

I DON'T REMEMBER

BY

KARRI A DIEKEN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY  
Department of Fine Arts

MAY 2010

To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the thesis of Karri A Dieken find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

---

Chair Chris Watts

---

Kevin Haas

---

Nik Meisel

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to dedicate *I Don't Remember* to my father, Kenny Dieken and my grandmother, Cora Fugier. Without their love and support through out my career as an artist and student, this wouldn't have been possible. I would also like to acknowledge all the professors, visiting artist, and museum staff who have guided and mentored me throughout my academic experience.

# I DON'T REMEMBER

Abstract

by Karri A Dieken, MFA  
Washington State University  
May 2010

Chair: Christopher Watts

This thesis contains true stories of life experiences. Many of the objects come from disparate aesthetic time periods, representing a memory of a reconstructed event that may or may not have been experienced. When possible, the actual objects have been replaced by surrogate objects in hopes of altering their true identity. Warning: The juxtaposition of these objects may elicit memories of your own.

My thesis is a series of installations consisting of simulacrum domestic interiors. All of these pieces come from memories however factual and may cultivate similar responses from the viewer, although these will not be the same. Each installation reflects upon memory and a sense of nostalgia through a narrative and time, while still relating the work to contemporary culture and domestic space. I am in search for a common place between contemporary culture and the nostalgia for, or perceived innocence of the past through technology. Through these processes I am concerned with exploring the social relations and familiarity in domestic environments and past objects. The set or place I am creating is meant to be a place the viewer can relate to more as an illustration or narrative. The work addresses common issues of placement, self-awareness, use and loss of, emptiness and uncertainty. Along with the cultural and generation disconnect between objects we no longer use through the evolution of technology.

My research question's what comprises a domestic space, the home, and the objects with it as well as the role of the family. Why is there a desire to attain old objects and hold onto a past that may or may not be our own? How does a room hold on to a memory? What is the disconnect between what once was and our moving forward?

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                      |     |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....               | iii |
| ABSTRACT.....                        | iv  |
| SECTIONS                             |     |
| I. INTRODUCTION .....                | 1   |
| II. CLOTHING .....                   | 2   |
| III. WALLPAPER.....                  | 3   |
| IV. APPENDIX.....                    | 5   |
| IMAGE 1: <i>KEEP IT CLEAN</i> .....  | 5   |
| IMAGE 2: <i>COUNTING SHEEP</i> ..... | 6   |
| IMAGE 3: <i>CLIPPINGS</i> .....      | 7   |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY.....                    | 8   |

## I DON'T REMEMBER

### INTRODUCTION:

The majority of my designs begin as hand drawn images which are then altered and refined on the computer and finally manufactured according to my instructions. However, each work uniquely subverts the premise of industrial production. The handmade mark and my attention to craft add to the unique quality of the work. With each installation invite the machine to be my collaborator, serving as fabricator, designer and producer of a percentage of the finished product. This choice of collaboration is enhanced by my involvement as the quilter, printmaker, and wood worker, activities long associated with manual labor. Something I found interesting is how sewing or other activities requiring the craftsman's skill is commonly assessed according to the regularity the final stitch or turn of the wood work. Great care is invested in maintaining an even stitch or the slight turn of the carving tool, and the tonal range achieved when printing a screen. As a crafts person I strive to be as precise as a machine, while the machines are sometimes manipulated to be flawed like the individual person.

I have been examining how both handmade and mass produced objects can effect our perceptions of gender and the body. It has been a way for me to analyze where gender stereotypes originate and how gender roles change the physical interpretation of the body. Looking at artist like Rosemarie Trockel, Robert Gober, and Mai-Thu Perret. Along with other artist working with wallpaper and the domestic space. I am also looking at the way art can inform our perception of the female body and identity within the home, place and domestic objects. This happens specifically with the 50's shirt dress, apron and appliance cozies in *Keep It Clean*, decorative plates, footstools and quilts in *Counting Sheep*, and silhouette portraits, a high back chair and a vintage television in *Clippings*.

Each installation depicts a specific gender quality due to the color choice and objects within the space. Referring to previous gender stereotypes where women have been identified with domestic objects, methods of work, and the physical space related to the interior home. While men have been identified with social standings, methods of work, strength and power outside the home. Fabrics and knitting traditional feminine connotations, and I explore systems such as these that privilege the rational over the emotional that may be used to marginalize women. The garments in *Keep It Clean* and *Calling All Dancers* become a form of packaging, My use of traditionally female materials (fabric), methods (sewing), and forms (clothing). manipulate the traditionally handcrafted medium of sewing to challenge received notions about what is typically designated “women’s work,” and women as homemaker's and objects.

## CLOTHING

The 1950’s “Dress” in my installation *Keep It Clean*, is meant to resemble a circuit board pattern, and the role of the woman in the house-hold. The “Dress” is accompanied by a white outlet pattern on a white apron, and is presented cleanly floating above a white rug printed with extension cords in white, placed in front of the wall, and accompanied by the cleaning items of a cozy covered broom and dustpan.

Looking back at the male and female gender roles, women have been identified with domestic objects, methods of work, and the physical space related to the interior home, and men have been identified with social standings, methods of work, strength and power outside the home. Before the 1920’s women were the primary manufacturers of their families clothing, using hand sewing and mending. As technology advanced with the production of the household sewing machine, the woman’s role in the household changed as she was able to create a more efficient running home. Primarily women used sewing as a way to mend, repair, and fashion articles of

clothing to cover the body. With the new sewing machine, production of clothing became streamlined for the household and the body. This changed the sewing machine's value from a desired and owned object by the upper class, to a devalued and cheaply sold object used among all social classes.<sup>1</sup> Eventually the sewing machine was identified only with people who could not afford to buy mass produced clothing.<sup>2</sup> This modified the norms and social standards of the function of clothing for both men and women. This also changed how clothing distinguished the social classes and genders, and that is was no longer used for function and protection. Clothing was elevated to an art form that addressed a separate aspect of gender stereotypes.

## WALLPAPER

*In Land Of Crystal*, in what she calls an old-fashioned museum presentation, Mai-Thu Perret examines the role and the function of her fiction in relation to the objects she makes and the museum environment in which they are displayed.

“What ever you have in your room think first of the walls for they are that which makes our house and home, and if you do not make some sacrifices in their favor you will find your chambers have a kind of makeshift, lodging-house look about them.....” William Morris.

The pattern designed for the wallpaper is the main theme for the installation narrative. The wallpaper alludes to the story and connects the other objects through theme and color within the space. Traditionally wallpaper is used for covering a wall, and historically could tell viewers and visitors if the household was successful financially. For me the wallpaper is a recorder keeper for all my memories. It is the one thing in a room with a memory, having eyes to see and experience everything happening within the home. Each room in my installations have a different wallpaper as record keeper of the space and the ability to change the energy and emotion within the room. Wallpaper has generally been thought of as background rather than foreground, and within my installations the placement is within the background. However, the

---

<sup>1</sup> Marguerite Connolly, . *The Disappearance of the Domestic Sewing Machine, 1880-1925*. Winterthur Portfolio, Vol 34, No. 1 (Spring, 1999) 40.

<sup>2</sup> Marguerite Connolly. *The Disappearance of the Domestic Sewing Machine, 1880-1925*. Winterthur Portfolio, Vol 34, No. 1 (Spring, 1999) 34.



importance and narrative within the wallpaper is the key to the space as a whole. Traditionally, its role in the overall decorative scheme is a vital one, and the choice of wallpaper affects the mood and style of a room, influence on other furnishings, function of the space, and other identifying factors of the inhabitants<sup>3</sup>.

Within my installations I attempt to remove the stigma wallpaper has long been considered as the poor relation of the decorative arts: fragile, ephemeral, easy to replace, and often insignificant in marking history.<sup>4</sup> Recently wallpapers have once again become more mainstream and a key component in decoration of the home and interior space as well as an art form. The common perception is that many wallpapers are produced in huge quantities and are relatively undistinguished, repetitive in design and color, and are cheap. At worst they are considered a DIY coverup and a mindless utilitarian decoration<sup>5</sup>.

Wallpaper however, possess an imitative characteristic, pretending to be something its not, be it tapestry, velvet, linen, wood, masonry or mural. For much of history wallpaper at first glance appears to be something other than merely printed paper and a cheaper substitute for a more costly materials<sup>6</sup>. Wallpaper has many functions as an object that is hiding and or covering something unsightly, with a mild attachment to the past, and easily removed and replaced. Meanwhile, holding a hint of deception and illusion, and with the rejection of tradition and integrity.

The virtues of good wallpaper lie in its variety and its ability to conjure up different moods in a room. “Clothing the walls with the richness and warmth, while at the same time creating an atmosphere inspired by the past historically and metaphorically<sup>7</sup>. This clothing mimics the actual clothing for the home, woman, and the furniture within the space. With each space I hope to accentuate the handmade mark and my attention to craft and quality of the work.

---

<sup>3</sup> Eleanor Thompson. *The American Home, Material Culture, Domestic Space, and Family Life*. New England Press. 1998. 135-155.

<sup>4</sup> Eleanor Thompson. *The American Home, Material Culture, Domestic Space, and Family Life*. New England Press. 1998. Introduction.

<sup>5</sup> Clark, Jane Gordon. *Wallpaper in Decoration*, Francis Lincoln Limited, 1991-2001. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Eleanor Thompson. *The American Home, Material Culture, Domestic Space, and Family Life*. New England Press. Introduction.

<sup>7</sup> Clark, Jane Gordon. *Wallpaper in Decoration*, Francis Lincoln Limited, 1991-2001. 9-15.



Image 1: *Keep It Clean*





Image 2: *Counting Sheep*





Image 3: *Clippings*

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Boyd, Karen Keifer, "A Pedagogy to Expose and Critique Gendered Cultural Stereotypes Embedded in Art Interpretations," *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 44 (Summer 2003): 315-334.
- Clark, Jane Gordon. *Wallpaper in Decoration*, Francis Lincoln Limited, 1991-2001. Intro, 6-20.
- Connolly, Marguerite. *The Disappearance of the Domestic Sewing Machine, 1880-1925*. Winterthur Portfolio, Vol 34, No. 1 (Spring, 1999) 31-48.
- Connor, Maureen. Untitled. *Fashion and Fetishism: A social History of the Corset, Tight-Lacing and other forms of body sculpture in the West* by David Kunzle. *Art Journal*, Vol 42, No. 2, Words and word works (summer 1982) 165-171
- Felshin, Nina. *Empty Dress : Clothing as a Surrogate in Recent Art*, Independent Curators Incorporated, New York. 1993.
- Goldstein, Ann, and Rorimer, Anne. *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*. (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 13-15, 17-39, 229-245.
- Gordon, Beverly, "Woman's Domestic Body: The Conceptual Conflation of Women and Interiors in the Industrial Age," *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 31, No. 4, *Gendered Spaces and Aesthetics* (Winter 1996): 281-301.
- Jones, Amelia, Geoffrey Batchen, Ken Gonzales-Day, Peggy Phelan, Christine Ross, Guillermo Gomez-Pena, Roberto Sifuentes, and Matthew Finch. 2001. *The Body and Technology*. *Art Journal* (New York. 1960). 60 (1):20-39.
- Jones, Caroline. *Painting Machines: Industrial Image and Process in Contemporary Art*. (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press. 1997). *Art Forum*. 214.
- Meskimmon, Marsha. *Women Marking art: history, subjectivity, aesthetics*. (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 1-16, 72-90, 110-134, 151-167.
- Thompson, Eleanor. *The American Home, Material Culture, Domestic Space, and Family Life*. New England Press. 1998. 135-190.
- Weintraub, Linda. *Art on the Edge and Over: searching for art's meaning in contemporary society, 1970's-1990's*. ed. Arthur Danto; Thomas McEvelley. (Litchfield, CT: Art Insights, Inc., Publishers, 1996), 10-16, 32-38, 140-144, 154-158. 8