

The Memory of a Dream About a Place

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Thesis prepared for the Degree of  
Masters of Fine Arts

University of Georgia Athens, 2020

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This is a love letter home,  
a eulogy for dreams,  
dedicated to memory.

Home.

Last night I woke from a dream.

It was the third that night, the most potent of them all,  
the one that lingered longest.

*“Pink light filters through spanish moss and live oak leaves.  
rain lingers on the pavement as heat wraps me in its arms,  
my pupils dilate in its humid embrace.*

*A half circle of manicured grass littered with branches and the fallen tangles of the oak’s  
grey hair is surrounded by dank, grey asphalt.*

*In the center amongst this sanctuary of trees stands a lone tower.*

*This is my home.”*

I have spent a long time revisiting the dreams that have haunted me from a young age.

Many of these dreams are recorded in writing, some are scrawled out images in a desperate attempt to hold onto anything I can remember, but each and every one are echoing in conscious and subconscious memories. I have become especially fascinated in the settings in which these dreams take place; landscapes I return to, structures I interact with night after night, a return to a place that I once called home. The dreams are nothing more than reflections of what happens throughout the day, but the space within them is alive and constantly morphing in its familiarity. My research is focused on recreating the objects and architecture that stand out the most in these fictitious places. In this compilation of my research, I present a collection of findings through a recounting of memory, distorted through an overly romantic nostalgic lens, all in relation to the ever morphing landscape that is most familiar to me.

“Sensual representations are in a perpetual flux,  
they come after each other like the waves of a river,  
and even during the time that they last  
they do not remain the same thing.”

-Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*

The objects I make are confrontational. With lines that push and pull focal points, structures that are both grounded and airy, they are what dance in front of my eyes as I slip into the slumber in which they morph as I move through. Reference to the skeletal structures of exposed architecture, flowing locks of spanish moss, cast iron storm drain covers in the street, and the twisting branches and roots of mangrove and oak trees can all be found in my work. They are the ruins of a place I once knew, allegories of a lost haven.



Darting rods of color, falling arches and slumping grids weighed down by large blocks of mass and color, these objects feel otherworldly and evoke a sense of poetic imagery pulled from the depths of an aggregate memory. Unlike a metaphor, the “poetic image” is an understanding formed through daydreaming and image resonance, it is poetry in action. This idea of provoking awareness through sensory driven memory is how I generate the objects I make. Lumbering structures come alive, awkwardly stretching upwards while their many feet clamber outwards like roots in soil. The object stands in place of its origin, as a reminder of how it felt to be somewhere; looking less to the historical context of the place, and more the manifestation of the memory.

## The Memory:

In 1999 my parents bought their first house and my family moved in just in time for the new millennium. St. Pete was a sleepy town and the house we moved into was a large and empty four story split level. Complete with jalousie windows, a front porch dusted with termite frass, a pink painted kitchen, and window shaker A/C units, it was a standard old-Florida house. We lived in many places around the state, but this was the first house my parents owned. I quickly connected to this neighborhood of shady live oaks and set-back bungalows, and felt for the first time a sense of belonging in a place. I knew this was home the day we arrived.

The French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard's investigation into self-awareness and the spatial/object-awareness of one's experience with the poetic image of architecture, encapsulates modes of memory in relation to place and one's understanding of the world around oneself. Bachelard's phenomenological research investigates the lived experience and the constructed space in which it happens. In his most notable text, *The Poetics of Space*<sup>1</sup>, the physical space an experience occurs (specifically one's childhood home), imprints a biased memory. He presents an investigation that reaches beyond our empirical senses and taps into the physical poetry of qualia. Oxford University uses the 'painfulness of pinpricks or the redness of red roses.' to define the term qualia, the external result of phenomena. I find this definition to fall short describing this physical measure of lived experience. The memories of interacting with a space, including the less tangible experiences, require a nuance that only poetry and art making can capture.

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<sup>1</sup> Bachelard, Gaston. 2014. *The Poetics of Space*. London, England: Penguin Classics.

In his text, Bachelard investigates the childhood home as a poetic image, looking to literature and art and the representations made in relation to rooms found in a house. These wry replicas I make are drawn up by memory have its origins in this house we moved into. The first years in this new home were time of coming of age for me, a place in time when I began to not only explore the world beyond the protection of the home, but also a time to develop more complex understandings of the setting and its impact on my life.

The uneven polish on the brass doorknob from years of turning, the smear of dirt from hands brushing the wall behind the banister, even the worn down varnish in the footpath on a hardwood floor are the physical memory imprinted on the architecture that tells the history of its inhabitants. All of this evidence of action and object interaction with a person's movement through time, is the residue that lingers to inform one's engagement with space. The memory



then is less of the semiotic understanding of images and objects, but rather the pure patina rubbed onto those objects, a physical embodiment of memory imprinted directly onto one's surroundings that creates the interaction. This investigation into self and surroundings expanded into the neighborhood and city around me. As I ventured further beyond the home, the landscape of the place I came to love began to morph into an extension of myself, committed to memory and revisited in dreams.

Dylan Trigg, a researcher at the University of Vienna, discusses this relation of body to memory and place. In his text titled, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*<sup>2</sup>, Trigg touches on different types of memory and how the interaction with space can influence our identity and future engagement and understanding of said space. He connects this idea of episodic, or individual memory, with the collective memory and understanding of communal spaces (i.e. cities) into an independent realization of the body as a place of memory. With consideration of these two types of memory, Trigg claims a tertiary memory effect on the body itself. He likens this effect to hauntings and moments in which the body responds even when the reaction is at odds with the brain's response.

In contrast to Trigg's analysis of space and memory, artist Genpei Akagesawa documented objects that provided him this tertiary memory in the cities he knew so well. Akagesawa created a compilation of these objects in his book *Hyperart Thomasson*<sup>3</sup>, and coined the term "Thomasson" in the mid 70's to describe this phenomenon present and vivid in post-war industrialized Japan. Parts of the country saw fast growth and evolution, this post-war economic boom created a fast pace of changing landscapes while communities built their hometowns to suit a new way of living. This constant change created a layering of architecture and infrastructure at such a pace, most obsolete entities were built on top of or merely left behind. This term is specific to these objects of architecture that are devoid of its original function but still exist in the cityscape and are maintained despite its objective uselessness. Examples of this might be a mid-air doorway on the second story of a building, a stairwell that leads to a brick

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<sup>2</sup> Trigg, D.. 2012. *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*. 1-347.

<sup>3</sup> Akasegawa, Genpei, Matt Fargo, Matt Fargo, Reiko Tomii, Jordan Sand, and Genpei Akasegawa. 2009. *Hyperart: Thomasson*.



wall, or a concrete base that may have once secured a towering light post but now only exist as a large painted cubic mass. These physical memories are the ghosts of Trigg's haunting memories. Like ruins of old left behind within a new city, thomassons create layered understandings of a space and its history within it. The city becomes a mausoleum for the relics of its history without the reverence of documentation or notation. Akagesawa's fascination with these stairs that led to nowhere drove him to collect images from people by asking the public to report these oddities as found in their daily life. For years I have participated, unknowingly, in the documentation and admiration of the mystery of these defunct oddities. This objective information became embossed in my subconscious that shaped my understanding of my surroundings and personal history, resulting in a compulsion to recreate them.

These objects like this became landmarks, monuments, and tombstones dedicated to the life cycle of the space they inhabit and my own passage through them. Over time these objects have been torn down



to make way for new residences, upgraded infrastructure, or purely out of inevitable neglect.

With the removal of these makeshift landmarks, so goes the dialect and language of the landscape as I understood it. I have moved through the stages of mourning the loss of this perspective I have lived in, a landscape that slowly morphs as each of these structures of absurd personal importance is broken down and replaced by the unfamiliar; an ancient language lost to time. Looking back, I don't recognize this once familiar place. All that is left is the romanticized memory used to describe an awareness of self.

Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination.

-Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

### **The Dream:**

A Walk.

*“The intensity of indescribable colors permeates the landscape.*

*This light refracts into my eyes and glows deep throughout me.*

*Lumbering live oak trees sway in the breeze while sycamore and gardenia float through the thick humid air.*

*I step through the threshold of my nest to find a wide empty street.*

*The vibrant violet blooms of the jacaranda trees vibrate in spite of the blacktop they cling to.*

*The wet dog smell of rain on hot pavement pierces the veils of steam floating in the hot summer evening.*

*Towers of pink rust stained concrete, ten feet high and immeasurable mass poised as a gateway tower above the path I find myself on.*

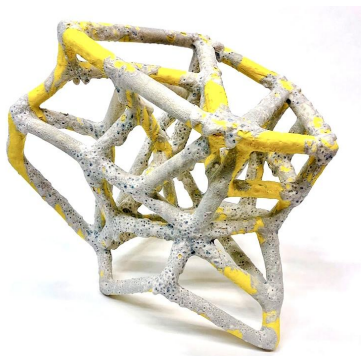
*The slow stroll aimed at the sleepy sun slipping beneath the horizon is lit with a light neither green nor yellow, but its intensity is beyond description.*

*A turn down an alleyway reveals an empty plot of land in between a row of houses.*

*Behind an idle fence, a lone brick staircase is poised as if it will lead me somewhere beyond the sightline.”*

The dreams that haunt me are the ones where I am moving through this landscape so familiar to me. The sculptures I make are built with the body in mind, specifically my body, and how it interacts with these elaborate edifices. These towering structures are large enough to have a commanding presence, disrupting one's sightline. At the same time, visual passageways through the archways and windows through the objects allow a viewer to seemingly enter into the space it exists while physically restricting actual passage. This framing of space while simultaneously blocking it creates a tension of absence and presence. Some of these objects are much shorter, allowing one to approach it as it freely stands on the ground and observes it from above. Regardless of actual measurement, the scale and mass of each object engages its surroundings creating an environment through the language of its materiality, construction, and its arrangement.

Hard ceramic material mimics the density and rigidity of construction material while its flowing hand formed objecthood and textured glaze gives the viewer a sense of time passing despite its static state, an interaction that suggests the object has some authenticity and life. These monuments to my dreams embody the impact of the physicality of a landscape filtered through romanticized memory. They are memoirs of the fast, everchanging maps I have drawn in



my mind in a desperate attempt to document a myth I have created about this place. As the waypoints and landmarks I felt drawn to are systematically removed from this now foreign city, I seek to embody and replace them in my sightline. They are parts of the poem I recite every night.

The dream space is a recurrence in my nocturnal visions. A landscape unraveling as I revisit the most familiar yet fictitious places. The light, the mass, and the scale of what surrounds me in these hallucinations are all that resonate behind my eyelids when I wake. As I pull myself out of the liminal delirium between rest and wake, dim shapes and outlines fall just out of reach and slowly fades into my morning cup.

Along with the scale, placement, and awkward nature of these objects, color becomes a very meaningful component of these dream objects. A study conducted by Patricia Siple and Robert M. Springer looked into the concept of “memory color”<sup>4</sup>. Their findings on how subjects recalled colors of universally recognizable objects (they used vegetables) shows accurate recollection, but a preference for a more saturated version of what was presented. Looking back at the visuals I reference from these hallucinatory states led me to recapture these vivid memory colors on the linear limericks I built. Applying color became the most difficult aspect of creating these objects as recapturing the feeling of being among these constructions. Like describing the smell of your childhood home, reassigning color through memory proved to be arduous. This struggle led me into experimenting with the texture and the layering of glaze I applied in an attempt to capture a sense of the sticky, sharp, and supple nature of light refracted through memory, recalled in a dream, and finally rewritten in real space. Color, structure, and scale all come together to create a codex to the narrative I am creating. A sensory reading of the work is what will inform the viewer, never a description, to draw conclusions for themselves. This work is meant to be felt and lived with, not watched and dissected.

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<sup>4</sup> Siple, P. & Springer, R.M. *Perception & Psychophysics* (1983) 34: 363. <https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03203049>

## The Place:

Historical and geographical context is key to understanding the landscape and architecture that impacts how I interpret this place I remember so vividly. A peninsula attached to a peninsula, St. Petersburg is the thumb of land sticking off the west coast of the state of Florida. Sandwiched between the Gulf of Mexico and Tampa Bay, this jut of land offers coastline on either side of the city giving the sky dramatic lighting for both sunrise and sunset. Rays of filtered light coming in colors indescribable, deeper than ultraviolet, more coral than Medeteranian architecture, all filtered through the green clouds making the air yellow like the lenses a long haul truckers wear at twilight.

St Pete has been through many changes throughout its timeline as a city and before. Much before its founding in 1888 it was home to the Manasota people of the Weedon Island Culture. The archeological manifestations on this island in the north crook of the bay are footprints of architecture left by its inhabitants along with mounds and middens. The middens are pits and piles of detritus located near where once stood homes. These kitchen and village middens of discarded shells, broken tools, and other leavings, give insight into the everyday lives of the non-nomadic communities that lived near them. In addition to the middens, sandy mounds were found to mark the burial site in which each body was buried accompanied by ceremonial ceramic vessels<sup>5</sup>. This ritualistic mortuary practice was new to the Manasota people at the time, and unique to the inhabitants of Weedon Island. The practice of burying their dead with pieces of decorated, functionally inutile artifacts of technology was not found in the Manasota culture

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<sup>5</sup> Thompson, Keith H. *The Weedon Island story*. Tarpon Springs, FL: Pinellas County Dept. of Environmental Management Environmental Lands Division, 2005.

before this site's existence dating around a.d. 200. The difference of intent between these piles are significant, but looked at together they embody both the everyday and the everlasting impact the landscape had on the people who lived there, and vice versa. These physical markers of the people's daily lives and their rituals to understand the world around them.

Jumping forward in time into the turn of the century, St. Pete becomes the terminus for the rail line known as The Orange Belt<sup>6</sup>. With the expansion of industry riding on the rails, the Orange Belt became a trail for another kind of industry: Tourism. As more and more people hopped into passenger cars and rode the passenger cars to visit this sleepy town, more and more hotels, spas, and goods shops began to pop up. Eventually neighborhoods began to sprawl and the city spread its reaches to its now 75 square miles. Between 1900 and 2000, St. Petersburg has gone through major fluctuations of wealth, speculative real estate, and civil tensions. The city has seen architectural trends from anywhere from bungalows, to 50's block homes, even to monuments like William B. Harvard Sr's inverted pyramid pier. These monuments to wealth are surrounded by architecture of practicality and common use. The juxtaposition of old and new, communal and exclusive slowly deteriorated and left behind these objects of interest to be swallowed up by time. As middens and mounds are mined for meaning, so can the strata of lost architectures around this city. With new interest in the city, a lot of these objects that are woven into the composition of this landscape are being replaced with cheap lumber and plaster; it is my intent to capture what I can before the artifacts of this city are picked dry and paved over.

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<sup>6</sup> Arsenault, Raymond. *St. Petersburg and the Florida dream, 1888-1950*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1996.\*

I've spent a lifetime exploring this personal knowledge of what home means, along with some historical findings, and have created a sort of myth around it. These myths and stories are retold over and over again in my dreams and in an attempt to decipher them have created a physical language to speak of them. My hope is that these objects I make can create the feeling, the longing and desire I have towards this place that will never again exist. I hope to find that place again.

“The French say that the best part of an affair is going up the stairs.

Desire is almost always more thrilling than fulfillment.”

-Tom Robbins, *Fierce Invalids Home From Hot Climates*

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