THE MEMORY YIELDS: B.F.A THESIS EXHIBITION

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“Different modes of memory afford differing perspectives into the past, but the process of recall merges all of them together. And they do after all have something in common. All memory transmutes experience, distills the past rather than simply reflecting it. We recall only a small fraction of what has impinged on us, let alone of all the environment displays. Thus memory sifts again what perception had already sifted, leaving us only fragments of the fragments of what was initially on view.”

-David Lowenthal
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Recollection

My family has an exceptional collection of family photo albums that span from my grandmother’s childhood all the way through my own, containing snapshots that collectively represent three generations of my family. They were not all kept together; rather they would show up sporadically throughout my childhood, each bringing its own peek into a decade of family history. I can’t remember when I saw them for the first time – I just remember looking through the albums and wondering how no one had ever shown them to me before. How had I been a part of this family for my whole life and not seen what they looked like in their home, growing up like I was right now? Where had these pictures – these clues – been hiding? It was the first time that I was really able to understand the fact that people have personal histories, leaving little traces behind them as clues to the lives they once lived.

For a period of my childhood, my Grandma Dot was moving through different stages of Alzheimer’s disease, from moments of confusion and ‘forgetfulness,’ through the heart-breaking progression that causes wonder at the complexity and frailty of human memory. While there were a range of signs that marked the advancement of this disease and its effects on her health and safety, there was one development that had a particular impact on the way that I understood what she was going through: the way she handled and referenced photographs. We lived in the same city as my grandmother when I was growing up and I was incredibly fortunate to have her as an active part of my childhood. As she began showing early signs of the disease, there were a large number of photographs turning up on her coffee table. Each
time we came in, there were new photographs from her childhood or my mother’s. I was never really sure where they had come from, but they usually showed up around events like birthdays or times when you might want to find an old photograph to share with others. Some had names on the back, while others had dates or cities. Around this same time, my grandmother began buying disposable cameras — little plastic Kodak cameras that she could get developed at the grocery store. Each time we came to visit, there would be a few cameras for us to have developed. At first, I was very excited to see what the prints were going to look like: the ability of a snapshot to freeze time seemed magical to me. My mother had the philosophy that photographs belonged to the everyday — that a snapshot of my sister and me at the kitchen table told more about our childhood than a formal picture from a moment that seemed “special” or elevated from the everyday. I always found snapshots to capture images most beautifully and honestly for this reason; in my family, they sought to capture the imperfect beauty of daily life.

The photographs that my grandmother had started taking confused me; I did not pull the prints out of their envelope to look at fun moments she had photographed. They were pictures that I found unexciting: most of them were empty or of things in her house, often featuring her little mongrel terrier named Pepper. I remember thinking: “Why does grandma want pictures of all of this stuff?” Her coffee table, which had been accumulating older snapshots pulled from family albums, now began to fill up with new photographs, the old and new images mixing together to form large stacks. When I picked up a stack to look through them, I would find many snapshots
that I had seen before and a few that I didn’t know existed. It was always a collection that did not give any thought to organization, other than the possible label of “Images from Dorothy’s Life.” As her memory began fading, she liked looking through photographs of old times and accumulating new snapshots from her everyday experiences as a way of remembering with a little help. I had failed to understand the significance of her new photographs when I was younger – they seemed haphazard, insignificant, and frankly like a waste of film. After studying the role that the snapshot plays in our personal histories, I have come to understand the photographs she was referencing (from both the distant and recent past) as tools that used the past to help her understand herself in the present. These seemingly insignificant photos created a personal history, each photograph serving its purpose as a representation for different periods of her life.
Theory

Snapshot photography has long been seen as a way of documenting everyday life, available to the amateur photographer as a means of preserving a personal history. The snapshot extends an invitation to reminisce, requiring an understanding of memory “as an animated and interactive process and… as a collection of inert images and representations” (Bassin 162). This fragmentary and subjective nature of memory makes the snapshot a useful tool for recall:

As objective and fragmentary records, photographs resemble retrieved information, their facticity similar to the details we remember before we have located them within a personal framework such as the details of household furniture we remember as part of our childhood home. (West 176).

Beginning early in the 20th century, Kodak stressed the imperfection of recall, offering photographs as a compensation for this frailty of human memory. Products that facilitated snapshot photography were marketed as ways to document moments worth remembering. Kodak promoted photography as “…a form of memory” after World War I, “…capitalizing on the use of narrative as a means of organizing experience and thus suggesting that a collection of photographs could provide a more effective means of recording or remembering and interpreting events than a consumer’s own fallible memory” (West 16). Kodak referred to this effort to brand the snapshot as a memorial practice as The Story Campaign, promising that the photograph had the ability to displace memory, especially supplanting “memory of absence and separation with memories of familial bliss at a time when the solidity of the family was most severely threatened” after the war (West 17). The campaign urged women to buy “Autographic” cameras, which allowed them to write information on
the negative, “so they could send photos of ‘life back home’ to their absent husbands and sons” (West 16). Thus, the consumer could rely on the photograph, instead of their own memory, “for an accurate preservation of personal histories” (West 172). This creates a complicated relationship between the idea of the consumer and of the “maker;” photographs are products, commodities, and yet they are still revered as magical relics of the past somehow produced by the past itself rather than by us.

Before the snapshot made its way into the homes of consumers, photography was heavily associated with “discourses of death and mortality,” preoccupied with the notion that the photograph mimics death, freezing its subject like a corpse (West 143). The photograph’s nostalgic quality relied on “the relative willingness of the Victorians to indulge in painful memories that sustained their grief… Their relation to memory was thus profoundly different from ours in this sense, reflecting as it does a conception of memory as bound up in the necessity, indeed the desirability, of mourning” (West 141). This form of nostalgia focuses on the act of longing; a sense of mourning for what has passed or been lost. With more and more cameras in the homes of consumers following the growing popularity of Kodak, the object of this sense of longing became focused on life lived rather than life lost. An entirely new image of the American family was being captured as a new demographic of picture-takers emerged, who now had the ability to:

- take photos of almost exclusively happy moments, and then use those photos as a means of reconstructing their histories into narratives of “timeless” pleasure and affection, thus striving to secure a future that will remain untouched by pain as it looks back on what seem to be moments that have somehow escaped sorrow and loss. (West 143).
The amateur photographer was able to selectively record the present, and thus could edit its contents by representing the past through the snapshot. Nostalgia is characterized by both longing for the past and, often, revisiting the past through happy memories. The nostalgia associated with taking and viewing personal photographs “allows for the comfortable belief that we can somehow envelope the past in the present by commodifying, domesticating, beautifying it” (West 142). Thus, the snapshot draws on a different qualifier for nostalgia – it focuses its attention on the happy past. Snapshots allow the viewer to choose from what seems like an endless bank of memories in order to:

use those photos as a means of reconstructing their histories into narratives of ‘timeless’ pleasure and affection, thus striving to secure a future that will remain untouched by pain as it looks back on what seem to be moments that have somehow escaped sorrow and loss” (West 143).

Family archives require curation, and this selective inclusion begins from the moment the snapshot was taken. This decision is dictated by what is considered to be a “good” picture and, by association, a good representation of the moment.

Considering these historical notions of the snapshot as a tool that can be used to supplement memory, I have used images of my family as a way to construct speculative memories of life during a time in which I could have been the person taking the image, a person in the room, or any other hypothetical viewer. In Camera Lucida, French theorist Roland Barthes gives us an understanding of history that becomes pivotal in approaching the concept of recall as an attempt to close the temporal distance between the present and the past: “In regard to many of these photographs, it was History which separated me from them. Is History not simply that
time when we were not born?” (Barthes 64). Photographs, and visual images as a whole, “have the capacity to create, interfere with, and trouble the memories we hold as individuals and as a culture. They lend shape to personal stories and truth claims, and function as technologies of memory, producing both memory and forgetting” (Sturken 178). The snapshots that accumulated in my family archives function as “these technologies of memory”, and yet “while the photograph may be perceived as a container for memory, it is not inhabited by memory so much as it proposes it; it is a mechanism through which the past can be constructed and situated within the present” (Sturken 178). These photographs have become tools from which I, as the artist, have the ability to construct a memory of a family that I never knew. Being the youngest born of all of the grandchildren, the Place family I knew was very different from the one that my mother grew up with. The recall that I experience as I place myself within family photographs is speculative: the information that the photograph provides is paired with my own memories to animate my family members as they were in the past. Barthes walks us through a similar process of rediscovery in viewing a photograph of his mother during her childhood:

I studied the little girl and at last rediscovered my mother. The distinctness of her face, the naïve attitude of her hands, the place she had docilely taken without either showing or hiding herself, and finally her expression, which distinguished her, like Good from Evil, from the hysterical little girl, from the simpering doll who plays at being a grownup – all this constituted the figure of a sovereign innocence… all this had transformed the photographic pose into that untenable paradox which she had nonetheless maintained all her life: the assertion of a gentleness. (Barthes 69).

In this passage, Barthes illustrates how this photograph serves as a tool for rediscovering someone through a snapshot, bringing an understanding of that person
beyond what the photograph contains through the experience of seeing the snapshot.

“For once,” Barthes reveals, “photography gave me a sentiment as certain as remembrance” [emphasis added] (Barthes 70). However, photographs hinder memory in their own way, suggesting that the certainty Barthes speaks of is not without doubt; the photograph is “never, in essence, a memory… but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory” (Barthes 91). We can see this in family albums, which are curated to represent a collective family history and yet can often seem contradictory to our own memories. Despite their collective nature, we are able to derive a sense of the individual through a collection of images, as Barthes has done with his mother: “All the photographs of my mother which I was looking through were a little like so many masks; at the last, suddenly the mask vanished: there remained a soul, ageless but not timeless, since this air was the person I used to see, consubstantial with her face, each day of her long life” (Barthes 109). These photographs become material for the imagination, heavily influenced by the viewer’s own understanding of the past and conclusions about its significance.
**Practice**

The snapshot serves as the basis for my creative explorations as I reimagine the past through the practice of recall. As I navigate my vast collection of family photographs, I find myself often questioning if I remember a moment or if I have constructed a memory from photographs: does my memory actually try to recall this moment, or am I referencing one of the photographs that I have studied? I have found that my mind often animates these snapshots and incorporates them into my memory, blurring the line between memories from experience and recalling an image.

After coming to understand the way that I reimagined moments from the past through photographs, I wanted to explore how to represent this process visually by translating the subjective significance of a snapshot into a more objective prompt that the viewer is able to easily adopt as their own. I chose images from childhood for this body of work for many reasons, including their reference to the past and ability to conjure up nostalgia; however, the largest reason for this choice lies in the memories that we have from childhood in combination with photographs from the same time period. Social conventions can drive the information that we seek out and translate into memory:

Children see and hear what is there; adults see and hear what they are expected to and mainly remember what they think they ought to remember. That we recall little of our earliest years stems less from repression than from the loss of sensate recollections that adults can no longer even imagine experiencing. Adult memory schemata have no room for the smells, tastes, and other vivid sensations, or for the pre-logical and magical thinking of early childhood. (Lowenthal 202).
Memories from childhood are less about what we “ought to remember,” therefore there is less of an emphasis on factual information and subjective experience carries a heavier weight. As children we constantly ask questions and seek out information to learn about our environments, thus leading us to discoveries that seem particularly enlightening. Memories from childhood are much less restricted in their need to be “acceptable,” as Lowenthal has explained: “deeply felt experience fails to register or is forgotten if it is socially inappropriate” (Lowenthal 202). I am more inclined to share details of past experiences if they are from my childhood because I see certain moments from my childhood with distinct clarity, drawing from remembered feelings and emotions rather than facts and conclusions. The child is understood to be, as James Kincaid writes, the “great rememberer, though it is the child being remembered…. Memory is constructed from observation; the powers of observation are never so strong as when we are young” (Kincaid 230).

In addition to the way that our memories function, photographs of childhood perform various ideal functions depending on the context of its contents, as outlined by Nancy Martha West in *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*:

(1) pictured in or around the home, they reinforce the leisured world of the middle- and upper-class family; (2) pictured outdoors or engaged in some form of play, they embody the simplicity, adventure, and serendipity of snapshot photography; (3) depicted alongside adults or in surprisingly melancholic settings, they dramatize the distance between adulthood and childhood… (West 80).

In my editorial process of image selection, these functions are used to render time as fleeting: photographs serve as a testament to how quickly children grow up, with the camera as the only tool that “can keep up with their velocity” (Mavor 4). The
photographs that I have selected draw on these settings and nuances, often featuring children outdoors or in settings that imply leisure. As West illustrates, these situations epitomize the ideal image of childhood as being both leisurely and yet fiercely transitory; snapshots from childhood carry the wonder of the past while emphasizing its temporality. In the introduction to her book *Mother*, photographer Elinor Carucci discusses her drive to photograph her own children:

The need to photograph became even stronger when I realized how painfully apparent the passage of time is in the life of a child. The stages they go through simply fly by. Moments that will never come back have passed before my eyes… I felt compelled to preserve those moments somehow. It is a need every parent shares – whether or not we are professional photographers, we all take pictures of our families. It is as if we’re consoling ourselves, counting our days in this world with our children. (Carucci 7).

Photographing children appears to be a way to slow down the inevitable passing of time, allowing childhood to be understood through “a world that appears artificially still, slowed down by the adult nostalgia that has supposedly determined the taking of the photograph” (West 84). I am interested in this aspect of stopping time in the ways we document and recall the past – snapshots allow us to look longingly upon the past, and my work calls to attention the ability of the individual to transform that document upon viewing it. The past undergoes continual transformation in our attempts to document, revisit, and understand personal history.

The editorial process of image selection always begins with a good study of the family albums that I have come to know well. I have a loose criteria for the images that I choose to paint – they are not the snapshots that are strongest in my memory, but rather images that can be easily read and understood by the viewer. They do not necessarily need to be compositionally dynamic in their own right. Placing a higher
value on content, I tend towards photographs that have a few subjects in them, figures usually presiding over objects or structures. I often find a single detail within the family photograph that begins to carry enormous weight – this detail, while often only occupying a miniscule portion of the image, seems to fill it entirely. Throughout the albums, there are photographs that showcase the power of detail: a Fisher Price car, the pattern on a dress, or the way that sunlight bathes a figure are details that, when isolated, emphasize the poetic beauty of the every day. The paintings can be seen as an attempt to analyze the way we remember that image and the role that such details play in anchoring a moment in our memory. By extension, these paintings are an exercise in understanding the larger notion of how we remember.

Barthes describes two elements that interest him most in photography, elements which have heavily directed the concepts behind my work. The first is the *studium,* or the general function that help us to recognize the photographer’s intentions, which often could be understood as “the order of *liking,* not of *loving*” an image (Barthes 27). The second element, the one that my research considers, is recognizing and responding to the *punctum;* the “sting, speck, cut, little hole – and also a cast of the dice. A photograph’s punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (Barthes 27). The punctum is not captured by the photographer; rather, it is produced through viewing the photograph, and recognizing it depends on the viewer. The punctum is most often a detail, but “while remaining a ‘detail,’ it fills the whole picture” (Barthes 45). The painting is built from the punctum that I take from the snapshot (one of any number; the punctum speaks to the
individual), but this detail that “pricks” me is transformed through both my intervention and simply by being remembered: “in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes” (Barthes 53). The detail that spoke to me was not what I saw when I was looking at the photograph, but rather what I remembered when I looked away. As I leaf through the family albums looking for photographs to work with, I look for these accidental moments of poignancy – the details that “prick” me cannot be deliberate choices by the photographer. Even within the information that I include in the painting, the detail that speaks to my viewer varies. The punctum that speaks to me is often the detail that I choose to include in the composition, but it carries the figure along with it.

Figure 3

The most important factors in deciding what information to include were the suggestion of space and composition. The portions of the photograph that “pricked” me always beg for space, therefore it is my role as the artist to choose what information to include or remove. I wanted the paintings to hint or suggest a memory, inviting speculation from the viewer by including select details:

An element of secrecy or discretion adds to our personal involvement with an object, requiring extra investment and attention. As a verb, ‘intimate’ means to make known indirectly, to hint or suggest, rather than fully reveal. Intimate objects with private parts speak to us in an insinuating, come-hither tone,
instead of declaring themselves outright. Coyly introverted forms, they are seductive in their discretion. (Ramljak 188).

Excluding much of the snapshot’s information (including the entirety of its setting) gives it a sense of secrecy, revisiting the idea that information is “missing.” Thus, the viewer adds in their own information from memory and supposition. In one painting (Fig. 2), we see this with the little girl looking outward. I had originally included another figure in my drawings, but as I started painting the girl she seemed to be looking out towards an expansive horizon. The other figure I had included grounded her and removing it opened up the negative space, creating a seemingly limitless vista. It was clear that the slight folds in her dress and her active gaze towards something unknown gave enough information to imply a setting. In another painting (Fig. 3), I placed the figures on a more panoramic panel, suggesting a scene or landscape behind them. The scale of the figures against the panoramic field of color excludes any information to suggest a limit to that horizon. The reference to the panorama combined with the natural light in this painting, as in many of the paintings in this body of work, gives a strong sense of an outdoor setting. The natural light source creates areas of high contrast, defining shapes on a miniature scale by casting dark shadows that hide many of the finer details.
Figure 2

Study for Figure 2
Much of the process that has been used in producing this body of work grows out of photographic study, and yet we are discussing a series of paintings. While the photograph serves as the basis for these paintings, it acts in the same way that your memory might as it constructs a sense of documented time while leaving a margin of subjectivity. Painting requires a manual mark: leaving pigment as a memory of the painterly gesture. It constructs the image piece by piece into a recognizable image. By painting the image, I am transforming the moment pictured – much like the photograph did, and even memory before it. Recall blurs out the details, carries a sense of emotion, and usually fixates on a particular detail: this body of work emphasizes this subjective experience of recall that both memory and photography exist within. This experience is translated into painting through the selective inclusion of detail. Memories from childhood can seem so vibrant, but when one really tries to remember the details we find that our memory is highly discerning. Thus, vibrancy and selective simplicity became a vital combination behind this body of work, acting as links between the process of painting and the process of remembering. Giving the painting a sense of atmosphere becomes crucial to the viewing experience; therefore the details that I include often give clues for establishing a setting. Composition and scale are used as strategies for establishing a sense of place – if the subject is wearing a bathing suit, the viewer will assume they are by water. “Remembered places tend to converge unless highly distinctive;” Lowenthal writes, “a score of successive scenes may confl ate to one or two recalled with the generic features of them all” (Lowenthal 208). The viewer’s own memories have been used to re-imagine this moment, either by
invoking a similar memory or by causing them to construct a familiar “water” setting in which they can situate the subject. The paintings draw on conventions associated with the snapshot, allowing the viewer to situate the figures within their own imagined settings. Simply and eloquently, “much of the past is yet to become visible. But what is potentially visible is omnipresent” (Lowenthal 239). By reimagining the past, the viewer is able to experience recollection while accepting the inability to excavate it entirely. Barthes applies this notion to photographs and their inability to be “lifelike;” he does not believe in their ability to reproduce the past as it was but rather in the ability of the photograph to animate and be animated by the viewer. This animation process calls for an imaginative reconstruction of a moment from the past: “The photograph itself is in no way animated…but it animates me: this is what creates every adventure” (Barthes 20). In this case, their poignancy lies in their ability to engage the viewer in an imaginative process. In one painting (Fig. 4), recognizing the conventions of perspective enables the viewer to imagine the figures walking towards a horizon. It is my goal for the
viewer’s own memories to act as tools for understanding the painting, but with minimal conscious aim or effort.

Through the combination of isolated details and high contrast, the figures become performers on a miniature stage. I reduced the background to a single, hazy color chosen from the scanned snapshots using Adobe Photoshop’s eyedropper tool. I chose a color that remained faithful to the aura of the snapshot, and then emphasized its vibrancy through a layered application technique. If the color that I felt spoke to the image was not a vibrant color itself, I was still able to preserve that sense of luminosity and depth through the method of application. Each painting began on an aluminum composite panel, its smooth surface allowing for smooth blending of the background and crisp detail within the figure. I mixed a series of glazes, which contained Liquin (a gel medium) and oil paint, the ratio depending on the translucency that I needed. I alternated between layers of pigmented glaze and a layer of clear glaze until I had reached the desired background translucency. I then painted the figures by layering pigmented glazes. Glazing is a technique that lends itself well to creating realistic work because it tends to illuminate the figure: layering different tones creates bright highlights, vibrant mid tones, and rich darks that work together to create a photo-realistic rendering. After the glazes were complete and all figures were fully rendered, a clear isolation layer was applied to protect the surface and give the painting a high-gloss aesthetic.

Scale has been used as another way of exploring the connection we feel to these poignant moments in our lives. There is already a nostalgia created by the
snapshot at its printed size, thus keeping the figures at a miniature scale emphasizes the association between the printed snapshot and the past. While we associate snapshot images with this smaller scale, the smallness of a painting is more unconventional. For this particular body of work, the sense of monumentality in the miniature speaks to the value that we place on our memories, reflecting the ability of a single image to become representative of a grander moment, understanding, or sense of human experience.

Through their size, these paintings lend themselves to an intimate reading, encouraging the viewer to have their own experience with the work through their ability to manipulate what the image might have contained. “Smallness,” Ramljak contends, “can have immense implications. This inversion of scale values parallels the overturning of values regarding the public and private sphere” (Ramljak 190). The experience is meant to remain private: “when we use privacy to make temporary space for the individual…we make possible a place for various exquisite aspects of humanness” (Smith 236). In this body of work, scale dictates the experience that the viewer shares with a painting: “like peering into a peephole, we must gather ourselves around a point and focus with intent; we must become fixated. Most diminutive things have the power to captivate us in this way” (Ramljak 191). The viewer finds himself or herself having a personal moment with the painting as he or she fixates on a detail to understand the painting more fully. Immersion becomes vital here; small works “have the ability to immerse us in their complexity, leading to a slowing of time and thickening of experience. Many have noted how, through intense concentration, the
miniscule can seem monumental, how we can come to see the world in a grain of sand” (Ramljak 191). The figure in the painting is indistinguishable from afar, but as the viewer moves towards the piece there is a sense of reward in coming to see more and more detail; and yet, you can come so close to the painting only to feel that you’ve stopped short.

Viewing the work is its own intimate encounter. It pulls the viewer in and calls upon personal memories: a vista they might have seen, a summer vacation as a child, or what the sun looks like on someone’s back during summer. This invitation to revisit the past and examine our memories closely and intimately rarely extends itself:

the opportunities for intimate, personal encounters are becoming rarer as mediated experience supplants direct contact and public and private realms increasingly converge. The function of objects at the turn of the millennium should be assessed against the backdrop of this growing depersonalization and blur of modern life. (Ramljak 186).

These paintings are personal not in their relationship to a specific memory of mine, but in their relationship with each individual viewer as they call attention to the sharp, poignant moments that peek out from the static of everyday life. The snapshot reference freezes time, allowing for more thoughtful observation of a singular moment. In an interview with Suzanne Ramljak, critic Donald Kuspit “observes that there is very little in modern society, apart from art, that encourages us to become subjective. Among the various forms of art, intimate objects have a distinct advantage in cultivating our subjectivity and in aiding the transition back to ourselves” (Ramljak 187). I found that the scale received a physical response from my viewer that mirrors both physical and emotional intimacy:
In addition to taking more time and concentration, diminished scale also demands an adjustment of the viewer’s stance vis-à-vis an object. To be seen properly, small objects require us to get close, and this closeness is central to the intimate experience. Just as a whisper makes us draw nearer to decipher the words, so too intimate objects demand close proximity before divulging themselves (Ramljak 191).

The miniature activates the space around it, drawing the viewer closer in a way that includes the approach as part of the viewing experience. To understand the experience that this work evokes, one must consider the relationship that the painting shares with the space surrounding it.

I propose that the snapshot serves as material for reenactment, requiring imagination and improvisation to reperform the moment pictured while giving the viewer the freedom to establish a setting or understanding of purpose for the figure.

The hazy color that radiates around the figures serves as the stage upon which they perform. The high-contrast of the sun-soaked images acts much like a spotlight would, throwing shadows that conceal the faces of the figures in many of the paintings. Those that aren’t in shadow are usually turned away from the viewer, concealing any distinguishing features that might give you a sense of who they are. For my purposes, the figure acts more effectively as an anonymous “child” than it would as a portrait of my sister. By reducing the image down to figures and a few details to denote setting, I
am able to create a “blind field” through which we are able to see the “nature” of the portrait: it establishes “a whole life external to [the] portrait” (Barthes 57). The blind field that Barthes refers to includes the unseen world that exists outside of the frame, which forms the content within the image. Applying this notion of the blind field to these paintings, the “child figure” does not speak to an individual but rather implies a sense of childhood and the past, giving the figure a life beyond the painting. As was the case with the setting, I want my viewer to construct an identity for this figure – “the persons who figure there are certainly constituted as persons, but only because of their resemblance to human beings, without any special intentionality. They drift between the shores of perception, between sign and image, without ever approaching either” (Barthes 19). These paintings balance content and emptiness to set a stage for reenactment, using photographic reference to act as an animator of memory. The figures, once animated by the viewer, carry out the inevitably changed yet still poignant moment that is the subject of speculative recall.

I see these paintings as a collection of memories, stories that are a little hazy on the details and open to interpretation. Thus, when people talked to me about my work, they would reference the painting with descriptions such as “the one with the kids on the beach.” I always loved discovering the associations that people have made. The original snapshot was at a community pool, but other settings that I heard included the other typical bodies of water one associates with childhood such as the beach or a lake. “The kids at the beach” was the most common description I was given, but I always felt a little funny referring to it by that when speaking about the
painting; I thought of it as “the kids at the pool” but I didn’t want to correct anyone. Rather, I referred to it as they had and recognized that we were talking about the painting that they see, not the one I see.

These paintings open themselves up to transformation by their viewer, and require very personal participation. In *The Abuse of Beauty*, Arthur C. Danto’s reflects upon Joachim Wtewael’s *The Wedding of Peleus and Thetis* (1610), trying to discern its meaning: “The meaning, if I have it right, is philosophical, and internally related to its viewers. It put their lives in perspective. It tells them what, really, they already know” (Danto 142). It is my aim that the subjective qualities of my work lend it towards this interpretation of meaning, calling on the viewer’s experience to evoke a personal reaction and viewing experience. The purpose is not to question the past but to revisit it; to reimagine a moment in an attempt to experience the details of a memory that “prick” us.
Exhibition

After working through the conceptual and technical aspects, I was faced with the question of how the work should be experienced through a series of decisions that ranged from the title of the exhibition to considerations of installation. I chose to title the exhibition *The Memory Yields* for its twofold meaning. In *The Past is a Foreign Country*, David Lowenthal discusses our tendency to measure the truth against our recollections rather than against the past itself, quoting Nietzsche: “‘I did that’, says my memory. ‘I could not have done that,’ says my pride and remains inexorable.”
Eventually the memory yields” (Lowenthal 200). In this case, the word *yields* acts as a verb, implying an active conflict between the past and our interpretation of it in which the “truth” of the memory yields to our subjective perceptions of reality. Experience comes from the senses: what we see, what we hear, and what we feel are all “perceptions that memory simplifies and composes. Above all, memory transforms the experienced past into what we later think it should have been, eliminating undesired scenes and making favoured ones suitable” (Lowenthal 206). The memory yields to our constructed understanding, sometimes with the imagined truth revealing more about the past than what a more “factual” history provides. The second meaning comes with a different reading of *yields* as a noun that refers to products or objects produced by a process of reenactment or reimagining. These paintings are the *yields* of an exploration into the theory and practice behind memory. They have the ability to suggest the sensation of memory, referencing the experience of recalling details from the past, and analyzing the ways in which we use tools to do this.

As one selects work to include in the exhibition and makes choices about installation, the entire space of the gallery becomes a component in how the work is experienced. As mentioned earlier, the scale of these miniature paintings was meant to engage the viewer during their approach to the piece. The exhibition space in Trisolini Gallery is large in relationship to the scale of the paintings, so I decided to really draw out that distance to intensify the feeling of approach by focusing light on the back end of the gallery, farthest from the entrance. Rather than lighting the paintings alone, I decided to illuminate the entire back end of the space and lessen the intensity of the
lighting as it moved toward the entrance, creating a warm glow that invites the viewer to move through the space as they attempt to navigate that distance. I wanted to create a physical space that directed the viewer to the paintings. However, this approach was easily lost when the paintings were placed in too close proximity to one another. To address this, I surrounded each of the six paintings with generous white space, ensuring that each painting would be approached rather than just moved past. The miniature scale of the work is able to activate the space around it, using emptiness as a tool for closing in on the content in the painting. The empty space of the white walls

The Memory Yields, Installation View
closes in on the small rectangle of color that defines the painting; the empty space within the painting envelops the figure. The vacancy of these spaces activates the perceptive content. This concept carried over into the design of the promotional materials for the exhibition, using white space as a compliment to the nature of the work. The challenge of the exhibition lies in situating these miniscule paintings in a way that occupies such a vast, seemingly empty space.

These paintings prompt questions about how we understand the past and how we perceive the present; by doing this they are able to engage the viewer on a personal level, acting as tools that direct experience in a way that helps us “to make the transition back to the interior reality he or she tends to forget in his or her dealings with exterior reality” (Ramljak 187). I feel that the digital realm that we seem to have immersed ourselves within tends to isolate people from the physicality of relationships, experiences, and even direct contact with oneself. Intimate objects give us a feeling of connection – to both oneself and the past. This connection “with objects and with other people is not only necessary for individual growth, it is also the source of our greatest pleasures. For if God is in the details, as is oft stated, then heaven must reside within intimate encounters” (Ramljak 194). Sociologist Peter Berger believes that the fallibility of our memories contributes to a disconnect with the self: “Rather we stumble like drunkards over the sprawling canvas of our self-conception, throwing a little paint here, erasing some lines there, never really stopping to obtain a view of the likeness we have produced” (Berger 72). The interaction between the viewer and the painting is meant to examine the ways in which we recall our personal histories. It
asks us to slow down, taking the time to navigate physical distance in order to experience intimate contact with the art object – an experience that provides an intimate link between the individual and the past.

Figure 2 The Memory Yields, Installation View
Images
Fig. 1, 2013
Oil on Aluminum
5.5” x 3.5”
Fig. 2, 2013
Oil on Aluminum
4.5” x 8
Fig. 3, 2013
Oil on Aluminum
2” x 8.5”
Fig. 4, 2013
Oil on Aluminum
4.5” x 6”
Fig. 5, 2013
Oil on Aluminum
3” x 1.75”
Fig. 6, 2013
Oil on Aluminum
4” x 7”
Works Consulted


