THE PLACE OF LONGING

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THE PLACE OF LONGING

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THE PLACE OF LONGING, ARTIST STATEMENT

My current work is a series of photographic collages combined with paper silhouettes based on the imagery and natural landscape from my homeland Taiwan. I have lived away from home for nine years and always feel a sense of being temporary, the process of making these work gives me the sense of a place.

The photographs function as concrete evidence of place, my memory and emotions associated with home. The silhouettes are sourced from photographs taken in Taiwan. I have chosen to cut the silhouettes out of paper because of the temporary nature of paper and the nostalgic feeling that paper evokes. I selected the Betel palm tree and the pineapple because of the shape and also because they represent elements of Taiwan. Densely layering the paper silhouettes to create volumetric forms integrated into the landscape is meant to suggest my great longing for home.
INTRODUCTION

I am interested in the expression of emotion through line, shape, space and to the simple concept of pattern, layering and visual movement. Using individual elements in paper to create new space and pattern of wall pieces. I am attracted to the idea of the connection between memory and longing, in addition to emotions associated with a place.

Photographs are the most common way people record and capture a moment in life. The photograph functions as the evidence of a place and memory. For me, memories usually fade over time becoming fragments, moreover, they persist in the method of longing. A silhouette is the image of an object represented as a solid shape of a single color, it portrays the characteristic of an object becomes vague, unclear in fragile memory. My approach is to combine my interests of memory and longing by using two types of visual media, photograph and silhouette.

BACKGROUND

I grew up in Taipei, Taiwan and I came to the United States to pursue my undergraduate studies at Iowa State University in 2005. I have been living in the United States for nine years, being a foreigner in the United States not only makes me aware of my own cultural background but also encourages me to experience diversity. I usually travel back to Taiwan, once a year, however, I still feel like a visitor in both places. The sense of being temporary in both places makes me feel lost, as well as influences my approach while I am making. I start to seek the connections between two places, using the techniques of jewelry and metals to make work that suggest my cultural identity and cross-cultural experiences.
The homeland is important to me because it has been the most familiar place for me since I was born, the language, people, and culture. Living away from home not only makes me independent but also arises my great longing for home. Thus my longing to homeland has become a key inspiration in my work.

MATERIAL AND PROCESS

WHY?

After taking an Introduction to Papermaking and Book Arts course as a studio elective during the Spring Semester of 2012, personal interest in paper arts began to arise. I made a paper necklace in handmade abaca paper for the class assignment, and I was intrigued by the lightness, weight and qualities of paper jewelry. However, I did not make a decision to start using paper as my material until I had thirty hour exam. During the exam, my committee challenged my understanding of material choice and the way I work. After the exam, I released myself from metals and started a new challenge in paper.

THE STUDY OF CONNECTION

The first thing I noticed with working in paper was I actually work faster and more freely. I am fascinated by the temporary nature of paper and the nostalgic feeling that paper evokes. The idea was to trace the shapes from the photographs I have taken in Taiwan when I was home for the summer. Most of the photographs I took in Taiwan were food, street views, architecture, and store displays. I selected the shapes out of the photographs as a starting point to collect visual vocabulary in my work. I did not pay much attention when I first traced the shapes from the photographs, but my goal was to get as many shapes as possible out of the photographs. I traced the outline of street signs,
streetlights, roof, and apartments from street view; the trees, flowers, mountain, and
fences from picture of landscape; chopsticks, seafood, bowl, and teapot from the picture
of table display. Sometimes I traced outside of the exact outline of the object on the
photograph combining more than one object into a shape. Sometimes I joined more than
two shapes together to be a single shape. Tracing the shapes taught me to look more
closely at the detail in the photographs. It was easy for me to recognize everything on the
photographs since Taiwan has been my familiar place, however, it was hard for me to see
things in the photographs as my first time see them. Thus the photographs became the
way to obtain the fact, I created new information by tracing the shapes out of the
photographs.

After I acquired a new mass of information on tracing paper, I began to carefully
select the shapes when I created the sketches. Taking out of the shapes from my
homeland photographs and creating them into a new body of work become the metaphor
of my memory being re-constructed in another method and place. I drew the shapes on
paper, hand cut each shape out of paper, colored and constructed them into a new body of
work. This process of making allowed me to work in step-by-step, which I found was the
most effective system for me to work. As I hand cut each shape out of paper, I left the
blank of shape on paper, these results elevated my interest in the practice of piercing
paper and reconstructing shapes especially in developing the connections between these
two processes. My interest in the hand cutting is the process of cutting gives me the sense
of a place. When I sat on my table, the tool and the material were on my hand to reach, I
created myself a real place to work. When I was hand cutting, I shut down myself out of
the world so I could only focus on my cutting. In addition to the cut I made on paper is
important to me because it became the evidence that suggest the path I come from and head to. Figure 1 depicts the process of removing the shapes from one place and rearranging them in another place.

Thus began the research and development on connecting the paper. Tacky glue, pins, staple, thread, tape, wooden clips, metal wires and felt were among the materials that were used in experimenting. Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4 and Figure 5, I was using the same shapes in different colors in order to create the repetition and layer in form. In Figure 6, I curled the paper and used three different shapes to create the form. These results responded to my interest in the simple concept of layering and visual movement. However, the idea of connecting the form to original piercing piece did not work as planned. At this point, the need of as many shapes in paper became necessary in order to create the repetition and layer. Hand cutting is an extremely time-consuming process especially since I was cutting out a lot of shapes in different sizes, thus I decided to laser cut. Laser cutting is a technology that uses a laser to cut materials and leaves an edge with a high-quality surface finish. The laser cutter I used is Epilog Legend 36EXT. The advantage of using laser cutting was saving time and also getting a large amount of shapes in a short time.

I made many discoveries while studying connections. The thread became my most visually interesting material when combined with paper because it is flexible and does not change the quality of paper. Figure 7 is the experimentation of using embroidery to connect the shape to its original piercing. Figure 8 is another example of embroidery on paper. The negative spaces pierced out on the top part of the composition, and long threads connect the negative and positive spaces. However, the composition felt too
separated from the top and the bottom, and a lot of threads appeared too random. In Figure 9, I tried to make the negative spaces and positive spaces placed closer to each other, using one thread to move around the whole composition. In this sketch, the composition looks organized and the thread directs the movement going around the negative spaces and positive spaces.

Besides the connection of thread, I also experimented with paper silhouettes. Since I was using a lot of abstract shapes, paper silhouettes allowed me to use concrete shapes to create the sketches. In Figure 11, betel palm tree silhouettes created, to give a vision of place. The large amount of betel palm tree silhouettes created into a landscape in Figure 12, this sketch contained both positive and negative spaces. I paid more attention to the composition while I was constructing each paper silhouette. At this point, I became intrigued with the landscape composition, extreme layering and crazy repetition. Another example of betel palm tree silhouettes in Figure 14, using black paper silhouettes to create a heart form against on a white background paper. With densely layering and the quality of paper, the heart form became a pop-up on the surface of paper. Another composition experimented in Figure 15, applying the tree silhouettes upside down with different colors to create a long composition. The motivation for this study was to investigate process, material and composition.

PAPER SILHOUETTES AND PHOTOGRAPHS

I began a second investigation with the paper by combining the paper with photographs. The photographs are the images I took in Taiwan while visiting my family. I collected the images most of the time during the family trip and friends gathering. The
process of returning home to collect images makes me stand on the view of a visitor to take the pictures in Taiwan, therefore, the images are ranging from the food, the street view, the architectures, and the landscape. All of the subjects in photographs are the things I have been missing while I live in the United States.

I was interested in disrupting the photograph with paper silhouettes integrated into photographs. The combination of the paper silhouettes and landscapes formed a volumetric surface that evokes a longing for a place. In Figure 16, the negative spaces of betel palm trees direct the composition from the top of the photograph to thin stalks and express heavy layering of betel palm tree silhouettes. Arranging the tree silhouettes upside down in grey color palette to create a mood of sadness in combination with the photograph. At this point, I became more careful of selecting the color palette of paper silhouettes to enhance emotional impression in my work. The orderly layering became my interest of working in paper silhouettes, this can be seen in Figure 17.

I am also interested in using photographs as experience spaces, adding conceptual response to the photographs. Figure 18 was the photograph I took at the beach in Taiwan during a summer afternoon. The weather was extremely hot and humid. Everything was like emitting hot air. I include the feeling of hotness by adding radiant red paper silhouettes with the photograph. In Figure 19, I cut out the shape of the house from the photograph instead of postcard size of it. The house was my grandmother's house in Taiwan. With an opened door of the house, the hearts are coming out of house is a metaphor of my longing as well as using the
momentum of the paper to invite the viewer in. In figure 20, I consider where the paper silhouettes come from the photographs; I have some of the ladders come from the mountain and some of them come from the fence. The ladders are also the metaphor of connecting to a place.

In Figure 21, I have the paper silhouettes integrated into the composition of the photograph instead of interrupting it. From the composition, the paper silhouettes are extensions of the photographs. The green grass paper silhouettes grow out from the wall of the house, and purple betel palm trees live in front of the window, which created an atmospheric sketch. In Figure 22, the texture of pineapple skin became my inspiration of paper forms. The spiked forms develop from the photograph of pineapple, layering each other create the sense of coarse texture of pineapple skin.

This research in photograph, paper, and form created the transition to my work fro the 2014 Master of Fine Arts Candidates Exhibition. The current body of work, The Place of Longing, was directly influenced by interest in photographic collages with paper silhouettes.

THE PLACE OF LONGING

A vast collection of knowledge was discovered through material research and experimentation. The knowledge along with my skill were combined to create The Place of Longing, a series of photographic collages. I continued to use paper silhouettes and photographs although the working scales was much larger than I had previously worked them. For this body of work, the paper silhouettes were constructed as three-dimensional
forms. I was again interested in the repetition, layering and visual movement. The silhouettes are sourced from photographs taken in Taiwan. They are meant to evoke my longing for home. The combination of photographs and paper silhouettes create the nostalgic feeling. The color of the paper silhouettes were another significant element of this work, they were used to draw the viewer into the piece with the emotional composition. Each piece for *THE PLACE OF LONGING* is intended to be wall piece.

*a cloud + ladders*

The composition starts from a photograph in the cloud shape, the fences on the photograph are decorated with the arches, a transformation of paper ladders. The paper ladders pop-up from the photograph, some ladders come from the mountain, and some of them continue with the fences, they extend to the outside of the cloud becoming several ladder trails continuing to the floor. The shape of cloud was inspired by iCloud service, a cloud storage from Apple Inc, a metaphor of technology of connecting two places. The ladders are also a metaphor of going to a place. I printed the photographs on paper, laser cut them in the shape of ladders, thus the ladders included the information of the photographs from Taiwan. I then constructed ladders randomly to produce a feeling of mix up memory. The ladder trails are carrying the memory from the cloud to the floor. I hung the piece higher than the central level on the wall because I wanted the hard to reach feeling that cloud evokes as well as the past memory are difficult to obtain.

*Missing, Missing*

The composition starts from natural photograph of tea trees and betel palm trees; they are the most common scene in country of Taiwan. I framed the photograph in this
piece because it was the only rectangular image from this work. The framed image is the most common way that people display photograph to remember the special moment in life. I take this idea of framed image as a special moment in life to metaphor as a memory. The idea of this piece is paper silhouettes are shedding from the photograph, coming out of the framed and becoming a huge teardrop. The photograph has been cut into six negative spaces of betel palm trees. These negative spaces follow by densely layering of betel palm tree silhouettes on the stalk and become six pop-up linear forms. Two of the central linear forms are connected into a huge teardrop that is hanging under the framed photograph. The other linear forms are hanging from the photograph but do not connect with the teardrop because I want the feeling of unsteady. The teardrop constructs by six different sizes of betel palm tree silhouettes, from short trees to tall trees, also the variation of the sizes. The gray color of paper silhouettes evokes a feeling of sadness. Although I laser cut all of the paper silhouettes, I still incorporated hand cutting when I constructed them into the piece. I hand cut each slot for paper silhouettes to pass through, and fold and glue the end of paper silhouette to the back of the piece. I enjoy the tension in between laser cut and hand cut because laser cut allows me to get enough material yet hand cut reminds me what I am doing in my work.

ong-lái

The composition starts from the center of pineapple image developing into several long spiked forms. The photograph contains an unusual pineapple I have seen because several pineapples grow together at the same time, which makes it become an odd pineapple. This photograph is the only one in The Place of Longing I actually cut through the outline of the subject because I want organic feeling in this piece. The shapes of paper
silhouettes are abstract, then I folded them into spiked three-dimensional forms. There are eight sizes of the shapes. The leaves of the pineapple were constructed by numerous of paper folding forms; they are layering in different direction. The pineapple is a tropical plant that is one of the most common fruit in Taiwan. The combination of fuse green and shocking yellow color paper suggests the feeling of sunshine and brightness mood. Besides the feeling of sadness while thinking about a place, sometimes it also comes with delightful moment from the memory. This piece is meant to evoke a lovely moment of memory.

CONCLUSION

This work is the product of the accumulation of one and half years researching and investigation the possibilities of paper and form. My work exists in the memory of my homeland, and the relationship from my homeland to the viewer. Scale, form, and material engage and describe the longing to my homeland. The variety of ways to use the material will help me to continue using paper in my work and influence my future work in jewelry and metals.
Figure 1: the process of removing and arranging

Figure 2: Wooden clips

Figure 3: Pin

Figure 4: Staples
Figure 9: embroidery on paper III

Figure 10: embroidery on paper III detail

Figure 11: paper silhouettes
Figure 12: betel palm tree silhouettes

Figure 13: betel palm tree silhouettes, detail
Figure 14: betel palm tree silhouettes-heart

Figure 15: betel palm tree silhouettes-red and green
Figure 16: photograph with paper silhouettes-1

Figure 17: photograph with paper silhouettes-1 detail
Figure 18: photograph with paper silhouettes-2

Figure 19: photograph with paper silhouettes-3
Figure 20: photograph with paper silhouettes-4

Figure 21: photograph with paper silhouettes-5
Figure 22: photograph with paper silhouettes-6

Figure 23: View of Installation
Figure 24: *a cloud+ ladders*

Figure 25: *a cloud+ ladders*, detail
Figure 26: Missing, Missing

Figure 27: Missing, Missing
detail
Figure 28: ōng-lāi

Figure 29: ōng-lāi, detail
Figure 30: ōng-lāi, detail