

Katia Meisinger / Artist Statement

Memory of a Room

Memories are something that can plague us or bring us joy, and when I look back at my memories of home I remember a space that didn't feel like home. It did not feel like a comfortable space but one of alienation, anxiety, and anger. The living room is where most of my memories of home take place, it



Katia Meisinger, *The Red Room*, 2018

is where I grew up and explored the world. When I remember home I see the living room, not the building but a single room, because that is where everything happened; fights, celebrations, and even solitude. Something I remember was a mirror in the living room, and all I would do was stare into the mirror and would make eye contact with myself. I did further research on this idea of how we see ourselves in the mirror and found that there was a theory linking a sign of anxiety to this action of connecting with yourself to realize you are a living and functions being. This was something I did not know was connected to my anxiety.

Having anxiety is not a major part of my artwork but I include it because it was a key feature in my younger years. This theme is hidden throughout the installation with the symbol of the eye, they are on the mirror and on the nails of every hand. What contributed to my anxiety was living in two homes, my parents divorced when I was very young; both got remarried and then divorced again. My mother's second husband walked out on us when I was nine, this only taught me the pain of abandonment and that a promise to love and cherish is not a real promise.

This began my warped reality and understanding of how I view the home, how I felt about home, and what a domestic home looked like.

Events throughout this past year have spurred my inspiration into creating this installation, I believe this started as a subconscious way to heal and come to terms with my past and how I treated myself. Growing up I had relationships, romantic and family related, that were emotionally abusive. Much like how we can suppress our emotions I pushed this anger into jars in my mind. Found objects and other items that represent these negative memories, moments of my life, fill these jars. One of them is labeled “Words of Encouragement”; the paper inside reads “You’re kind, smart, important” but is overlapped with words like “You’re selfish, a bitch, a cunt”. Words of anger stick a lot harder than the positive ones and caused me to have an abstracted reality that felt more like a home than the one I lived within.

The purpose of my piece is not to twist the perception of other people in my life but to show the effects that were left behind from their actions. While not all actions were abusive some instead inflicted pain with absence, like my father. He was around as my brother and I grew up but did not take on the parental role. Therefore, the male figure is missing in the family portrait, no one ever filled that void in my life and is something I have found to be a norm. Because of this I found ways of escaping and creating my own reality. Drugs, sex, and alcohol were all ways to deal with the past or present, hints of these themes are placed throughout my artwork. Empty bottles in the drawer of secrets, a penis Atari connected to the television, or the joints filling a jar labeled “The Good Days”. The television quickly became my best friend, along with my cats and dogs, both forms of entertainment to distract me from the old reality crashing around me.

Everything in my installation is made from found objects, I have always collected found objects to keep me company and fill the empty spaces in my life which is why I have leaned to heavily to the use of the found object. This is how I stumbled upon Joseph Cornell, an artist that uses found objects and mixes them with the surreal to create otherworldly artworks. Just like me Cornell uses these found objects and boxes to escape from his own reality.¹ His work represented an escape from a reclusive life, pieces featuring childhood and space. Though I am not a reclusive person I designed my installation to be a small space so that only very few people can enter the space at once to give the feeling of loneliness and how small my reality used to be. This is why there is a single chair that is anthropomorphized into a representation of my body, a spot I sat in every day and became my comfortable place much like Cornell found comfort in his artwork. He used his artwork to travel to fantasy worlds without leaving his home, his pieces gave insight into surreal worlds and perceptions of objects and sceneries which is what I aim to accomplish as well.²

His most familiar works are made up of jars and shadow boxes mixed with found objects inside that can give the viewer a new sight into realities. His work ranges from surreal worlds contained within boxes to jars filled with found



Joseph Cornell, *Pharmacy*, 1943

¹ Solomon, Deborah. *Utopia Parkway: The Life and Work of Joseph Cornell*. New York: Other Press, 2015.

² Joseph Cornell Biography, Art, and Analysis of Works." *The Art Story*. Accessed April 02, 2018. <http://www.theartstory.org/artist-cornell-joseph.htm>.

items. *Pharmacy* (1943) is one of many pieces that stem from his life as a Christian Scientist, a belief in not using medicine but rather the belief that God will heal through prayer. This piece resembles a pharmacy self with jars containing found objects that are medicine for the imagination and the soul. Things like butterfly wings, map pieces, colored sand, newspaper, and fruit bits fill the jars combining his use of surrealism and memories of childhood. Containing these things within small jars is like how I attempt to contain a space within a space with invisible walls or having a space unmoved but still placed somewhere other than the home, like inside the gallery.

In my instillation there is an obvious nod to Cornell, an exploding head filled with glass jars to represent moments in my past. The head is used to communicate how I felt hold in all



those memories, it fills to the point where my head wanted to burst. These memory jars are filled with things like sand to represent wasted moments, and flower petals to represent all the times I was not loved. This does add an interactive portion to this piece because it gives the audience something to investigate pick up the jars. Having an interactive component like that is necessary because it gives the notions of someone living in the space and has filled the jars themselves and allows

the viewer to become immersed in the space. These jars also hold the feeling of anger that came from the alienation and absence that followed trying to cope. Same can be said for the slippers lying at the feet of the armchair; this gives the appearance of the room being lived in but not comfortably. Inside the slippers are tacks that spike out of the bottom, this will give the feeling that whomever did live here had a painful time, even with small tasks like walking in the space.

Memory and emotion go hand in hand so when building this space, I knew that adding touches of my own life would help give this room a life of its own and extend beyond just a mix of memories into a physical form.

Having the viewer enter my installation is a large portion of my artwork because I do not want people to just walk past and view my memory room, but to also experience it. This includes actions as simple as walking in and out of the room, looking through items and jars, and even sitting in the armchair. These actions, whether the viewer is aware of it or not, put them in my shoes and will cause them to create and understand the same actions, moments, of other things I have experienced.

The Surreal Effect

My inspiration found through surrealism is apparent in my artwork with many reasons as to why it consumes my installation. I define surrealism as a subconscious disconnect from the normal which causes an embrace of the abnormal. Through this definition I aim to magnify my subconscious abstraction of the everyday object and will create a room that resembles my unique perception of a living space and give substance to the objects. For example, I keep my secrets hidden and locked away, much like one hides things within a drawer.

The end table next to the armchair will have clawing and gripping hands to keep the “Secrets” drawer from opening but it stays open because eventually our secrets are put out there for all to see. This gives a life to the object and takes it out of our normal understand of furniture and the term, “We like to keep and hold things inside.”





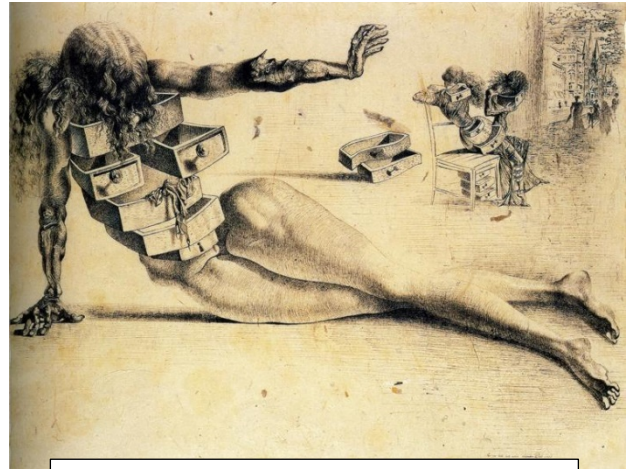
Salvador Dalí, *Mae West*, 1934

When creating these abnormal pieces of furniture, I research Dalí and his use of the body and everyday objects in his paintings. I do not want to create a static space which is also far from Dalí's style; his paintings hold movement and emotion that confuse the viewer much like I want to do with my art work. While I am grasping for the surrealist style I do not want it to overshadow the narrative of my artwork, I want it to emote and to give an experience. If we compare this to Dalí's *Mae West* (1934) we can see how he uses Mae West's face to create a room that still

resembles an actual living space. Her hair is the curtains, eyes are the windows, lips are a couch, and even chin is the steps leading into the room.³ I am not taking this approach but will use body within the space to show the physical connect I made with my memory of the room. But like Dalí's painting I want to have tricks of the eye and cause different reactions to the same piece of work. This will show a link to the subconscious and how we really view our surroundings, giving the audience a new vision of art and the world around them.

³ Dalí, Salvador. *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*. NY: The Dover, 1993.

The other connection I'd like to make is Dali's use of the sexual body and objects. *The City of Drawers* (1936) is scenery of women whose chests have been altered into drawers, a play on the term "chest of drawers"; he enjoyed perverse eroticism mixed with alternate realities that play with placement of items and the naked body.⁴ By forming a coherence between anthropomorphizing and sexualizing the objects within my artwork I am giving them life and a voice within the space. Mixing this aspect with surrealism I can make these objects tell a narrative to the audience without words. They will emote and give way to the emotions and memories that was once my childhood reality. Creating a surreal surrounding has helped me come to terms with my inner child and those feelings that never left. By giving my memories a voice through surreal sculpture I am healing the wounds that grew over the decades and will give my adult self some overdue closer.



Salvador Dali, *The City of Drawers*, 1936

⁴ Alexandrian, Sarane. *Surrealist Art*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2007

Found Objects and their Home

What creates a home is not just a person that lives within it but the memories, objects, and even the remains of what once was. As I analyzed homes and rooms around the idea of constructing a space I found my own personal story and memories incorporating into my artwork, some literal and some abstract. The literal components include having a heart and brain inside of another drawer to indicate having to put my thoughts and feelings away, because I did not feel like I could be my true self around my family. The drawer will be open for people to search inside and find what else could be tucked away. One of the abstract components is the cohesion of my body and the armchair; it will look as if a cloth body has evolved from the chair to parallel a person sitting in the furniture. Making this armchair apart from the room is the color, everything else is entirely red except the chair, because the chair is me and I was the one thing that stuck out in my home. I find red to be a symbol for all my feelings of anxiety and anger, along with because a symbol for what I consider to be a fake domestic home.

To find this balance I found inspiration from Edward and Nancy Kienholz, an artistic duo that uses a built space to construct a narrative that is inspired by a specific subject matter; hook ups, abortions, or decaying life. Their work surrounds the use of installed rooms with deteriorating objects to give the viewer subject matter that extends beyond a specified era. This brings a theme of the degrading era, the old and falling apart, mixed with modern social criticism. For example, the piece *Roxy's* (1960-61) depicts a domestic space that embodies Edward Kienholz's youthful encounters in a brothel set in the era of the 1930's and can be describe as the "stuff of nightmares". Items used look as if they are overused and degrading, all

of which are found objects.⁵ The welcoming Madame has a boar's head skull with a cloth wig on top and a sinister grin, this only adds to the altered reality Keinhholz is placing before us. What helps place the era is the juke box, which purposefully streams music that reminds the viewer of the depression-era and used cigarettes fill ashtrays in the room giving the space a feeling of it being alive.⁶

I compare my work to *Roxy's* (1960-61) because setting a scene and creating a narrative is what I am creating and Kienholz have successfully, in my opinion, mastered the use of found



objects and space manipulation. I want to give the audience a room they can imagine was once a space lived in. A lonesome armchair seated in a small living room, a television companion, a family portrait missing the male figure, and more. Each object is a part of my story that is important to keep in the instillation. A small detail is a vase of artificial colored flowers that have been left to die; I believe this gives the impression of the fake and forgotten. The fake is the natural object that has been artificially

altered to represent the fakeness I find in the domestic home. Having them die expands on the notion that even the things we use to cover up the faux prettiness of a home are also left to decay leaving nothing but the real ugliness behind.

⁵ Hollein, Max, and Martina Weinhart. Kienholz. Walther König, 2012.

⁶ Rooney, Kara L. The Brooklyn Rail. June 3, 2010. <https://brooklynrail.org/2010/06/artseen/edward-kienholz-roxys>

This relates to the decision to have transparent walls, instead I place items within the space to give the representation of a wall being there. I did not want to include walls for multiple reasons, one being because I find the use of walls to be very confining in shape and having a physical room inside a room, especially gallery walls. I also visually enjoyed the thought of being able to see the room without having to enter that way the viewer may have different



Edward and Nancy Keinholz, Roxy's, 1960-61

points of view. But, my main choice of not including the walls is to show how transparent this domestic space really is. Having veiled, or invisible, walls will help set the space for the viewer without constructing the home and if I never actually felt as home then why create an actual one?

In the real reality I designed there were no walls to hold me back or blank white walls to stop my creativity. The walls in my bedroom are painted from top to bottom with everything from handprints to doodles that popped into my head. I consider those to be real walls, not just one solid color, but I knew that if I incorporated that into my installation it would do one or both things. One, become way too much for the viewer to take in and distract them from the narrative, or two, make no sense at all and ruin the installation. The truth of what I dealt with as a child through adulthood, though it is not dark and gruesome, is still a sad and lonely tale that cannot be covered with material value or the farce of a domestic home. Because we hide things about ourselves behind walls, in drawers, and within ourselves I want the walls to be a symbolic image that I want people to be able to see right through the sculptures and objects to see the true meaning of my piece, my reality, and the old me that once was.

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