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Then and Now: An Exploration in Visual Memoir

Marie Helene Baribeau

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THEN AND NOW:
An Exploration in Visual Memoir

By

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B. F. A., University of Arizona, 2006

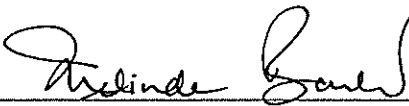
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Department of Art and Art History

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This thesis entitled:
Then and Now: An Exploration in Visual Memoir
Written by Marie Helene Baribeau
Has been approved for the Department of Art and Art History



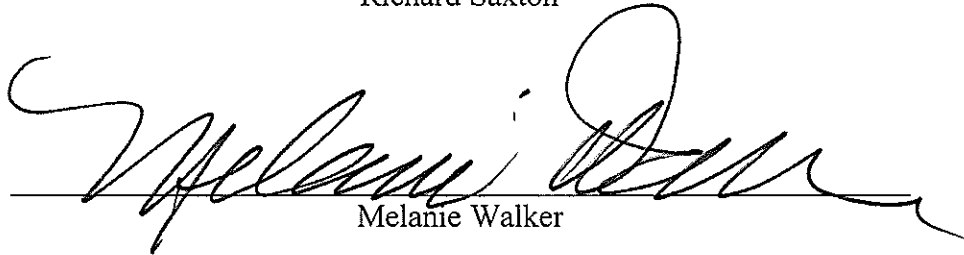
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Of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

ABSTRACT

Then and Now: An Exploration in Visual Memoir.

Baribeau, Marie Helene, (M.F.A., Department of Art and Art History)

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Melanie Yazzie

My creative thesis is a series of hybrid works on paper that began as a memoiresque exploration of personal narrative, through the introduction of family snapshots, and resolved itself as a Jungian landscape of the shadow side of family life.

Since my creative process was critical to the evolution of this work it is discussed in detail. A description of the traditional printmakers aesthetic is included to contrast it with my current personal aesthetic. I write about how this work was driven by chance as much as it was crafted with deliberation and control. A discussion is included describing the process of weaning myself from being seduced by the preciousness of the work, as part of my challenge demanded a break with aesthetic traditions as well as emotional attachment to the photographic images of my family. The final chapter discusses several of the pieces in detail touching on personal narrative and formal issues. This group of works assembles four generations of my family, transports them from the intimate setting of family albums into an academic/museum environment, where private and public spheres collide.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family.

I would also like to thank my committee members for their time and support during my graduate school experience

Melanie Yazzie

Melinda Barlow

Richard Saxton

Melanie Walker

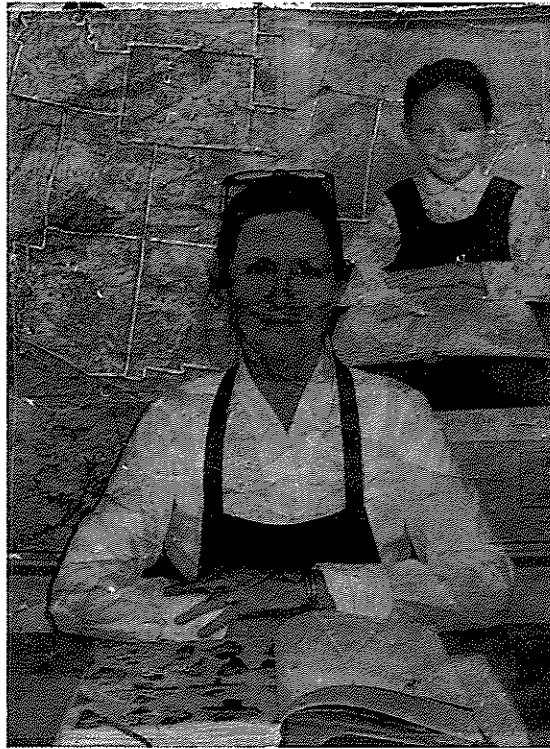
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Then and Now: An Exploration in Visual Memoir



"In that interactive process (between photographer and subject), the unique power of snapshots and our need for them become even more evident. The episodic nature of what snapshots capture and later return to us mirrors the ways our neurological architecture is structured. "Fragments beget narratives," Annette Kuhn writes; memory and snapshot photography are inextricably linked because both involve "searching for cues, deciphering signs, making deductions, patching together reconstructions out of fragments of evidence." ¹

Marvin Heiferman

Chapter One: Memoir

This chapter introduces the theme of memoir and the reasons chosen to explore it through visual rather than literary arts.

"As we look at and handle snapshots something remarkable happens- they awaken, animate and even overwrite memory. Snapshots encourage nostalgia by inviting us, even if it is only

for a few moments, to loose ourselves in the presentness of the past, to talk to time and mortality. Little theatrical tableaux of worlds frozen in time and limited in space, snapshots both particularize and generalize time. They are souvenirs, the symbolic reminders of authentic experiences and of what we believe to be unique events that we actively make and then collect and organize for later use and self-protection."²

This creative thesis offered me a chance to explore memoir thereby revisiting and laying claim to my life. In choosing to work with family snapshots that span four generations, the opportunity arose to look at intergenerational family dynamics, glean personal insights, document turning points in marriages, reconsider the true nature of relationship, and question issues of identity.

Good art is often based on universal themes. What could be more inclusive of the human condition than family? Everyone has one, or some version of one. As a collective experience we all understand how complex living with, or without, a family truly is. Ask people who have never met their genetic family what that experience has done to their sense of identity and feeling of self worth and they'll tell you a story that will have you reevaluating the frustrations you experience with yours.

During the past year my involvement with my family has been more intense than it has been in years. Illness, birth, death and celebration have given me the opportunity to visit with my last living parent, my uncle, cousins and their children, my 87-year-old second cousin, my sons and their father, several nieces and a nephew, my brothers, a sister-in-law, and my ex- husbands-step-brothers-daughter. Ages spanned from four weeks to eighty-nine years. That is why I chose to explore memoir.

My choice of materials for this project reflects my cultural and aesthetic history. Printmaking has a long tradition that lends itself to narrative works of art. Knitting paper

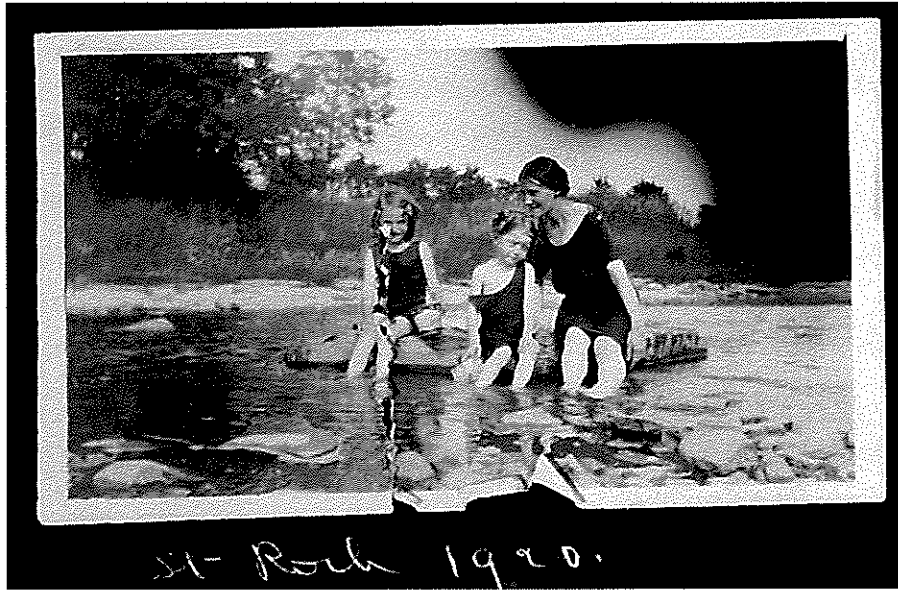
speaks to my earliest creative experience of "making." My mother and grandmother taught me to knit at a very early age. Thread is used as a drawing tool and since it has the ability to connect things, it symbolically binds my family together. In this series of works on paper, family memories are stitched together and bring the generations closer to understanding the value of our shared history.

In the process of discovering ways that memoir could be produced in a nonlinear fashion, through visual rather than literary arts, my studio practice was transformed. I found a new freedom of expression in the exploration of my feelings about what it means to belong to a family and discovered a startling truth about the nature of identity and what it means to know someone.³

My thesis work is loosely based on memoir. As a literary genre, memoir is typically a recitation of events leading from one's birth, through childhood, followed by coming of age stories, a weaving of the experiences leading to maturity, and old age. Memoir finds its origins in the French *memoire*, meaning memory and the Latin *memoria*, meaning reminiscence.⁴

My creative thesis hop scotches across four generations and is a non-fictional collection of fleeting visual impressions.

Memory, by its nature, is elusive, and so my own memories may have unintentionally created unconformities in the fabric of my narrative. While writing this it occurs to me that one only ever really knows a tiny facet of the people that we think of as *our own*. From examining photos of my mother before my birth, I understand that the prescribed limitations of our mother-daughter relationship precluded knowing her as the individual she was.



"Sometimes when people move to a new place they've never been before, with any hope or illusion of staying there, they get interested in their predecessors. Having lost or been displaced from their own history they are ready to adopt those of others, at least are receptive to their stories" Lucy Lippard ⁵

Chapter Two: Process

This chapter describes the process of making prints to tell the story of my family memories and how that choice impacted my development as an artist.

In the process of re-inventing my studio practice and reconsidering my sense of artistic aesthetics, a body of hybrid works was produced that incorporated photographs culled from family collections, hand pulled prints, thread work, deconstruction of the print, and radical distressing of the paper. What remains is suggestive of the passage of time and the fickleness of remembrance. Figurative subject matter is alluded to by stitched outlines and tangled thread abstractions. The process of making the work relied heavily on chance, an experience I found both seductive and unnerving.

Reproducing a photograph of a family member was the first step in the creation of each of the final images on exhibition. It was a non-intuitive process that required technical skill and the assistance of the photo-lab monitor. Images were chosen, scanned, cropped and sized in Photoshop before printing them on the Epson Stylus Pro 7900 using sepia ink.

The second stage of making this work involved staining the paper with black tea. Visually, it softened the harsh bright whiteness of the paper and it reflected a family tradition of sitting down to tea as a way to invite conversation and initiate social discourse.

Using single floss embroidery thread to draw on the photographic image allowed time to reflect and reminisce about the people in the snapshots and remember time spent in their company. Embroidering on the snapshots was an act of memorialization.

Typically the thread was measured out by stretching a six-threaded strand of floss out to full arm's length, separated the strands into single threads and used as needed. Working exclusively from the front allowed me to make delicate controlled stitches along the contours of the image without trying to influence what was happening on the back of the photo. The only time the back was referred to was to tie a knot, so it wouldn't unravel. At first the idea of long threads dangling from the back of the piece was appealing, but was soon abandoned to avoid fussy tangling issues.

The randomness of the stitches, the crossovers and tangles are the effects of chance. The introduction of embroidery became a way to animate various elements in the snapshots. This process, above all the others, was the most engaging for me. The simple repetitiveness of it was meditative and allowed me to daydream and lose myself in the

work. Each stitch held a thought and provided access to the curious experience of being a tourist in my life.

By the time the handstitching was completed, the back of the photograph underwent a metamorphosis and became the front of the art piece. From now on the flip side of the photo will be referred to as the front and the actual photographic image is now the back.

The reversible handstitching is akin to a bilingual conversation; two languages are being spoken to describe a single event, just as French and English were spoken in my childhood home.

Next comes a complex stage involving several phases in which the print was deconstructed to create a labyrinth of cutouts that suggested how memory is a construct, an act of creation confused with imagination and reinterpreted in the light of now.⁶

Beginning with pre-made balls of mapKnit, a paper yarn, unique frames were knitted for each piece. This resulting woven fiber structure was designed to frame the photographic side of the piece; it was then inked and printed on the image side. By this time a couple of weeks was invested in the needlework of each piece. I had to be willing to destroy the print in order to continue working on it. Using an X-Acto blade the negative shapes from the imprint of the collograph are cut out.

Now each print was ready for the compost pile to be subjected to the effects of leaf mulch. A certain amount of wear and tear is expected during this process as is evidenced by the mended sections of each print. If they survived to this point the final process involved driving over them with a car. I got into it after a few times and looked

for a certain level of damage. I think of this as an aesthetic of destruction...a sort of Freudian death wish for work that I'd invested untold hours of work.

These final exercises in emotional disengagement with my work were effective, and were replaced with an appreciation of the effects of chance. I found myself feeling self-conscious as I stitched in bits of gravel that had become imbedded in the paper and decided that this new way of working had developed its own aesthetic. The additional texture added a unique element to the work and it finally felt complete. There was more mending to do, but it added to the sense of the passage of time, the erosion of idealism, and the disappointments of unfulfilled dreams in our lives as they unfold.

Although it was never my conscious intention to expose my family's dysfunctional idiosyncrasies, this is what my work embodies. Now that I'm older, I understand that the adults in my life were fumbling along, as best they could given their circumstances, just as I have.

While this work is far from the traditional printmaking aesthetic, its taken on it's own patina and beauty. Whereas posed family snapshots often attempt to present the classic happy family, my work shows an aspect of the reality of family life. Sometimes a dysfunctional family is challenging, but it is often better than no family.

The discussion on process included more than just the production issues of making the work, behind all this 'doing' an intense emotional undercurrent played out in a way that is worth noting.

Urged by my MFA committee to forget everything I knew about *art* and basically take my work and jump off a cliff with it, I understood that in order to survive what was needed was to re-invent my studio practice. I sensed that on some level they were right,

simply because of my resistance to it. This required me to get over my wounded pride and examine my complicity in imposing confining external censors on my creative process. Allowing myself to be manipulated by my perceptions of 'art' would result in being exiled from my creative-self. Intuitively understanding that what was required was a willingness to leave my comfort zone in order to mature as an artist, I accepted the challenge.

Breaking all the rules of printmaking and abandoning my previous aesthetic choices to take my work to a new level was challenging, but it was especially difficult to do it to photographs of my family. Being emotionally invested in the outcome of this project, first, because it was for the MFA show and second, because these snapshots were the "photographic equivalent of ancestral remains" ⁷ which explains the feelings of guilt I experienced when working with them. There is nothing logical about my reaction, since the original snapshots were not destroyed, but it was never the less my experience.



"Memory plays a central role in the continuity and the formation of identity." ⁸

Chapter Three: Memory

This chapter will discuss some of the ways memory is perceived and how it influences the process of creating a visual memoir.

Memory has been a subject of much speculation throughout history. It is possibly *the* thing that makes us unique from other species, that and the wonderful architectural marvel of our hands.

In the novel *In Search of Lost Time*, Proust unwittingly uncovers a truth that neuroscientists are now exploring in the laboratory. His famous "Madeline Moment" began by dunking one of the lemon-flavored biscuits into a cup of tea. The combinations

of the two flavors stirred his memory and suddenly he found himself flung back into his childhood reliving an experience that held no specific significance, except that the power of the memory left him awestruck.⁹

Jonah Lehrer writes a series of essays in which he shows that eight artists each discovered an essential scientific truth that neuroscience is only now rediscovering.¹⁰

"One of Proust's deep insights was that our senses of smell and taste bear the unique burden of memory. Neuroscience now knows that Proust was right. Rachael Herz, a psychologist at Brown, has shown- in a science paper wittingly entitled "Testing the Proustian Hypothesis"- that our senses of smell and taste are uniquely sentimental. This is because smell and taste are the only senses that connect directly to the hippocampus, the center of the brain's long-term memory. Their mark is indelible." ¹¹

According to a radiolab podcast titled *Memory and Forgetting*, memory isn't like a filing cabinet where we store experiences, nor is it constructed like a biological disc drive. Memory is an act of creation. In fact, according to neuroscientists, each time we remember something it's recreated in terms of our current experience. This means that each time we recall an event we move farther away from the original experience and the memory becomes diluted. So, each memory becomes ever so slightly altered as we clone it into consciousness. What this ultimately means is that there is no place within our structural biology that houses an archive of pristine experiences.¹²

Sven Birkerts writes that he has "come to recognize that memory is an irrational, even counter intuitive ecologist, obeying the most obscure private laws...." ¹³

My experience with digging through my family photographs has been a curious affair. Since some of the photographs were taken decades before I was born I can claim no first hand memory, save that which I fabricated and wove together from snippets heard at my mother's knee, while we looked at the pictures together. The same holds true

with photos taken when I was a child; I have borrowed memories accumulated during other viewings, from people who were old enough to have first hand recall. As I write this it occurs to me that I relied on those second hand memories to be accurate. It's entirely possible that their stories are also constructed from hand-me-down memories and are as flawed as I suspect mine are.

Certain photographs serve as a trigger to tease memory forward from the archives of the past. Several times this resulted in curious insights coming to the forefront of my mind, and with them came a deeper understanding of familial hierarchy, social standing and the origins of the foundation myths of my life.



"Photographs were deployed to memorialize the past...But they were also used to reflect the vitality of the present, and the promise of the future. ...In weaving photographs into albums...the domestic environment was delineated and imbued with meaning." ¹⁴ Stephanie Snyder

Chapter Four: Materials

This chapter will explore how my choice of materials express aspects of my memories and evoke symbolic meaning as well as provide actual structure to my work. I also discuss the transformation in my attitude towards materials, as that is important to understanding the evolution of the work.

Paper

I entered graduate school with traditional printmakers aesthetics. They were so ingrained, that I wasn't aware how seamlessly they were incorporated into the lexicon of what I believed constituted *art*. Since then I have gone through a challenging process of re-education and find that at the end of my experience here, my work is driven by a more personal aesthetic.

A certain reverence for paper, instilled in me by my earliest printmaking instructors, influenced my work as a serious print major. Not only was paper costly, but it also made an important aesthetic statement. Long discussions ensued about the beauty of the deckled edge compared to the torn or mechanically cut edge. All this talk about the preciousness of paper resulted in certain angst until good work habits allowed me to conform to expectations. Except for the area where the printed image exists, the paper needs to be pristine.

While making this work my relationship to paper underwent a profound transformation and in the process it took on a life of its own. Experimenting with different types of paper led to several discoveries. Although the Arches 88 took the photographic image beautifully during the digital printing process, it was not designed to hold up once wet. I was disappointed that the various sheets of calligraphy paper I backpacked out of China during the summer could withstand some rough handling but they were ultimately too delicate to survive repeated soakings, and stitching on it tended to weaken it as well. In the end the white BFK paper, measuring 22 x 30 inches, proved to be anything but fragile and handled a surprising amount of abuse. As it changed it took on a personality that added new dimensions to my work acquiring depth and meaning that would have been impossible to reveal had the paper remained in its pristine state.

Tea and thread

During the summer a friend came to visit from Canada and brought me a box of Red Rose tea. It was the tea that we always drank at home and after enjoying a few cups it was dedicated to the first step in relaxing my aesthetic guard.

Once the photographs were printed on the BFK paper they were set out on the deck to be christened with teapots full of hot black tea. Incorporating tea into my work was appropriate as it harkened back to my childhood when sharing tea with friends and family was part of daily life. Pouring, splashing, and squirting tea across the photographs began to feel like a rite of initiation that signaled receptivity on my part, rather like an invitation to open the floodgates of my memory. This process was repeated several times, sometimes folding or crumpling the prints into a ball and soaking them in buckets of tea. So long as the paper dried thoroughly between sessions it would hold up.

Thread is used in everyday life to keep items made of fabric from falling apart. It connects things; it's also the basic element in woven fabric and as such stands in for the metaphor of a person's life being a tapestry. Incorporating it into my work is a symbolic gesture that signifies a desire to keep my family ties strong. At this moment in time my family is scattered across two continents, three countries and four states. Only my two sons live in the same city, the rest of us are completely isolated from each other. As the eldest surviving matriarch my duty is to keep us from drifting apart emotionally.

When both sides of the paper were sufficiently stained I studied the image and decided how to begin drawing on it with thread. My intention to incorporate thread in the work came from a desire to make marks that involved a repetitive action, stitching, to

mimic the act of memorization. Using thread allows the opportunity to introduce color in a subtle way and my mark making is made by using four basic stitches.

With an assortment of colored six strand embroidery threads and a few spools of neutral colored, twisted sewing thread I began experimenting by making stitches with various thicknesses of thread and found that working with a single strand allowed for subtle mark making. Some of the colors were too bright and felt garish against the muted paper tones but that was easily resolved by pouring more tea on it once the stitching process was complete. Since I was referencing memory I preferred faded colors to suggest the passage of time. It took up to two weeks of work to complete a print and the repetitive nature of stitching was meditative. I found myself lost in reverie, reliving memories and felt deeply engaged in each piece. It was not work that could be rushed or things would become hopelessly tangled.

The act of sewing on the snapshots involved piercing the paper with the tip of a threaded needle, sliding it through to the other side, reaching my hand underneath the paper to take hold of the needle, and tugging on it until the thread was pulled taut, then repeating the same action, but in reverse. My eyes remained fixed on the top of the image, only looking at the back to knot the thread so it stayed put, or to untangle it. Half of the activity was done where you could see what was happening and the other half was done blindly, somewhat like blind contour drawing. This physical act of piercing the paper with the needle to draw with thread brings to mind a section I read in Barthes' *Camera Lucida*.

Roland Barthes (1915- 1980), a member of the Parisian intelligentsia, used a Latin term, *punctum* meaning to puncture or wound, ¹⁵to describe how he felt touched by

emotionally charged details in certain family photographs. Specifically recalling this experience while viewing a childhood portrait of his recently deceased mother, he described how the photographic image was a sort of umbilical cord that links the body of the photographed thing with the viewers gaze.¹⁶

While working single strands of thread into the image it began to feel like I was mapping time, tracing the contours of the image as though they were topographic contours of the landscape of a life. I wondered about the nature of hindsight and got the sense that the act of stitching on these pieces was very much about duality.

Everything nice and orderly on one side and a chaos of tangles and disconnected fragments on the other. This works as a metaphor for the public and private face that families wear. In the privacy of the home, where dysfunction has free reign, the experience felt different than in the happy-ever-after scenarios often staged in the public life of family pictures. I was also curious to unravel secrets that might be in plain view in the photographs if I only knew how to interpret the frozen instants in time. The time required to complete the hand-stitching phase of each image allowed me the luxury to contemplate these questions.

mapKnit

The significance of incorporating the mapKnit frames is twofold. It creates a maze of abstract geometric forms that act as a template for memory and recall, resembling our biological neural synapses. The gaps between the strands are where creativity, remembrance and potential reside. The map-like networks allow for daydreaming and reference the longing for a simpler era, one that allowed time for our imaginations to wander. The labyrinth it suggests encompasses nostalgia, and longing for

connection with our younger selves. The abstract forms of the frames encircle the representation of the images, as if inviting a two-way dialog.

The second thing the mapKnit offered was a symbolic connection between the past and the present. I learned to knit from the women in these portraits, as mentioned earlier; it was my first experience with *making* something. So, in a sense, they planted the seeds that I now harvest in my life. I owe them a debt of gratitude.

Transforming traditional knitting into my studio practice was a significant step in my development as an artist. Making paper thread by repurposing maps, or other printed materials, felt like an inspired act. It was significant because it allowed me to enter my life as an artist by a creative act of authenticity. I owe a debt of gratitude to Ann Hamilton for suggesting the possibility that "Lineament"¹⁷ offered me. So, in a way, maybe the mapKnit yarn is like time. It allowed me to travel from the present straight back to my childhood.



"your slightest look easily will unclothe me
though i have closed myself as fingers,
you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens
(touching skillfully, mysteriously) her first rose"¹⁸
ee cummings

Chapter Five

Snapshots, Context and the Gaze

This chapter addresses issues of how context effects content and why that is important in this discussion of memoir. Susan Stewart writes that: "snapshots are magical objects, always incomplete and always demanding our interaction in order to make connections between the past and the present" ¹⁹

Beginning in the 1880's Kodak marketed mass-produced cameras world wide, thus ushering in the age of the vernacular photograph. It also marked the beginning of the birth of photographic literacy, and the introduction of the idea of self-consciousness. ²⁰

In my creative thesis family photos were appropriated from four generations, roughly spanning 1920 to 2009. My maternal grandmother's photo album, complete with

careful handwritten captions, written in white ink with a crow quill nib, is a coveted family artifact. Underneath many of the snapshots she documented the date, location, name of the person(s) posing. Under a select few she made an occasional remark, as if to invoke the heartbreak or the humor of the situation. Photographs culled from my parent's collections were more difficult to get my hands on. There is a box of negatives and treasured snapshots of my parents when they were young, before we children arrived. There are several of my siblings and I ranging in age from infancy to about twelve. My brother, who lives in Canada, has my mother's black tin box that housed her personal collection of photographs. When asked to loan them to me for my MFA project he agreed but after several weeks of waiting I contacted him and he reneged. He was understandably reluctant to trust it to the mail system, but was kind enough to scan the photos and send them to me on a disc. Viewing pictures of your family on a laptop is a singularly unsatisfying experience.

The third and final collection of photographs that were scavenged through is from my personal collection. These include some slides my father took of my family of origin when we were very young and a collection of snapshots, official school and little league portraits, and various shoeboxes crammed full of 'one-shot' photos and slides of my children as they grew up in the 1970' and '80's.

I have vague memories of the rare occasions that my mother leafed through my grandmother's photo- album, while she narrated details about her family and the summer cottages where the majority of the snapshots were taken. There are a few photos of their life in the east end of Montreal but from their scarcity you get the feeling that they

cherished their memories of summers spent in the countryside of the Laurentian Mountains.

The album in question is large and rather cumbersome. It was designed to open comfortably while laying across your lap, or placed on a table. I'm really not certain how my family would feel about me appropriating their photos to rework them and put them in an exhibition.

"As snapshots enter museum collections- poignant evidence of our constant and ever-evolving need for images of ourselves- questions about how we choose to look at them and understand them will inevitably be raised. Every institution that shows snapshots projects its own values, meanings and needs on them. Art museums tend to present snapshots and their modest pedigrees condescendingly, as charming photographic novelties that have influenced the ways more important image-makers have come to see and represent the world." ²¹

I want to briefly discuss two things: One, that using family photographs outside of their intended viewing context changes how they are perceived and secondly, that introducing them into a museum and academic setting further decontextualizes them. It occurs to me, that particularly in the venue of an art museum/gallery, that an element of institutionalized voyeurism is added into the viewing equation. This is not about the "...typical notions of voyeurism... as strictly erotic or predatory" ²² but more about transforming the experience of viewing private artifacts in a public space, where they are available to be scrutinized, stereotyped and criticized by strangers.

Overarching this awkward transition from the private sector into the public sphere is another intrusion, in the form of museum security surveillance cameras. Security personnel are sequestered away in another part of the building. They watch museum

patrons as they gazed at artworks on exhibit, in this case, the reverse images that originated from my family snapshots. You have to wonder if this doubling of the gaze²³ introduced by surveillance brings about other ways of seeing.

Lucy Lippard makes an interesting suggestion when she proposed that we consider museum patrons as stand-ins for the people represented in the photographs that are on display in a museum.²⁴ Following this logic, the security guards become substitutes for the family members for whom the collections of family snapshots were originally intended.

During the process of working with the MFA prints they took on a life of their own. What started out as typical frontal views of the enlarged snapshots morphed into the backs of the images, adding a level of secrecy to the work. Since the photographic images are turned to the wall, gallery viewers are invited to contemplate the flip side of this collection of family portraits. What was intended as private family history, became public by moving it from the home into the gallery; what was never noticed or considered, the back of the photograph, is now exhibited as the frontal view.

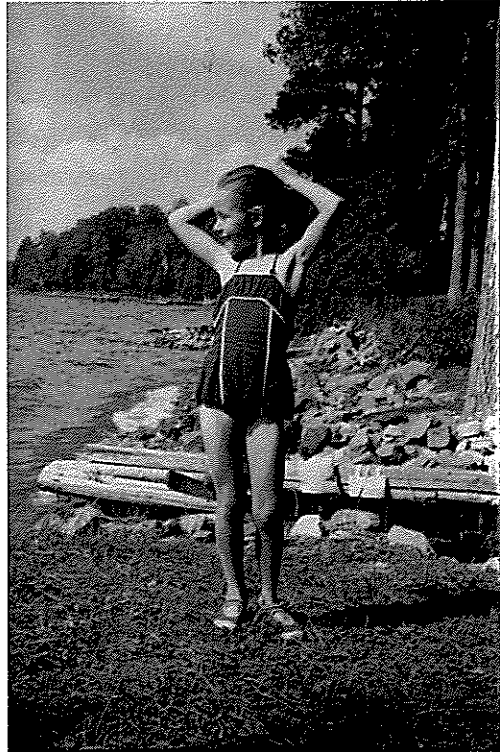
My choice to present the back of the images draws attention to the duality of the nature of photography. The snapshot both reveals and conceals. As Marianne Hirsh says: "[family] photographs locate themselves precisely in the space of contradiction between the myth of the ideal family and the lived reality of family life".²⁵

Revealing the reversed image, with all the tangled threads, tells a different story than the original does. Rather than presenting a photographic likeness of an individual it allows for an abstracted impression of their persona. Memory was also an element that came into play here. Often the images presented to the viewer are more of an abstraction

of identity. Photograph document certain facts: commemorating events were individuals gathered together, kinship, and geographic location. On occasion a photo may provoke emotion associated with an event or you might see a family resemblance that previously went unnoticed. Body language may suggest relationships that were bubbling under the surface of the family dynamic. A flash of recognition evokes emotion, longing or perhaps a rare insight. Since time played a role in the ability to recall facts and details, what I am most drawn to portraying is an intuitive impression of the individual in question.

"Snapshots are complicated. They are full of fact and fiction, life and loss, all that is unique and banal about our lives. They are insistent reminders of our need to be seen and reveal how much we want recognition: while we are alive and after we are gone. Snapshots intrigue us because, modest as they are, they speak eloquently and truthfully about the littleness and bigness of both photography and our lives."²⁶

The photograph plays a significant role in this work, as it is the matrix for content. The paper they are printed on plays an equally important role as it evolved to become more than merely a substrate to make marks on. On it the hazards of time and chance transformed the appropriated images into a mere impression imbedded in its fibers.



"Snapshots provided opportunities to experiment with ways one's private and public selves might be planned and performed"²⁷

Chapter Six: Influences

This chapter is about how different artists influenced my development as an artist and how I incorporated personal influences from my life.

My attraction to printmaking originated as an interest in artist's books. The first ones encountered were in the Special Collections at the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona. I poured over Duane Michals' artist's books and was moved by his portrayal of his friends and lovers. This was the first time that artwork affected me the way his work did. Most of the painting and sculpture I'd seen were representational, abstract or so cerebral that they were inaccessible. But Michals' work was about his life,

it had emotional content and it was presented in an intimate format, the book. Duane Michals' photographic memoirs were poignant and insightful. My experience viewing his work showed me the potential of art to engage the viewer emotionally. While I don't think it was his primary goal, the honesty of his work and the sense of intimacy it engendered results in creating an emotional affinity with the viewer. Oftentimes artists are criticized for making work about their lives. My thesis work, while not as accessible as Michal's work, is once again becoming personal and while the images are visually abstracted they portray an aspect of my family that allows for a glimpse into the shadowy side of their personalities.

In the early '90's Laurie Doctor hosted a weeklong workshop at Ghost Ranch in New Mexico. She introduced me to the idea of an intuitive based studio practice and it was a natural fit. This method of working was not a good match for the academic approach to art making encountered in grad school and resulted in frustration. Understanding the two approaches to creating a studio practice and appreciating their strengths and weaknesses allows me to work more efficiently. Teaching has also given me invaluable insights into how people work, and the benefits of blending both styles of working are becoming clearer. These two approaches used to feel diametrically opposed. When an artist chose the intellectual approach to making work everything was planned out before they touched their materials and began making the work. On the other hand an artist who approached their studio practice intuitively entered their studio and started working, with the hopes that they'd end up with something interesting. The ideal way to work would be to integrate an intuitive approach with the structure provided by the focus

that thematic direction offers. If I leave this program with nothing else but understanding this new idea, my time here has been well spent.

Visiting artist, Karen Kunc, a printmaker whom I had the privilege of working with as a student at CU, inspired me with the possibility that book arts offered. Her woodcuts are dramatic organic forms that allude to relational issues without being as personal as Michals' work. Her innovative studio practice and the process of developing ideas and implementing them were impressive.

Several years ago Kunc was the featured artist at Southern Graphics printmaking conference. She collaborated with several other printmakers to produce an edition of prints as part of that conference. Apart from the group dynamics and how she made hybrid prints using all sorts of seemingly unrelated visual styles to create a cohesive body of work, her innovative working style was inspiring. As an inexperienced artist I sometimes felt insecure when working and was surprised to see that Kunc and other accomplished artists also voiced doubt about their work. This helped me understand that self-doubt wasn't a personality defect so much as it was part of the experience of being an artist.

Anne Hamilton was my initial point of inspiration when I began making work using mapKnit about four years ago. In art: 21 there was a short clip on an installation piece by Hamilton called: "Lineament", so named from a word used in a poem written by Wallace Stevens, "The Planet on the Table."²⁸ What caught my eye was the way that she transformed the poetry of Stevens, "...each line of the page is lifted out of the book as if it were a thread and it's rolled into a ball"²⁹ She talked about the 'thread' representing time.

Things began to click for me intuitively, although my ability to articulate them remained inaccessible until recently. I began working with maps, deconstructing them into balls of paper yarn. For me the paper thread didn't represent *time* because I turned it into a material to produce work. If anything, it represented finding my way home. My choice to knit the paper yarn felt legitimate since knitting was one of my earliest creative experiences and I constructed various objects that were exhibited in Fleming, and most recently on the third floor at the new VAC building for the opening inaugural festivities last month. The head of my committee, Melanie Yazzie, kept asking me *why* I was drawn to maps, but I couldn't ever answer her satisfactorily, and her question nagged at me.

I appreciated printmaker, John Hitchcock's, understanding of fiber arts and their legitimate place in contemporary fine arts. His enthusiasm for some of my earlier knitted work was very validating and we discussed ideas that were in the works. Unfortunately for me, this was early in my second year as a grad student, before things started to click into place for me, during what I think of as my mute phase. I assumed there was a bias based on my choice of incorporating fiber arts in my work, as it blurred the lines between fine art and craft, when in fact the objection was to my inability to articulate why I worked with them and how they contributed to my work.

I admire Mark Newport's innovative knitted super-hero costumes and think of his work as making inroads into the insular fine art world.

Orly Cogan's use of traditional embroidery on vintage table linens incorporates contemporary as well as art historical themes that bridged the gap between woman's work, feminist theory and fine art. While my work isn't politically charged the way hers

is we share an affinity for working with traditional domestic themes by virtue of our choice of materials.

Kathryn Polk is a prolific printmaker from Arizona who makes lithographic prints dealing with memoir. Her 'non-indigenous woman' series addressed issues of her life on the edge of academia, politics, religion, and growing up in the south.³⁰ Her drawings are refined and sketchbooks are remarkable. Polk's work: "Layers humor into images that, on a closer look, explores alienation and subjugation."³¹

I've included this description of artists who have influenced me in various ways, all of whom used the theme of memoir as one of their inspirations and included personal narrative in their work. Some are fiber artists who successfully breached the arts-vs. -craft divide and have been accepted into elite galleries and museums around the world. Since I incorporate fiber arts into my printmaking practice, by introducing embroidery and knitting I was curious to see how other artists used these same materials to create narrative.



Chapter Seven: Discussion of creative thesis artworks

According to principles of Gestalt psychology "visual information is understood holistically before it is examined separately."³² This chapter will be a discussion of several of those principles as well as descriptions of specific artworks on display in my creative thesis exhibition.

Upon entering the gallery to view these works it is immediately noticeable that the artwork is displayed differently on the two walls. There is a large doorway separating the two walls where the work is hung.

To the right is a short wall measuring approximately eighteen feet, where the three largest vertical works on paper (29"x 41", 40" x 48", 29.5" x 42") are hung as a traditional linear suite that allows them to be viewed as separate works. Since this grouping is autobiographical in nature, it is appropriate that they hang in proximity of one

another, yet separated from the larger body of work. While these works are all rectangular, the central piece is framed by the same organic cutout border that surrounds most of the pieces on the larger wall to the left. This allows for diversity as well as unity.

There are two distinct groupings of work clustered on the larger thirty-six foot wall and each grouping has a rectangular piece nestled amongst the smaller organic shaped pieces. The placement of the work creates harmony and tension that allows for compositional balance and replicates the nonlinear nature of memory and time. These grouping styles also reflect how snapshots are sometimes placed in family photo albums.

Each of the artworks is cantilevered about three inches from the wall, suspended from long straight pins. The head of each pin is covered in tea stained calligraphy paper. The hanging system is visible if you look for it, but blends seamlessly into the work.

In this way the artwork floats in front of the wall, casting tertiary shadows creating discrete layers of value. While these works on paper are clearly two-dimensional, the fact that they hang away from the wall allows them to flirt with three-dimensionality.

Symbolically this liminal space reinforces ideas of duality and the notion that time and memory are fluid.

The print titled "Helen Posing at Round Lake" stands outside the norm as the cutout frame is formalized into regular scalloped shapes and this print reflects a subtle red glow on the wall.

The highly polished black floor in the gallery reflects the works on paper as a warm glowing ghost image. The shadows created by the geometric cutouts on the walls and the reflections on the floor suggest the elusive qualities of remembrance and the layering of memory.

Overall unity in the show is achieved by repetition, color and texture. The mottled tea stained paper is warm in tone, each piece casting three shadows that vary in density and value on the walls, suggesting afterimages. The rumpled paper contributes to the textural unity of the work and was the initial reason that I chose not to frame the work. Confining these prints inside a traditional rigid frame behind glass would have compromised the papers unique organic quality and created a formal barrier to viewing the work. Free floating the way they are encourages a level of intimacy that is appropriate to the core theme of memoir.

The deconstructed cutout borders of the work contribute a level of dynamic movement and both the repetition of color and geometric forms contribute variety as well as unity. The organic cutout frame is made up of positive and negative shapes that bring to mind tree-like branches. Using this analogy, the shadows on the wall act as roots and together they suggest a family tree. These abstract forms act as a containment device directing the viewers eye to wander in a circular pattern around the exterior of the work, always leading the eye back towards the heart of each piece to focus on the stitched drawing.

The overall first impression of radial symmetry of many of the works is complimented by the interior thread work that varies between symmetrically and asymmetrically balanced compositions. This series of work were made over a period of six months. Some of the earlier works rely heavily on partially outlined shapes that allow the viewer to connect the fragmentary information and complete the forms.³³ This use of closure was further developed in several of the larger rectangular pieces. The implied continuity of the free form stitch work drawings are deliberately left vague and abstract to

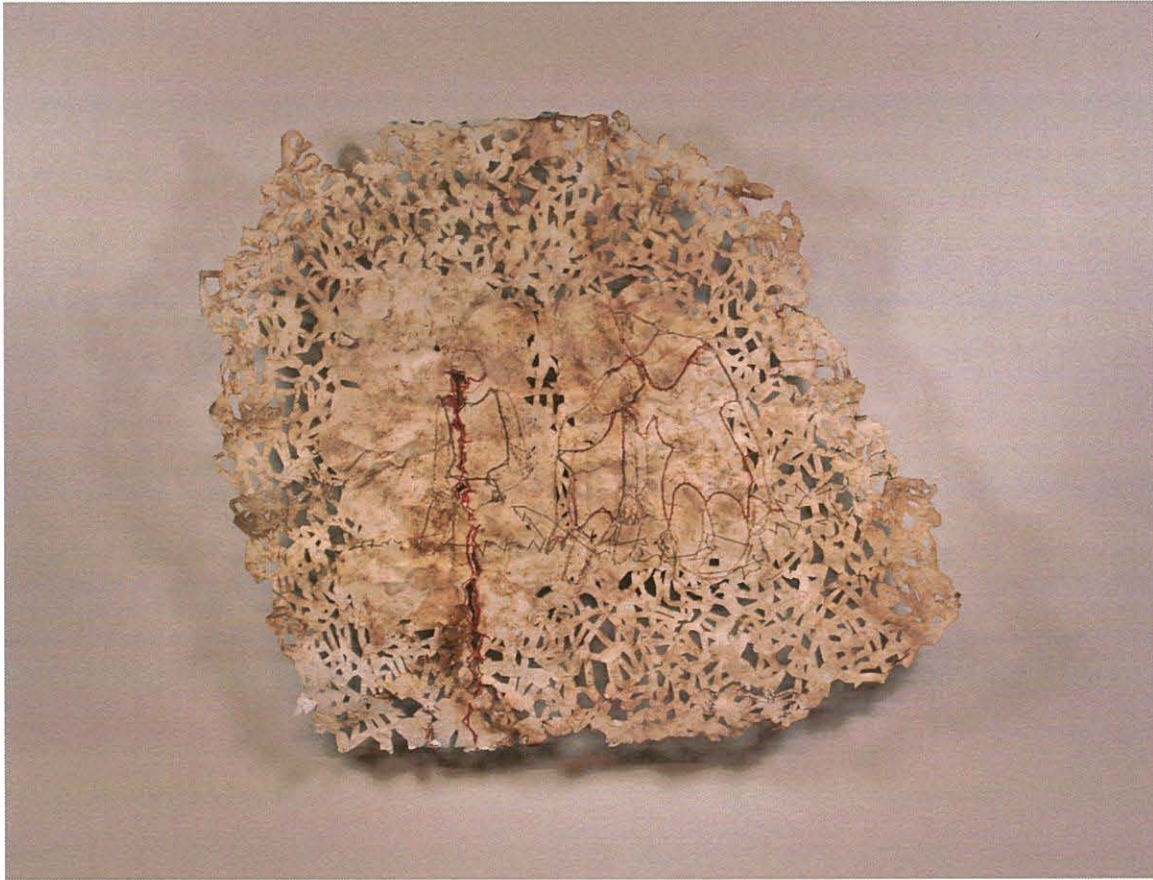
engage the viewers, allowing them the opportunity to project their own thoughts and ideas onto the work.

The embroidery uses four simple types of stitches (half stitch, cross stitch, blanket stitch and back stitch) and introduces modest amounts of color. The sizes of the stitches vary to include delicate tightly grouped areas to large loose formations present mainly in the larger works. On occasion long threads trail across the surface connecting areas together and create a visual pathway for the eye to travel along. For the most part colors are muted but in some cases bright reds, blues and greens add variety and interest.

In writing about four of the thesis works my intention is to discuss them in terms of what memories certain photographs elicit in me, how they depict family dynamics, how they marked turning points in family relationships, and how they triggered memories of early ideation.

In the attempt to produce a scholarly thesis I have tried to avoid getting overly personal as it detracts from the tone of the document. However, the topic of memoir deals directly with personal experience and the rest of this chapter will be more intimate than it is academic.

#1: "Matilda Longpre, Mariette and Jeannine, St Roch, 1920"
The original photograph is included at the beginning of Chapter Two.



In the original snapshot you see my maternal grandmother, sitting on a raft with her two daughters, on the shore of Lac St Roch de l'Achigan, in the Laurentian Mountains, outside of Montreal. A dark shadow created by the photographer's thumb in the top right corner is evidence of my grandfather's presence. Slightly left of center, a jagged tear runs vertically through two-thirds of the snapshot ending beneath Mariette's eye. She stared directly into the camera. My mother, Jeannine, is crying and her mother leans reassuringly towards her in a gesture of comfort.

I looked at this photo on many occasions before realizing that I'd never really *seen* it. Then I noticed that in its defaced state it truly portrayed the relationship between these



three family members. Several other family portraits also have similar body language and support this idea.

Looking at the photo one can clearly see that the younger child is being fussed over while the older daughter is slightly isolated. In many of the other snapshots this same body language is repeated and it became clear that the favorite child/excluded child dynamic began very early in this family. It played itself out in at least three generations that I am aware of. Mariette had four children and her eldest daughter, my cousin Helene, was the outcast of that family. Helene, in turn, abandoned her only child when he was about two years old and their relationship was always prickly. Her son, Patrick, has five children but I have no idea if he carried this dynamic into his family.

There is no way to find out how the photo came to be torn nearly in half, as everyone involved is dead. I've speculated that one of the girls tried removing it from the family album when they reached adolescence, perhaps because they found it objectionable for some reason. No other photos were torn and only a couple of others were successfully removed from the ninety-year-old photo album.

This print represented the defining moment in my thesis work. Up until this point my aesthetic was firmly aligned with traditional printmaking. Here you see where I broke away and wandered off to develop a more personal aesthetic. In so doing the work grew to include overtones of the dysfunction as interpreted from the original snapshot. When I incorporated embroidery into this print I wanted to use grays and browns to blend into the photographic image. The tear through Mariette was the exception and was outlined in three strands of maroon colored thread; I wanted it to be perfectly clear that this child was damaged by the favoritism shown to her younger sister.

Mariette never forgave her mother or her sister and understanding the family dynamic now explains why my mother only spoke about her sister in terms of their estrangement. It also accounts for why Mariette never drove across town to visit her mother or offered to help in her care when Nan was ill those last ten years of her life.

#2: "The House" St Roch, 1920

The original of this photograph is at the beginning of Chapter Four.



This family portrait was taken the same summer as the scene on the banks of the river. Sitting with her legs hanging outside the partially shuttered window sits my mother, squinting into the sun. Next to her is my grandmother holding her infant son, Paul, up to the window. He seems to be around eight months old. Beside them stands Mariette who was caught with an unflattering facial expression. The shadow of my grandfather, Aime Longpre, once again gives testimony to his roll as the photographer. As with many family portraits one of the parents is often missing.

From what I understand Aime had issues with alcohol that he acquired as a young man in South America and the gold fields in the Yukon. Story has it that his uncles took him to South America when he was in his early adolescence and found it amusing to get him drunk. He had issues with binge drinking his entire adult life so I think that it's fitting to see him as a shadowy figure at the edge of his young families portrait.

This was another snapshot that I studied many times before *seeing* all it had to offer. It was only while I was stitching on it did I notice the fruit on the window ledge directly in front of Mariette. There look to be four or five tomatoes sitting on the sunny window ledge, ripening. Mariette's long hair is parted to the side and held in place with a large floppy bow.

This image offered lots of possibilities for the stitch-work as there was a nice geometric feel to the composition. When I began addressing my grandfather's shadow I used an unthreaded sewing machine to stitch back and forth across it. Then I made tiny random stitches, connecting the holes made by the sewing machine. I liked the effect of the small shadow colored flecks on the photograph. It translated very differently to the front and the stitches have a frantic quality to them. This is the only image where the

lower edge of the print was left intact, allowing the presence of my grandfather's shadow to break with conformity within the established cutout framework.

#3: "Our Darlings Grave", Montreal, circa 1924.

The original photograph can be found at the beginning of this chapter.



This work is the anomaly within the exhibition. It breaks the pattern set by all the other works and as such acts to add diversity and suggest potential. The small islands of abstract cutout forms surround the mainland of the central image. The activity created by the cast shadows makes this piece even more dynamic. I see this print as being the

starting point for a new body of work where shadow play is pushed to include the ceiling and floor as well as the walls of a gallery space.

This snapshot must have been taken by my grandmother on a trip to the cemetery to visit her son's grave. It's late summer, Mariette stands with one hand behind her back a little bit in front of everyone, off to the left. She looks directly into the camera. Her knee length dress is checkered, her straw hat is pulled down snugly over her short hair and she's a bit over exposed and washed out.

Aime, my grandfather, adopts a classical *contrapposto* stance, to the far right side of his daughters, also with his hands held behind his back. He usually wore a hat so perhaps that is what he is holding behind his back. His face is mostly in shadow and he might be looking down at the ground. My mother, Jeannine, now short haired and bareheaded sat cross-legged on the grass between her father and sister. It is difficult to tell where her gaze was focused.

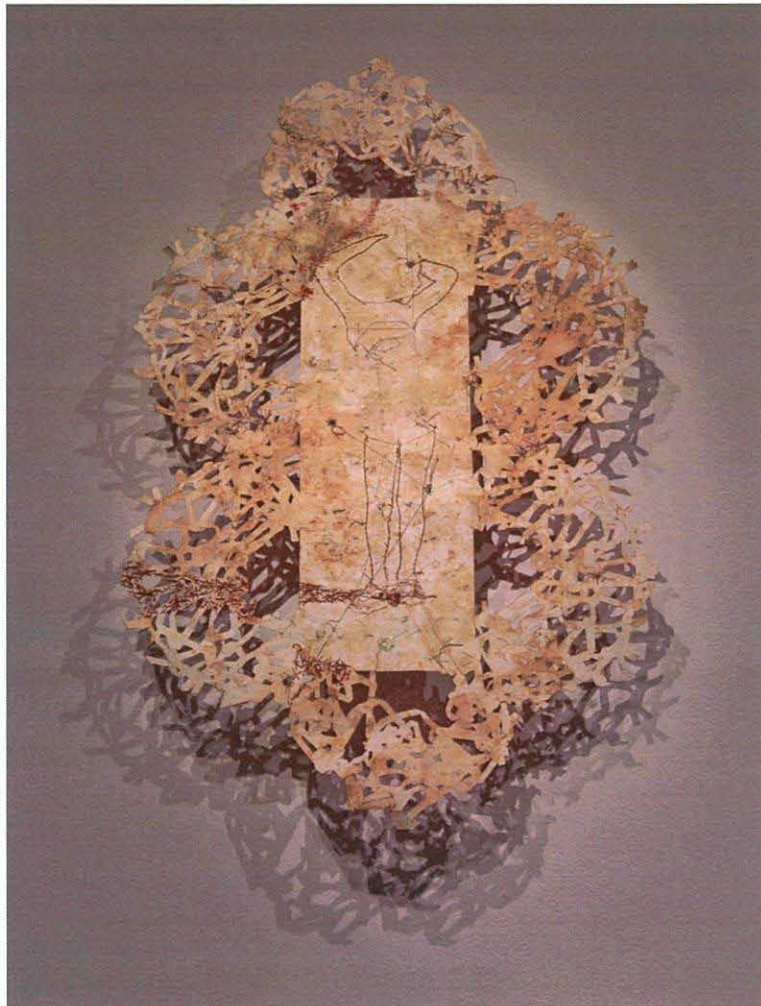
For the longest time I looked at this photo trying to understand where the gravesite was. But for the tear stained entry in the photo album they could have been at a park, in the back yard or at the edge of a garden. Only while stitching on it did I notice the short rounded gravestone between my grandfather's legs and the larger one in the background.

The story told to me by my mother about her brother's death went like this: My grandfather took his three young children down to play and swim along the shores of Riviere de la Prairie near Montreal. Within days all the children came down with scarlet fever. The girls survived, but Paul died when he was barely four years old. Another

version has it that the well at their summer cottage was contaminated and everyone in the family succumbed to scarlatina.

During the composting process this print disintegrated. In an attempt to salvage it, it became obvious that it was ruined. I was disappointed that it fell apart as I believed it documented a turning point in my grandparent's marriage. I brought it into my studio at school and hung it on the wall to discover that it had become the strongest of all my work. The tragedy of Paul's death literally blew the family apart at the seams as this piece accurately reflects.

#5: "Helen Posing", 1958, Round Lake, Ontario.
The original photograph of this image is at the beginning of Chapter Six.



Since my creative thesis is based on memoir I included a snapshot of myself as a six-year-old girl, self-consciously posing for my father. My red bathing suit was either a hand-me-down that was a bit too big or it was intentionally bought in a larger size in the hopes of getting two summer's wear out of it. I loved the thin red rubber wading shoes and refused to go in the lake unless I was wearing them. Not only did they offer a tiny bit of protection from the sharp rocks but I was convinced that I could run faster when wearing them. Between the older boys frightening us with the unknown terrors of the lake, small fish nibbling on our legs and the leeches it was sometimes important to be able to get to shore as fast as possible.

This image got me thinking about when I was still living in Toronto and how my life would drastically change before the next school year was finished. As such it represents the end of childhood innocence. The pose not only suggests an awaking awareness of myself as a sexual being but it presented my vulnerability to the world. I am not only innocent but also as yet unguarded.

I was intrigued after reading a section in Nabokov's memoir where he describes a day in 1903 when he experienced the "birth of sentient life" ³⁴ In Elizabeth Bishop's poem "In the Waiting Room" she also explores the idea of the beginning of conscious identity formation. After wondering about what that was like for my children as well as for myself I remembered an incident that would qualify for that beginning glimmer of identity. There were probably a series of things that led to the dawning realization that I was a *me*, a *Helen*.³⁵

The earliest recollection that I have involves an interaction with my older brother, John. He had a paper route and I looked up to him. John was allowed to walk all through

the neighborhood by himself, where as I was limited by the curb at the edge of the front yard. One evening he wanted to play with one of his friends so he decided that he would let me finish his paper route that evening. I felt special to take on this huge responsibility and I very much wanted to get it right. The newspapers were neatly rolled up and set in order in his wagon. Pointing at each paper he recited whose house it went to. But he must have pointed to different ones when he repeated the order of delivery because I remember being confused about which one went to which person. I had no concept of what a newspaper was except that they were important grownup things that adults needed everyday and my brother was important as well, since he was in charge of delivering them to several homes in the neighborhood. Since I couldn't read, and had no idea what a newspaper really was there was no way I could know that they were all identical. John and his friend Michael intentionally began confusing me, thinking it was funny and laughing at my expense ...and then came the pronouncement that formed a corner stone in the foundation myth of my life, "she's just a dumb girl, never mind, we'll do it" and off they went, leaving me behind, tethered to the curb, humiliated and destined to believe that girls were laughable insignificant idiots.

Each of the photographs I chose to include in my creative thesis carries a memory nested in the imagery. Thus, this memoir is truly a body of work that was conceived as well as executed through the visual arts.

CONCLUSION:

The theme of my creative thesis was exploring memoir through visual rather than literary arts. In a literary work one would expect to read a series of facts about someone's



life. They could be presented in a strict chronological progression or they could be woven together out of sequence in a lyrical way. Since I approached memoir from a visual perspective my intention was to have viewers experience the nature of family in broader terms. While using my family as the point of reference I invited viewers to relate to theirs. By turning the snapshots to face the wall I subverting the photographic images of my family, thereby alluding to the shadow side of all familial relationships and thus allowing viewers to experience the effects of time, the complex nature of family, and the fickleness of memory.

Footnotes:

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- ¹ Hoiferman, Marvin, *Now is Then: The Thrill and the Fate of Snapshots*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2008, p. 50.
- ² Heiferman, Marvin, p.50
- ³ Campbell, Kathy, conversation, Oct 24, 2010
- ⁴ Guralnik, David B., editor, Webster's New World Dictionary, Simon and Schuster, second edition, Gulf and Western Corporation, New York, pages 886, 1202.
- ⁵ Lippard, Lucy p. 23
- ⁶ radiolab, *Memory and Forgetting*, WNYC Session three, Section four, New York, www.radiolab.org/2007_jun07.
- ⁷ Heiferman, Marvin, page 51.
- ⁸ Blustein, Jeffery, *The Moral Demands of Memory*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2008, p.1.
- ⁹ Leher, Jonah, *Proust was a Neuroscientist*, First Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Co, Boston, New York, 2008, p. 80.
- ¹⁰ Leher, Jonah, back cover.
- ¹¹ Leher, Jonah, p. 204.
- ¹² radiolab, *Memory and Forgetting*.
- ¹³ Birkerts, Sven, *The Art of Time in Memoir: Then, Again*, p. 9.
- ¹⁴ Levine, Barbara, Snyder, Stephanie, *Snapshot Chronicles- Inventing the American Photo Album*, p.31
- ¹⁵ Barthes, Roland, translated by Howard, Richard, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, The Noonday Press, New York, 1981, p.27.
- ¹⁶ Hirsh, Marianne, *Family Frames, Photography, Narrative and Post Memory*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p.151.
- ¹⁷ Hammond, Ann, *Lineament*, art:21, Art in the Twenty-first Century, Season One, Spirituality, PBS 2001
- ¹⁸ cummings, ee, "poem 35", *100 selected poems*, Grove Press, Evergreen Edition, New York, 1959, p. 35.
- ¹⁹ Stewart, Susan, On Longing, Heiferman, Marvin, *Now is Then*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2008, p. 50.
- ²⁰ Levine, Barbara, Snyder, Stephanie, p. 18, 25.
- ²¹ Heiferman, Marvin, p. 52.
- ²² *Surveillance and the Camera Since 1870*, San Francisco Modern Museum of Art (SFMOMA), www.artdaily.org, Saturday, Oct 9. 2010.
- ²³ Sweeney, Robert W, Para-Sights: Multiplied Perspectives on Surveillance Research in Art Educational Spaces, www.surveillance-and-society.org/doing.htm.
- ²⁴ Lippard, Lucy, The Consequences of Memory, www.mccallumtarry.com/files/lucy_lippard.pdf.
- ²⁵ Hirsh, Marianna, p. 8.
- ²⁶ Heiferman, Marvin, p. 52.
- ²⁷ Heiferman, Marvin, p.46.

²⁸ Stevens, Wallace, "The Planet on the Table", *Stevens, Collected Poetry and Prose*, The Library of America, New York, 1997, p. 450.

²⁹ Hamilton, Ann, *Lineament*, art: 21, Season One, Spirituality, PBS, 2001

³⁰ Polk, Kathryn, www.nonindigenouswoman.com

³¹ Polk, Kathryn, *Invitational Artist*, statement, www.face-uofa.com/invitational.artist.

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Appendix

The Planet On The Table By Wallace Stevens

Ariel was glad he had written his poems
They were of a remembered time
Or of something seen that he liked.

Other makings of the sun
Were waste and welter
And the ripe shrub writhed.

His self and the sun were one
And his poems, although makings of his self,
Were no less makings of the sun.

It was not important that they survive.
What mattered was that they should bear
Some lineament or character,

Some affluence, if only half-perceived,
In the poverty of their words,
Of the planet of which they were part.

In the Waiting Room By Elizabeth Bishop

In Worcester, Massachusetts,
I went with Aunt Consuelo
to keep her dentist's appointment
and sat and waited for her
in the dentist's waiting room.
It was winter. It got dark
early. The waiting room
was full of grown-up people,
arctics and overcoats,

lamps and magazines.
My aunt was inside
what seemed like a long time
and while I waited and read
the *National Geographic*
(I could read) and carefully
studied the photographs:
the inside of a volcano,
black, and full of ashes;
then it was spilling over
in rivulets of fire.
Osa and Martin Johnson
dressed in riding breeches,
laced boots, and pith helmets.
A dead man slung on a pole
"Long Pig," the caption said.
Babies with pointed heads
wound round and round with string;
black, naked women with necks
wound round and round with wire
like the necks of light bulbs.
Their breasts were horrifying.
I read it right straight through.
I was too shy to stop.
And then I looked at the cover:
the yellow margins, the date.
Suddenly, from inside,
came an *oh!* of pain
--Aunt Consuelo's voice--
not very loud or long.
I wasn't at all surprised;
even then I knew she was
a foolish, timid woman.
I might have been embarrassed,
but wasn't. What took me
completely by surprise
was that it was *me*:
my voice, in my mouth.
Without thinking at all
I was my foolish aunt,
I--we--were falling, falling,
our eyes glued to the cover
of the *National Geographic*,
February, 1918.

I said to myself: three days

and you'll be seven years old.
I was saying it to stop
the sensation of falling off
the round, turning world.
into cold, blue-black space.
But I felt: you are an *I*,
you are an *Elizabeth*,
you are one of *them*.
Why should you be one, too?
I scarcely dared to look
to see what it was I was.
I gave a sidelong glance
--I couldn't look any higher--
at shadowy gray knees,
trousers and skirts and boots
and different pairs of hands
lying under the lamps.
I knew that nothing stranger
had ever happened, that nothing
stranger could ever happen.

Why should I be my aunt,
or me, or anyone?
What similarities
boots, hands, the family voice
I felt in my throat, or even
the *National Geographic*
and those awful hanging breasts
held us all together
or made us all just one?
How I didn't know any
word for it how "unlikely". . .
How had I come to be here,
like them, and overhear
a cry of pain that could have
got loud and worse but hadn't?

The waiting room was bright
and too hot. It was sliding
beneath a big black wave,
another, and another.

Then I was back in it.
The War was on. Outside,
in Worcester, Massachusetts,
were night and slush and cold,

and it was still the fifth
of February, 1918.



Short wall, UCB Art Gallery



Posing, Round Lake, 1957, 2010, M Helene Baribeau
Paper, snapshot, thread, tea, 29" x 43"



Now & Then, Double Self Portrait, 1957 & 2009, 2010, M. Helene Baribeau
Paper, snapshot, thread and tea, 40" x 49"



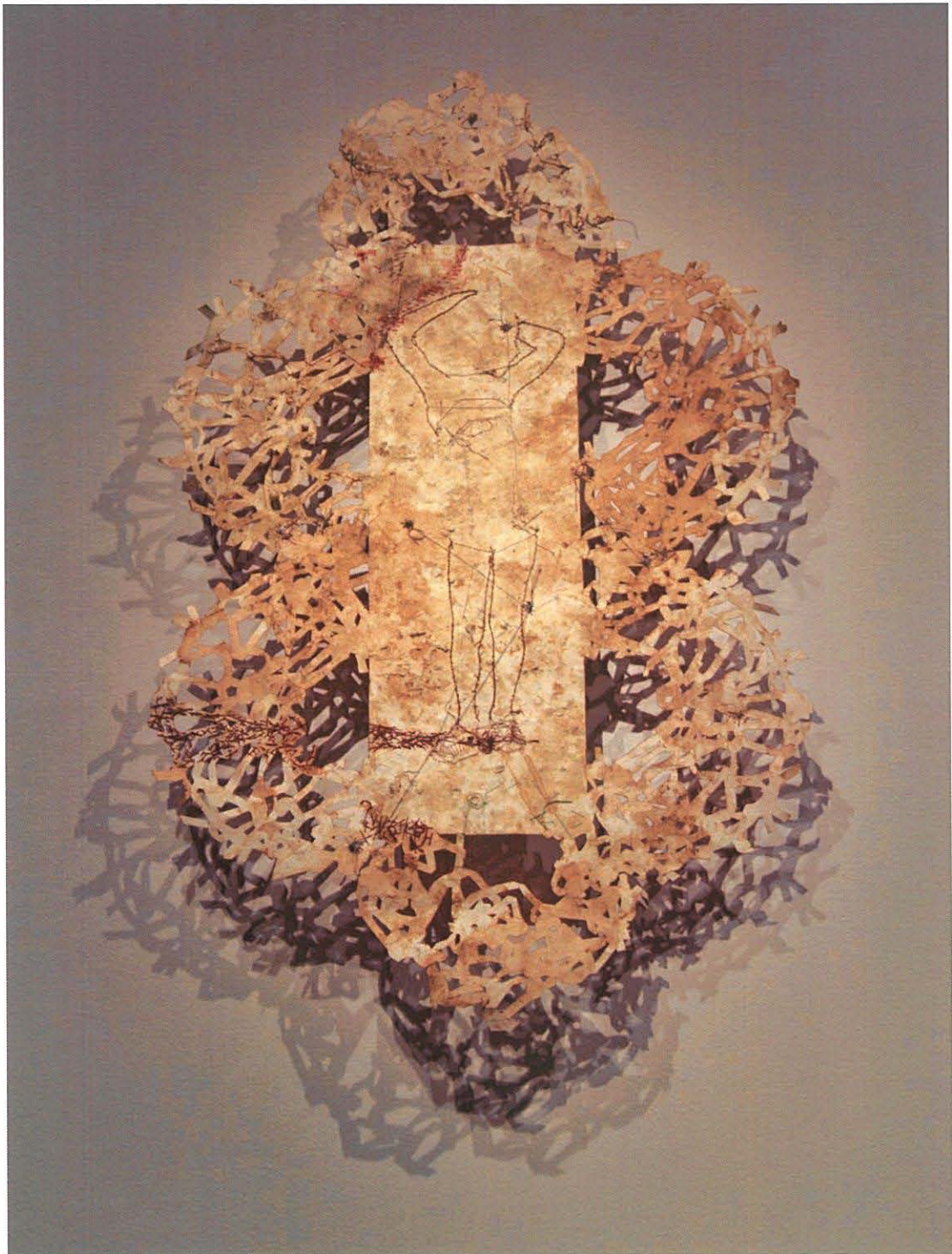
Jeannine, Pregnant with Me, 1950, 2010, M. Helene Baribeau
Paper, snapshot, thread and tea, 29" x 40"



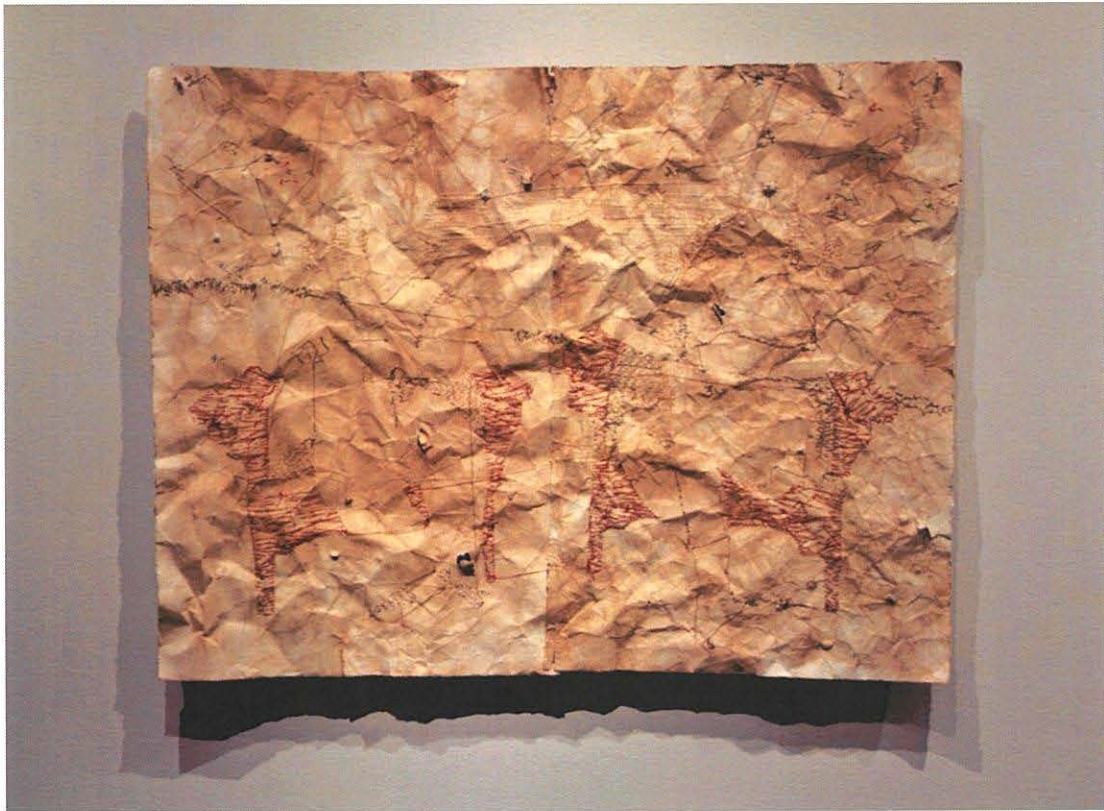
Long wall, UCB Art Gallery



Jeannine Bathing in the Atlantic, 1950, 2010, M. Helene Baribeau
Paper, snapshot, thread and tea, 21" x 35"



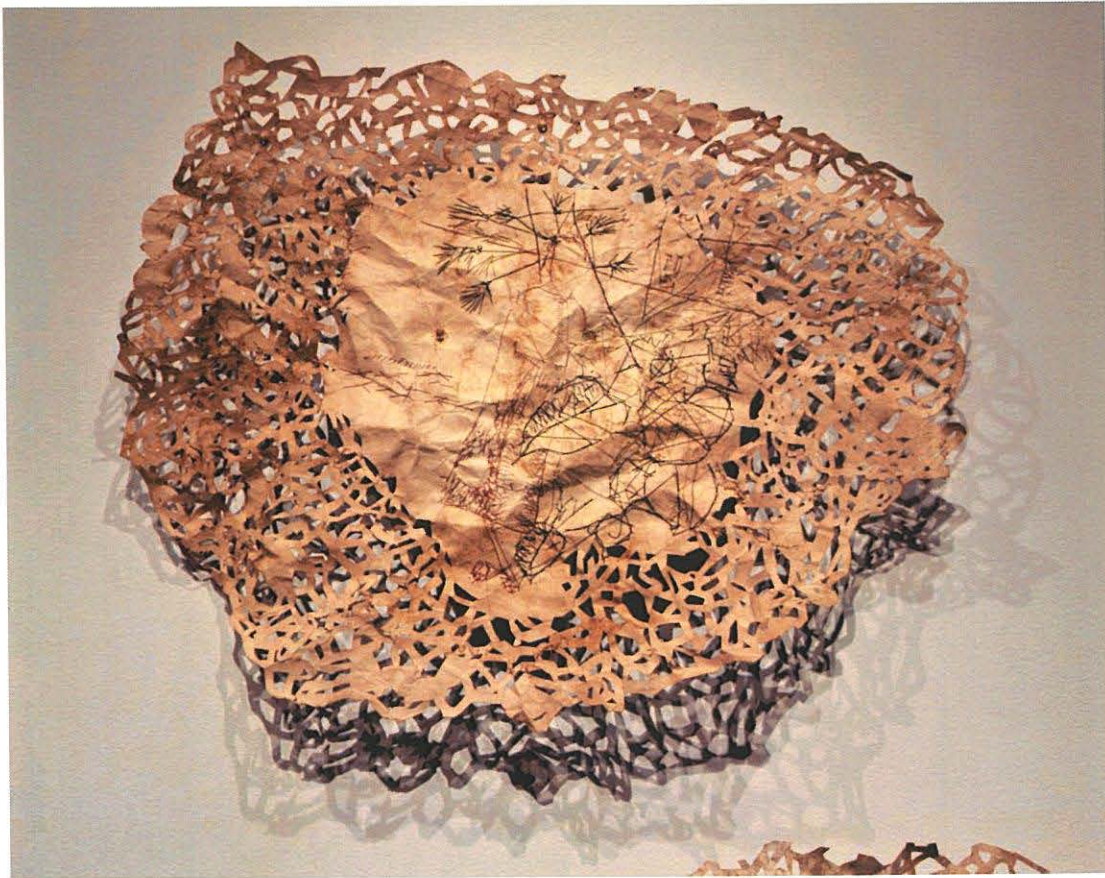
Helen Posing, Round Lake, 1957, 2010, M. Helene Baribeau
Paper, snapshot, thread and tea, 18"x 29"



Jeannine & Jacques, Happy, 1945, 2010, M. Helene Baribeau
Paper, snapshot, thread and tea, 29" x 39"



Tom as a Cowboy, Tucson, 1983, 2010, M. Helene Baribeau
Paper, snapshot, thread and tea, 21" x 29"



Jeannine in the Bahamas, 1948, 2010, M. Helene Baribeau
Paper, snapshot, thread and tea, 21" x 28"



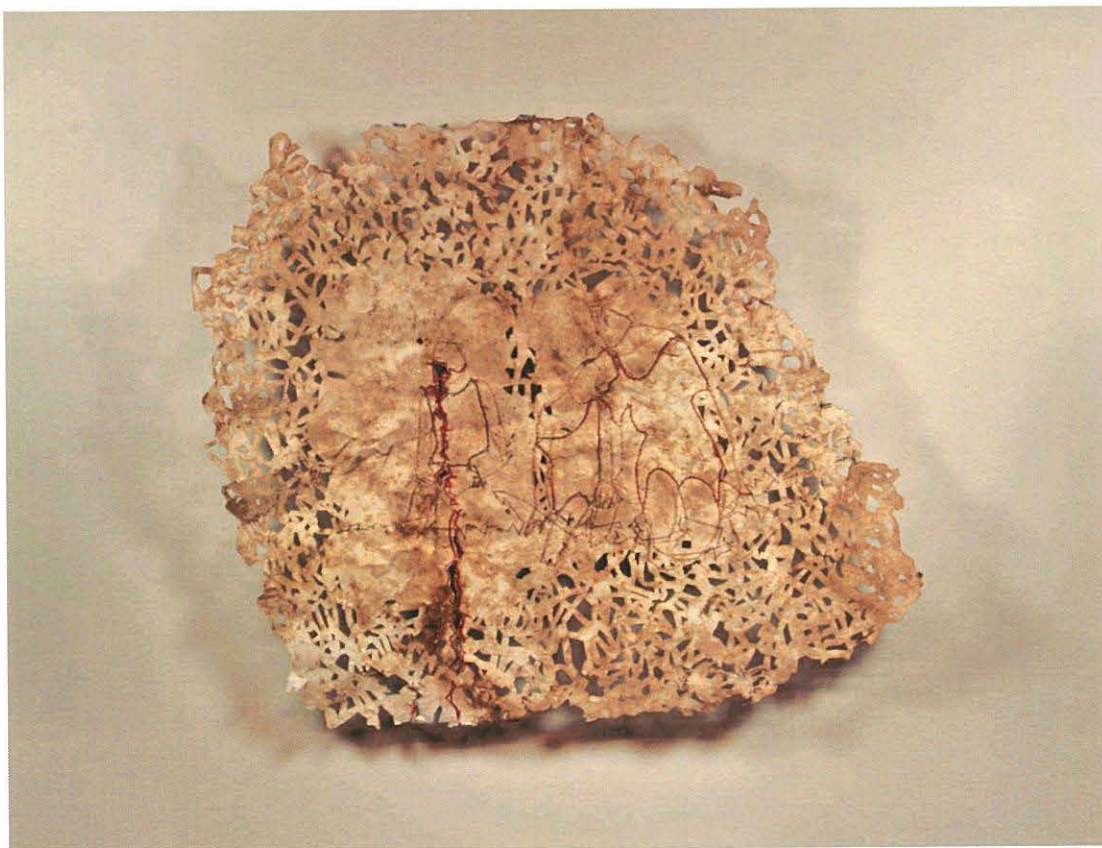
Jacques in the Garden, Toronto, 1957, 2010, M. Helene Baribeau
Paper, snapshot, thread and tea, 22" x 29"



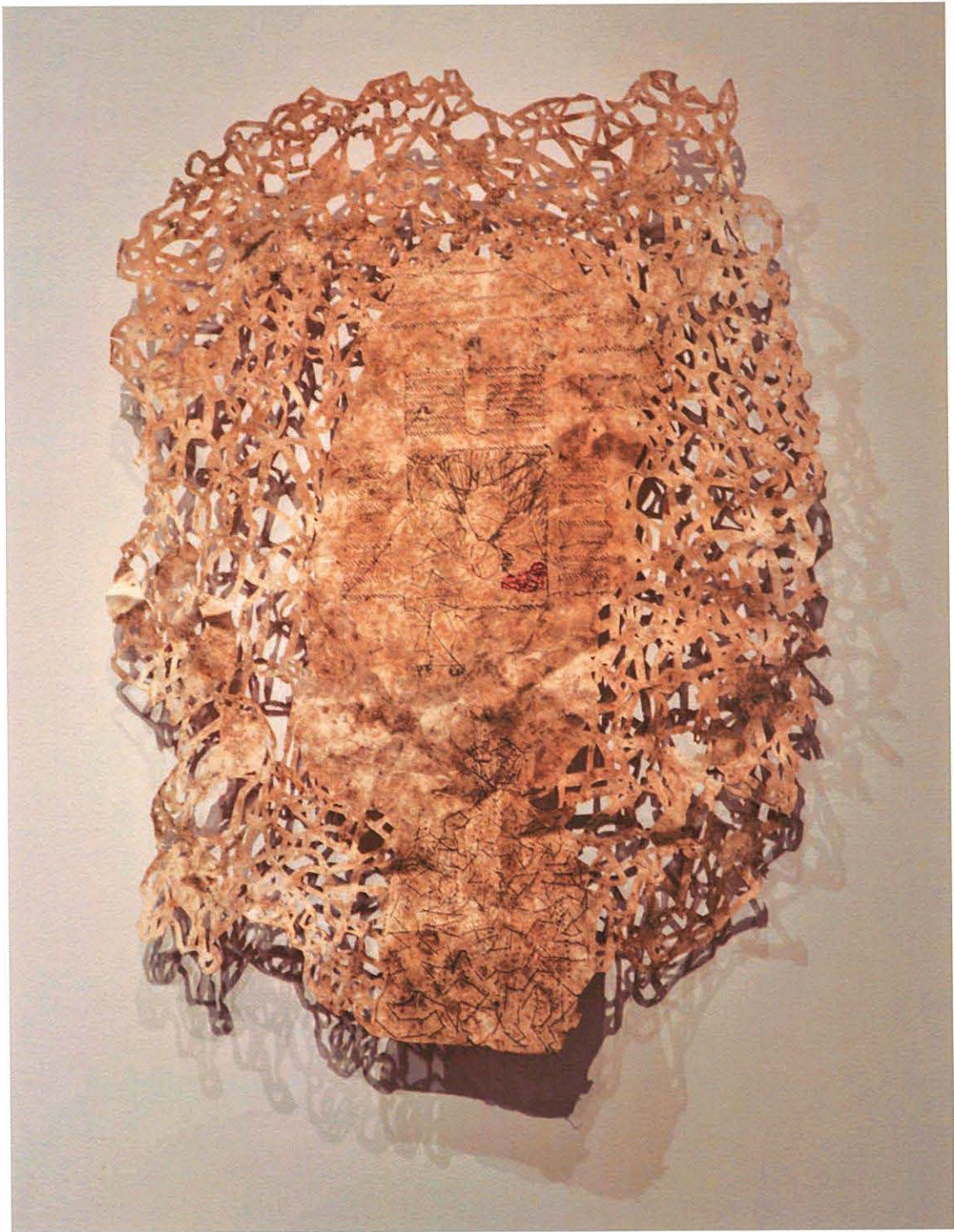
Our Darling's Grave, Montreal, 1924, 2010, M. Helene Baribeau
Paper, snapshot, thread and tea, 29" x 40"



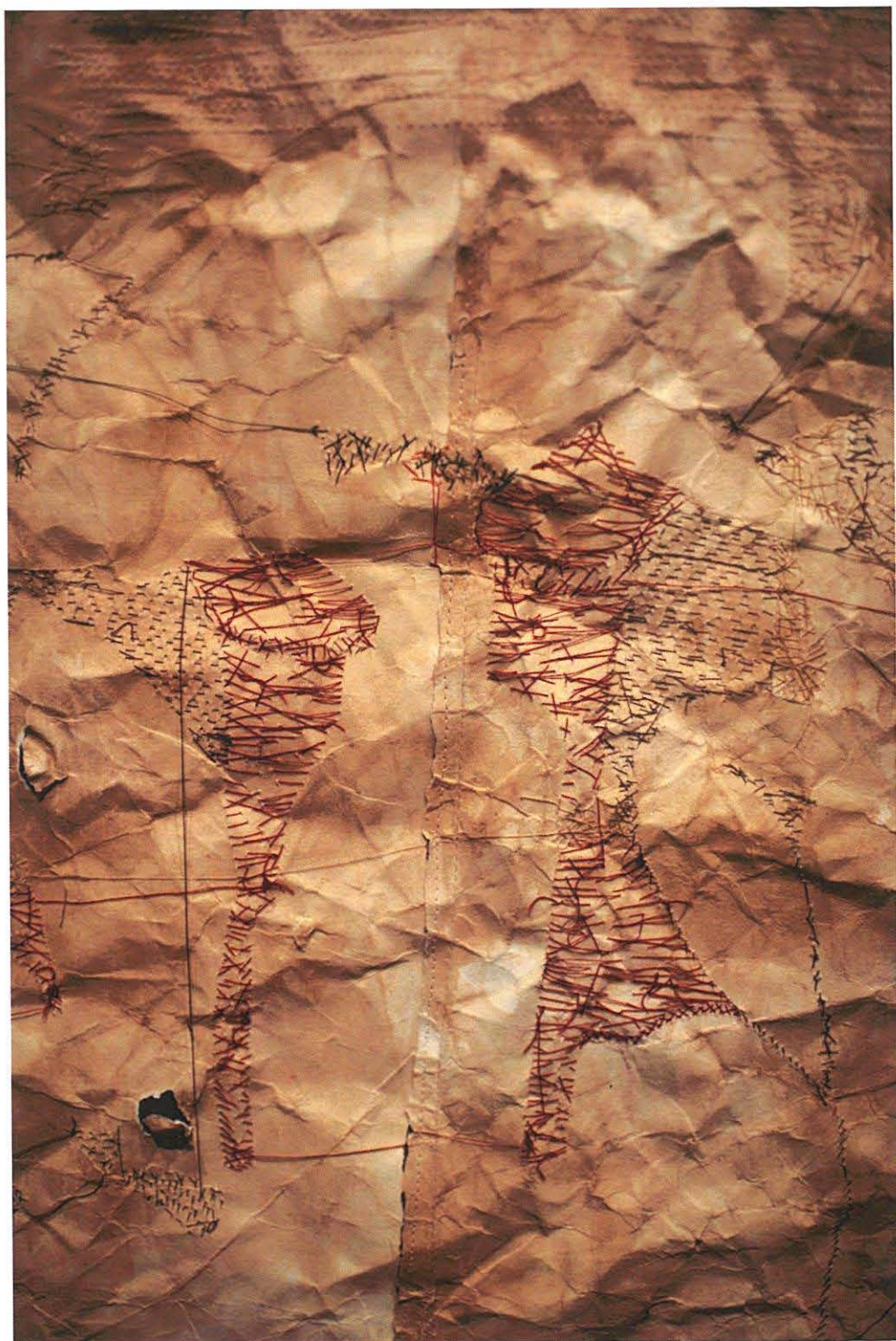
Nana Fishing, St Roch, Canada, 1945, 2010, M. Helene Baribeau
Paper, snapshot, thread and tea, 22" x 30"



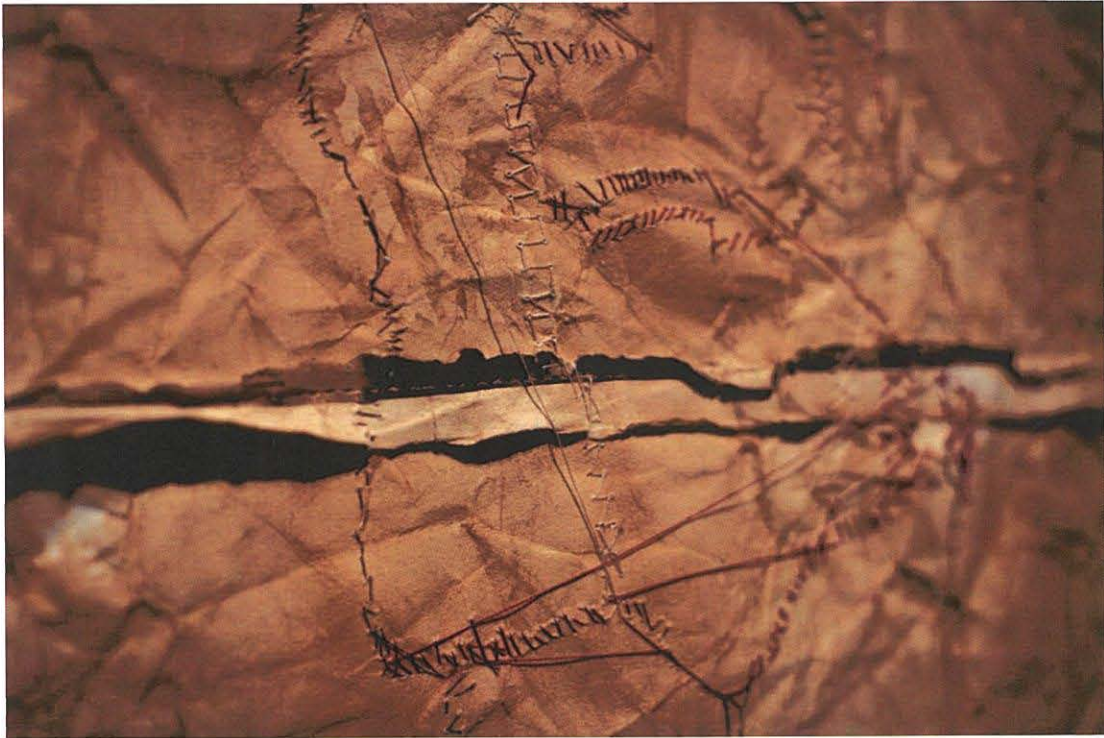
Matilda Longpre, Mariette, and Jeannine, St Roch, 1920, 2010, M. Helene Baribeau
Paper, snapshot, thread and tea, 22" x 22"



The House, St Roch, 1920, 2010, M. Helene Baribeau
Paper, snapshot, thread and tea, 21" x 29"



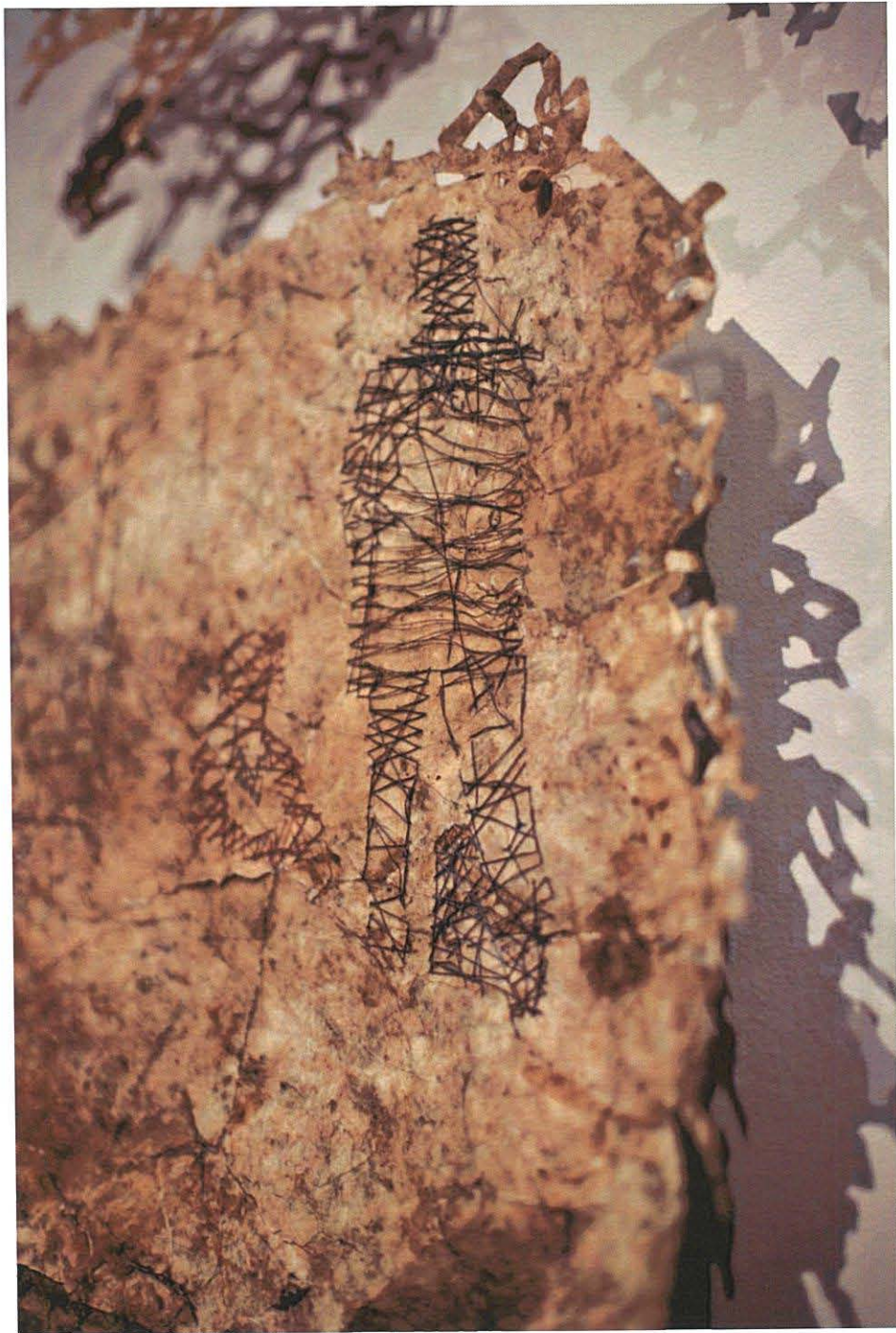
Detail, *Jeannine & Jacques, Happy, 1945*, M. Helene Baribeau



Detail: *Jeannine Pregnant with Me*, 1950, M. Helene Baribeau



Detail: *Matilda Longpre, Mariette and Jeannine*, 1920, M. Helene Baribeau



Detail: *Our Darling's Grave*, 1924, M. Helene Baribeau

