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Artist Statement/Full Statement  
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Artist Statement:

Chance. The chance happenings that occur, the decisions we make, these have been my passion for as long as I can remember. Not the decisions themselves, but the effect that each action has on the reaction. I often obsess over the actions not made that can change the course of life. Chance happenings assembled fate so that I would find my mother just after her final hour, that my father would have his heart attack on the back of a fire truck - on call - rather than in the station with the EMTs. There was not even a fire that night. It is strange how much we rely on timing, waiting for situations to present themselves, repeating that this "timing" must be "right", but with the endless opportunity for chance to change any moment we create.

Chance brought my fathers passing, brought my mother's need for an outlet, brought my need for a class in my schedule and built for us our common ground: photography.

I received my first photographic advice from my mother -she taught me the benefits of shooting as a woman (breasts are a great tripod) and exposed me to the ideas of light, and the value it brings to each frame. The first moment that inspired my own creative will was seeing my mother in the perfect light on a summers day. That moment of vulnerability, and the fleeting moment that perfect light offers, instilled in me the need to be aware, to be present, so not to miss these chances. This has led me to consider subjects otherwise missed - simple objects from a dresser, the way the light appears at just the hour you wake, and the last light of the day on the bathroom wall. These too, are gifts of chance, moments of perfect timing.

I have spent time alone in my family home, figuring out what has made it such a safe space, even in its emptiness (empty nature). Watching as light illuminates the absence that time has created. Once I have felt the memory return, I attempt to capture the space at its perfect balance, in the past and the present, with reverence to the value of the positives and the negatives (emotionally and tonally) that each brings.

As time continues to pass, it is my aim to give the home my mother created and the memories that were made the respect they deserve as I transition into adulthood. It is my chance to reclaim moments that will, with age, too easily slip from memory, to explore aspects of my life that may one day be forgotten.

Source to Self:

Becoming a photographer focusing on objects and spaces, rather than resting in the comfort of photographing people would become an intimidation from the beginning of this project. I am fed by vibrance, by the expressive nature of others and by human interactions. I am a social butterfly and my family knew it before even I did. So when grappling with the idea of photographing still lifes and an empty house, it did not take more than a moment for me to feel anxious. I may have felt emotion in the souvenirs of my mother. I may have known that going back to our home was exploration well needed, but I could not assume that what I feel and what I know will be understood and translated to others. Comically enough, it was the mystery and unique quality of his book, shoved between two well-kept oversized texts, that brought me to Josef Sudek. Tattered and stained, as easily looked over as any of the thousands of texts on each shelf, it was its uniquely ordinary nature that caused me to put the other 20 books I had collected down, so as to sit on the floor and review the photographer.

Josef Sudek, known as the “Poet of Prague”, went through his own personal life struggles. In March of 1915 he was issued his draft card for World War I and by December he was reporting for duty (Farova 8). During the final battle of his service, Sudek was sent to one of the more dangerous areas of the campaign for having been seen trying to avoid fighting. It could have just been a what it was: a petty lesson taught by his commanding officer; instead it shaped the way he would see the world and the way he would develop his craft. Sudek lost his arm due to this final fight and, after spending time in several hospitals, was sent home to his mother and sister. After reading about this part of his life and how he moved forward, I developed a feeling of camaraderie. I could never know what it is like to lose an

arm, but to lose something important and to handle it the way he did - with humor, acceptance, and determination - is an occurrence in life with which I am quite familiar. Sudek did not let his misfortunes disable him, but continued to lead a full life and examine its beauty, its illuminations and textures, objects and surroundings, through the medium of photography.

With his cumbersome 8x10 view camera in slung over his “good” shoulder, this resourceful artist explored the city around him, learning the timing of Prague’s luminous light at each and every interval throughout the day. A written remembrance of Sudek in a posthumous monograph entitled *Sudek* written by Sonja Bullaty, the author reflects on her experiences with the artist, stating that she realized “that the whole of Sudek’s life seemed to revolve around light” (Bullaty 14). They sat together in a Prague cathedral talking until Sudek shot up: “A ray of sun had entered the darkness and both of us were waving clothes to raise mountains of ancient dust ‘to see the light’ as Sudek said. Obviously he had known that the sun would reach here perhaps two or three times a year and he was waiting for it” (Bullaty 14). Reading about this episode of Sudek’s reminded me of my own practices, not only encouraging my obsession with the effect of light on a space, but pushing me to spend more time in my home and studio waiting for the light to express something otherwise missed. His respect and regard for the spaces he photographs, specifically his work with St. Vitus cathedral, likens itself to my treatment and interactions with my own home and the objects it contains: waiting for their perfection to display itself at its height, doing the best to encourage even the smallest details (dust, light, texture), to come forth in the grain of the film. Beyond our mutual value for the same formal aspects of photography, Sudek embraces these formal elements for reasons similar to my own. Sudek worked to embrace the

contradictions of his surroundings and, thus, discover its harmonies, pulling both the unspoken of beauty of his subjects, including grave yards, cathedrals, gardens, and his own studio, and the lingering feeling of stillness, even absence, that each carries (Fovera 12).

Despite that all of this information and all of the pictures I had seen that seemed very connected with my stylistic desires and method of photography, it was not until I had read his beliefs, his perspective on a life and the images in it, that I realized how important this artist would become to me:

*“More than anything, Sudek believed that life goes on, or, as he put it, ‘music keeps playing...even the darkest images are breaths of light’”.*

Josef Sudek embodies a photographer who understands that, although life has its dark, its negative occurrences and restricting factors, each moment comes with vibrant possibilities, a chance to see things with a new perspective, a chance to add light to the story that life creates.

With each positive moment or perspective I create in my photographs, there still lingers another side to my creative motivation. As with Sudek and his play of light and dark, I too have always had a passion for this juxtaposition, but, for me, there is a confession of the self that I receive from these moments of unspoken serenity. It is not just about the presence of the beauty for me, the blessing of the beautiful, but also about the absence of beauty, of the life and energy that decays and dissipates with time. Francesca Woodman fills the void left by Sudek. She saw the need to discuss the emptiness that goes hand in hand with the effects of time. With artists for parents, Woodman fell easily into photography, first exploring the medium at the age of thirteen. Noted as a “very self-confident, determined, ambitious” young photographer, Woodman traveled from place to place, including Providence, New York, and Rome, to build upon her studies and explore what the change of locations had to

offer for her photographs (Janus 29). Although she was seen as the self-confident young lady, she was also described as a “curious phenomenon”, as her energy was continually motivated, but with a dark side that often revealed itself in her photographs.

Having faced a life long struggle with loneliness, Woodman would confront the self through photography, going into old homes, old buildings and spending time with them, filling them with her own thoughts, her own perspective—she relates the space to herself. She would become a relative to the space itself, once found by Giuseppe Gallo, a close friend, in the vacant floor of their building, naked and shivering from the cold, waiting for the perfect light to present itself (Janus 30). She inspired, for me, a desire to be apart of my home, to sit with it and allow whatever part of my family was left on the walls to move into my thoughts, embracing the result of the emotion. As she worked to understand and move with the space, Francesca brought forth the element that is the elusiveness of a moment. Her framing “isolates her subjects” and displays the urgency of representation (Chandes 7). It is admitted in a self-titled book, created by the Foundation Cartier pou l’art Contemporain, that Woodman herself always wished to disappear, to melt into each space she left herself in and explore the idea of fragmentation of the self (Chandes 7). These elements of Woodman are revealed in each photo she created. The spaces she chose further reveal her beyond the artist, but as a person, choosing to disappear not into large mansions or beautiful pristine spaces, but in abandoned spaces, spaces long forgotten by many, but adored by the photographer. Just as she captured the transition of these spaces by combining them – literally *melting* them - with herself, I aim to capture my home and the objects found within drawers, closets, and other hidden places as they transition from the active familial uses, to the passive, silent state I find them in now. These spaces and objects are now awaiting this

animation of light that photography offers them. It isn't that I do not feel light in these souvenirs of the past, but simply to not confess their darkness would sell the emotional experience of photography short. It is through this act of photographing and my interaction with light, shadow and time that I am able to reanimate and ultimately reconnect with these spaces, these familial memories that exist outside of a linear time and find shape within the suspended time that my photographs offer.

Woodman has given me the opportunity to accept the appearance of personal anecdote and emotion in my photographs. She revealed that by placing the self into a subject, one does not unnecessarily make it all about them, but offers a fragment of the artist - of the emotion they feel - as an offering to the audience or, as Sudek's work was once referred to: "a tangible expression of spiritual reciprocity" (Fovera 12). I want to retain the serenity and beauty of the light in my photographs, while still confronting my relationship to the passing of my family and inviting others to contemplate and consider their own mortality.

Just as these artists have helped to motivate, encourage, and develop my artist interests and perspectives on photographing, the ideas and concepts behind the Japanese tradition of "wabi-sabi" have worked not only in the same fashion, but continue to alter and enlighten my perspective on life every day. My first encounter with the term "wabi-sabi" was during a ceramics class I took over the summer between my Sophomore and Junior year. I had made a pitcher that was entirely out of shape and had been accidentally left out, making it impossible to have a handle. When I realized the grave mistake I had made on a final project for the class the professor introduced the concept of "wabi-sabi" or, as she put it, "happy accidents". It quickly became a term I associated with my passion for chance

occurrences and accidental timing. Examining its effect on one's mental state, it is defined as the "acceptance of the inevitable, appreciation of the cosmic order" (Koren 40). The term occasionally found its way into conversations with friends, as the effects of time and our accidental encounters occurred over the year. It became apart of the same comedy I find from [im]perfect timing, forming comfort around the ideas I had that the accidents along the way may have made life for the best. Although this term never left my mind, it was not until a late night talk with a friend that had just finished her Asian study abroad that the term connected back to what I am working on today. "Ah yes, the impermanence of being and the transience of all things", she said after hearing me proclaim "wabi-sabi" over my hand made, hand glazed, perfect wine pitcher. Her definition brought me out of the realm of Japanese pottery and personal humor and into the world of happy accidents—it is not that an object is "wabi-sabi", becoming perfect through human imperfection, but it is that life, and all its chance happenings, creates our "wabi-sabi" outcomes.

First developed in Japan, the concept of "wabi-sabi" came from the cultural tradition of the tea ceremony. Known by names including sado, chado, and chanoyu, it is believed that had tea schools not continued the tradition of wabi-sabi, it would have disappeared entirely (Koren 32). The term known today is derived from an ancient saying reworked by the first major wabi-sabi- tea masters, Shuko and Rikyu, stemming from an old Zen Maxim, "First [tea] meeting, last [tea] meeting," stating that you must pay attention to everything happening around you at the moment it occurs, as it is constantly changing (Koren 36). Examining the principle to "be here now" brought an understanding of the necessity of stillness – to be observant and appreciative of where I am in the moment it happens – still allowing my obsession for time, but refining the eye to observe the changes as they happen, rather than predicting the future or reflecting in the past. With this in mind, the thoughts of Sudek and

Woodman began to further intertwine, forming connections between the illustrious qualities of light, the illusive nature of time, and the truth formed by trust in wabi-sabi—that “greatness” can exist in the most inconspicuous and overlooked details, one just remain mindful (Koren 40). Each time I have sat in my house examining the texture of the walls as the light changes I have been experiencing the wabi-sabi element that makes these moments of life extraordinary. It is the beauty of “things modest and humble”, things labeled as unconventional focuses, i.e. familiar spaces of habitation and common souvenirs of life (Koren 7). Through my experience in researching wabi-sabi, I have grown more watchful of the simple moments of life—the sounds of nature as it blends with the soft rush of the passing cars and the light as it moves over the chairs and shelves of the study room—these things are no longer lost details, but have become welcomed distractions in the motion of living.

In Leonard Koren’s book titled *Wabi-Sabi: For Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers*, the author describes wabi-sabi, in its purest form, as “delicate traces, this faint evidence, at the borders of nothingness” (42). These “delicate traces” translate in my photographs as the water stains and fingerprints on a glass door, the small cracks of an old photograph, and the shape of the light on the wall of my home as it passes through the trees in the morning light. I aim to highlight the faint evidence that is my connection to the past, lingering in the texture of walls and the dust that rests on each object, all in the hope that it may employ others to do the same: to connect to these small “happy accidents”, to examine their own history, and to enjoy the simple elements that may be shared between the life of another and their own.

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