeck’s work and applied it to *Sisters’ Reflection*. In *Sisters’ Reflection* I created an installation that acts as a ritualistic alter. Upon the altar various objects of beauty are presented. Each object is strategically positioned to point at the mirror and painted with a silver, metallic sheen. Upon looking above the vanity a black mirror hangs. In looking into the mirror one can only see their silhouette, however, in looking at the metallic objects glimpses of colors and shapes dance within the light. It becomes evident that is it easier to see ourselves with in the products that we use rather than the objects meant for us to view ourselves in. This pale pink vanity draws on the memories of the women in my family. It represents the years of me observing them and seeing how they change due to this understanding.
of beauty. It is this idea of beauty that begins in the home between mother and daughter. As an outsider I captured my understanding of the unhappiness that occurs through the journey of beauty. It is in these objects that we leave pieces of ourselves. “He who buries a treasure buries himself with it.” (Bachelard 88)

For me the rituals act as anchors to the happenings of the home. These altars within the rooms discuss the events that took place. Through my art I came to realize that rituals are memorials and monuments. Adding this understanding to my schema of home I was ready to approach the last factor, feeling.
Home as Feeling

In exploring the layers that defined the home I realize that there was a seventh element that was not as physical as the previous. The feeling that is felt in the home can also help separated from a house. A house is emotionally detached from the occupants while a home changes based off of the feelings of the habitants.

Figure 18 Ryan Michael Gleason, *Beneath the Surface*, 2017, Ink on Paper

I explore the nature of emotion by continuing to look at the artwork of Marlene Dumas primarily her loose brush strokes and her use of value that inspired me to create the *Beneath the Surface*. Figure 18 captures similar markmakings to discuss my battle with depression. This painting is very reminiscent to my aesthetics of my self-portraits and family portraits.
To aid me in understanding my internal struggles and scarring memories further I also looked at the work of Francis Bacon. Francis Bacon was a painter that used dark colors and rough brushstrokes. These along with his want to capture suffering he was able to create images of extreme torment that was present beneath the surface. One of these influential pieces was *Three Studies of the Human Head*.

Just as though there are emotions within the home they cannot initially be seen there are also emotions under the skin that aren’t initially evident. I’d challenge myself to explore this idea of hidden emotions through a series of ink drawings. Each “face” was created through similar brushstrokes as Dumas, however, my use a value created a more ghostly image. Each painting was made to represent the emotions that I felt while it was painted. By restricting the time in which the paintings were made each painting displays how the emotions change moments by moments within me. It is this ever changing ride of emotions that breathe life into the home and something that is core to my identity.

*Melancholia*

I then began to see that there was a common thread of emotions with an all of my work. This idea of a melancholy began to arise. In understanding what the melancholy medicine itself I looked at the work of George Seurat. In his drawings he was able to capture moments of person and place purely through texture in value. It is a shift in value that defined the subject.

However, I began to read further about melancholia and look to the words of Sigmund Freud. In Freud’s paper titled *Mourning and Melancholia* he defines melancholia as a loss of care about the outside world and a painful view of self. (Freud 151) Freud continues to address
the similarities between mourning and melancholia by claiming that both explore the feeling of loss, mourning for the loss of someone and melancholia for the loss of an “object of love”. (154) The difference, however, is that melancholia deals with an unconscious loss. But what has been the “object of love” that Freud claims I desired in a narcissistic way? This could only be referencing the ideal of a perfect home. Growing up a child is brought into a home without knowing their own definition of home. In realizing what makes a home a sense of loss is evident to occur when a child’s situation is compared. Thus, I have been creating reflections of my imperfect home in order to find my perfect.

Being inspired by the theory by Freud I worked to create my own definition of melancholy. For myself I began to see it in different historic art pieces focusing on ruins. I began to question as to why melancholy fits so well with this idea of forgotten cities. To me it seemed evident that melancholy came out of the lack of something, the lack of love, the lack of safety, the lack of being. And it is within this loss that one finds himself in a moment of never ending thought. These thoughts continue in an attempt to figure out how to fulfill what is lacking. It is at this point the person only fills the vacant space with sadness.
Having a better understanding of melancholy I began to explore this idea through other works. In these works I began to separate myself from the art in terms of imagery but connect myself further through the emotional content. With this being said I created the work known as *Melancholia*. In the painting a girl perpetually stares off into wallpaper hall. She is lost in thought but also becomes more and more than one with a design. The same use of black and white for the wallpaper and the girl allows the girl to become one with the home. The girls turned face does not exhibit and clear emotion that can be seen. Instead she stands emotionless. Through my battle of depression there are many moments of feeling numb.

*Figure 19* Ryan Michael Gleason, *Melancholia #2*, 2017, Acrylic on Board
Another piece that I created is called *that home*. *That home* is created using a shelf with six plaster houses sitting upon it. The first five homes are pristine and white embodying this idea of perfection. The last home stands out from the rest. It is stained and showing the damage of time. The six houses create a small, suburban neighborhood where all the houses look the same but each one contains a different story. The last home embodies melancholia because it sits still in the shadow yet the turmoil that it has faced is evident still. A true embodiment of my feelings. Feelings that can be classified as melancholia.
HOME SWEET HOME

Over this journey of art making I have come to understand my schema of the home. Taking what I learned from my exploration of idea, place, self, family, memories, rituals, and feelings I was able to conclude that my schema for the home is a depressed place of turmoil and challenges that appears to be a memorial for the fading memories of distant relatives where I have come to realize that I must adapt or escape its void-like hold. With this statement I created the installation that became my thesis work.

![Installation Image](image)

*Figure 21* Ryan Michael Gleason, *Dirty Laundry*, 2018, Ink on Clothes

Entering the space, a corner is frantically strung with clothesline. Amongst the tangle of cotton string a plethora of young boy’s underwear hangs for all to see. Each one weighing on the
once taunt line. Though the clothes hang above the laundry basket full of clean linen, the boy’s clothes remain soiled. Here and there phantom faces fade in and out of the white stitching.

![Image of a hallway](image.jpg)

**Figure 22** Ryan Michael Gleason, *Longing*, 2017, Mixed Media Installation, 8’x 4’x 16’

Leaving the clotheslines behind I enter the all too familiar hallway. The wooden floor acts as the foundation for the cracked and crooked walls that rise as pillars that hold up the decrepit and bowing popcorn-covered ceiling. Three dim lights lead me past the varied frames of black until I reach a shabby, yellow door. At first glance there seems to be nothing beyond the yellow barrier except white light, but with closer examination a shadows appears. However, the
details avoid my perception due to the frosted and scuffed glass. Bending low and peering into the tight keyhole in an image of a young boy lost in the splendors of laughter.

*Figure 23* Ryan Michael Gleason, *Limbo (detail)*, 2018, 8’x 12’x 14’

Realizing that the door does not allow visitors I must travel elsewhere, but the way I came is not the most desired. A perfectly, white curtain bellows to my side gracefully caressing my arm. I pull back the freshly pressed cotton to come across a room of white. White walls. White furniture. White trinkets. Everything in view reflects the bright, cool light. Slowly the comfort diminishes and I become unsettled as moment of decay and blackness stains the purity of the room. At the highest point of the room an overbearing woman hangs looking down on me.

The experience that I listed is a combination of three installations, *Dirty Laundry*, *Longing*, and *Limbo* respectfully. With each space I pulled all of the factors of my place identity to create a home. Together these installations show ideas, place, self, family, memories, rituals,
and feeling in a cohesive manner that allows the viewer to experience a dynamic “living places” that McClay mentioned. In other words this installation becomes a “a depressed place of turmoil and challenges that appears to be a memorial for the fading memories of distant relatives where I have come to realize that I must adapt or escape its void-like hold. With this statement I created the installation that became my thesis work.”
CONCLUSION

Though I did not know what my meaning of home was I had always known what I was searching for from beginning. In the back of my mind I somehow knew that I was searching for home and with each artwork I was being closer to accepting the home that I was given. Knowing how to accept where I am from allowed me to make major changes in my life to separate myself from the evident darkness that has resided in me. With this process of acceptance I was able to enter my current chapter in my artist journey.

With each of these layers merging together the finished product becomes living unlike a house. A home raises from its foundation and acts as a mirror of oneself. Though we have an idea of what a perfect home would look like that idea may be out of the scope of your identity. By embracing yourself through this journey of exploration more aspects of yourself will come to light. It wasn’t until I explore the seven facets of a home and thus myself that I could identify myself. Now with this new knowledge I am able to continue my artwork looking at the connection between space and self but it terms of others. I hope to bring my knowledge of how place can discuss identity into the public and bring what I learned to create an impact.

Another aspect of Schema Theory is that a schemata, the stored knowledge, can change thus changing ones perspective of an object or relationship. (Zhiqing 85) And with delving into some of these intense, dark feelings that I had from my childhood I was able move towards a path of accepting myself and where I am from. Through less acceptance I am able to express even more experiences. So beyond knowing the difference between a house and home one needs
to embrace both to have a true sense of home. We need the reality of the house and the ideas of
the home or the concrete and abstract elements of these places of development.
LIST OF REFERENCES


