

“I’ve always known this place, familiar as a room in our house”:

Engaging with Memory, Loss and Nostalgia through Sculpture

By

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Abstract

My exhibition draws on Andreas Huyssen's notion of memory sculpture to articulate my own sense of loss and trauma, due to the divorce of my parents. Within my work I explore the effects that divorce had on me and how it has disturbed my normative understanding of home and family. I have created scenarios alluding to the family home that I have manipulated in order to convey a sense of nostalgia and loss. By growing salt crystals over found objects and/or cladding them in salt, I attempt to suggest the dual motifs of preservation (a nostalgic clinging to the past) and destruction (due to the salt's corrosive properties). In this way, the salt-crusted objects serve as a metaphor for a memory that has become stagnant, and is both destructive and regressive. The objects encapsulate the mind's coping methods to loss.

In my mini thesis, I discuss characteristics of memory sculpture as a response to trauma, drawing on Sigmund Freud's differentiation between mourning and melancholia. I also unpack how objects and traces (such as photographs) may act as nostalgic triggers, inducing a state of melancholic attachment to an idealised past. I address these concerns in relation to selected works by Doris Salcedo and Bridget Baker, and also situate them in relation to my own art practice.

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all sources that I have used have been acknowledged by complete references. This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Masters of Fine Art at Rhodes University. I declare that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at another university.

Kesayne Reed

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Introduction

My exhibition titled “I’ve always known this place, familiar as a room in our house”¹, comprises of found objects which I have manipulated through processes of cocooning and/or crystallisation in salt. Each work is unique as the formation of salt crystals depends largely on the materiality of the object. The crystals themselves are alive: they grow and de-crystallise which constantly shifts their appearance. I have used found objects which relate to an everyday household environment as I want the viewer to be able to identify with my work on a personal level. These familiar household objects, disrupted by various interventions and encased in salt, suggest a disturbed notion of the ideal family home.

The exhibition is a form of remembering and a working-through of memories related to my up-bringing – particularly surrounding my parents’ divorce. When I was twelve years old I began to notice my parents’ relationship breaking down. It was never spoken of, but I could pick up on the fighting and could infer that something was wrong. A state of implicit hostility and tension between my parents prevailed for the next six years, which frightened and upset my brother and I – partly because it was not acknowledged. It was only in my final year of school that things unravelled completely. I came home from school one day to a scene of traumatic disarray: there were clothes thrown out of the cupboard and my mom was sobbing on the floor. I tried to comfort her but found myself in a precarious position of not wanting to pick sides. I tried to leave and go to a friend’s house but my dad waited for me to get back home. He sobbed and apologised, and then he simply left. I was angry and hurt and did not know how to deal with the traumatic dissolution of my parents’ marriage and the resulting emotions – it was so over-whelming. They finally divorced in my first year of University which was a drawn out and ugly process – lawyers were involved and my parents at this stage no longer spoke. I was torn between loving and hating them for what was happening and the positions/roles I was forced to play. In effect, I had to ‘grow up’ and console them

¹Michaels, A. 2000, "Anne Michaels": *Miner's Pond, The Weight of Oranges, Skin Divers*, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London.

when all I wanted was a little consolation. These are just a few of the reasons why I found it so important to externalise my own sense of loss in this exhibition. I wanted to make visible and confront my trauma.

At the same time, I am aware that what I have created is not necessarily a true reflection of events that happened but rather a reflection of the construct I have built up within my own mind. As Jill Bennet (2005: 23) notes, the extremity of trauma complicates normal processes of memory formation: “its unfamiliar or extraordinary nature renders it unintelligible, causing cognitive systems to balk; its sensory or affective character renders it inimical to thought – and ultimately to memory itself”. This then also makes trauma difficult to process, work through and let go of. For this reason, I have chosen a warehouse as my exhibition space. A warehouse is a space created for the storage of things – things we do not want to let go of (or cannot let go of) but have no room for in the next chapter of our lives. It therefore symbolises my ambivalent relationship to my own past. It denotes a psychological space where fragmented and partial memories, unresolved trauma, and melancholic loss are housed. These are things that I myself have stored and cannot relinquish.

The trigger for this exhibition was also a space that in itself has become a “non-place” (Princenthal 2000:57), our family holiday home in Struisbaai. It was the place we could go to as a family and where I could meet up with all my relatives who I lived so far away from in Zimbabwe. As a result of the divorce we stopped going there and the ties to family began to unravel. Struisbaai was the epitome of my carefree, pre-divorce childhood, carrying many happy memories of my family together. This has informed my choice of objects and materials in several ways. The idea to use Struisbaai as a starting point for my exhibition emerged when I visited it in my first year of Masters. I had not been there in over five years and what I remembered of it had changed drastically due to the sea and neglect – many of the places I had gone to get ice-cream and calamari as a child had become dilapidated through the destruction of the sea and were now abandoned buildings. The use of salt in my work suggested itself because of the coastal location of our holiday home. As the years have passed the salty sea has been complicit in destroying my memories of Struisbaai as most places have slowly been claimed by the sea. The salty air also leaves a residue on the furniture, windows and buildings. Without constant care it eventually eats the metal

components and rots the wood making the structures weak. The idea of a corrosive force weakening a seemingly permanent structure seemed a fitting metaphor for the gradual undoing of the institution of marriage. Despite its destructiveness, the constant residue of the salt on the furniture also suggested preservation, as if it was trying to preserve things over time. These conflicting associations of destruction and preservation are central to both my exhibition and my accompanying mini-thesis.

In the mini thesis I will be looking at notions of memory, loss, trauma and nostalgia through the context of memory sculpture and the trace. I will be interrogating the process behind the creation of memory sculpture (as posited by Andreas Huyssen) and discussing the ways in which memory sculpture alludes to trauma without inducing or re-afflicting it. Memory sculpture normally arises in situations of death and loss. In my work, I will be discussing the traumatic loss of the family ideal through divorce. This is a personal reflection on my own experience of the disruption in family dynamics. In my discussion of memory sculpture, I will refer to Andreas Huyssen's *Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (2003), where he describes memory sculpture as a form of trauma art which involves the induction of the viewer as a secondary witness.

I will be looking at how Huyssen conceptualises the process of memory sculpture through the works of Doris Salcedo, while drawing on Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* to better understand the unresolved workings of trauma. Giving expression to trauma seems to be a main driving point behind the creation of Salcedo's works and emerges as a central theme. Salcedo (born 1958) is a Colombian artist whose works are influenced by her experience of life within Colombia. Salcedo often works in response to the unspeakable traumas and atrocities of the Colombian civil war. *Atrabiliarios*, for example, alludes to the mass graves that were discovered of people that had gone missing during the war, leaving only their shoes as markers of identity. As Salcedo notes in an interview with Basualdo, "All the works I've made so far contain first-hand evidence from a real victim of war in Colombia" (Basualdo 2000: 14). In alluding to her work, I do not intend to draw parallels between the gravity of lives lost in war and the experiences of a child growing up in the shadow of divorce. Rather, my interest is in the ways that Salcedo's visual

language, as a sculptor, communicates motifs of loss, trauma, memory and mourning – that are useful for unpacking my own work.

As with my sculptures, Salcedo's work primarily consists of used furniture that she has manipulated. Salcedo often makes her work after interviewing family members of victims of atrocities to provoke conversation around an otherwise hushed topic. In particular, I will explore how her work subtly conveys historical and personal trauma, initiating the viewer as a secondary witness. Salcedo achieves this, in part, by using motifs of repetition and temporality, which is implicit in her use of materials (Huyssen 2003: 113).

According to Huyssen, memory sculpture can be characterised by three traits: an object which is normally associated with everyday use or common in most households; an intervention which sometimes entails tiny detailing; and the use of space in relation to objects or materials, such that the viewer undergoes a shift in perception. All these processes lead to the initiation of the viewer as a secondary witness. A secondary witness is a person who is exposed to a trauma through the experience of another – this is done sensitively so as to not re-inflict trauma. The objects used to create memory sculpture are generally everyday objects like furniture, clothing and so on. They must be relatable and recognisable to a large group of people for the work to be effective. The familiarity of these objects is important because memory sculpture involves an initial memory attachment formed by the viewer him/herself. It is crucial for the viewer to link his/her own personal experience to the object in order for the process of secondary witnessing to develop. The viewer's attachment to the objects is accomplished through time and space – the viewer is given time to associate the objects with his/her own memories from a distance before realising the interventions made within the works. The change in proximity allows the viewer to see the work in its entirety and to appreciate the interventions in the objects that he/she has familiarised him/herself with. This initial memory attachment then shifts to encompass the life of another, when the realisation of possible trauma comes to light. In Chapter 1, I will focus on the works *Atrabiliarios* (1992-1993: Fig. 1) and *Unland: The Orphan's Tunic* (1997: Fig. 3), and the methods employed to create works in response to trauma.

The above works address two specific traumatic events – one of the intangible loss of those who have gone missing and the second relating directly to a witnessed murder. In both cases, Salcedo uses familiar objects which are de-familiarised – through layering and stitching - to suggest the effects of unspeakable trauma. In my readings of her work I will draw on Freud’s *Mourning and Melancholia* (1939 [first published in 1917]) as well as texts on the work of Freud: *On Freud’s Mourning and Melancholia* (Fiorini, Bokanowski and Lewkowicz 2007) and *The New Black Mourning, Melancholia and Depression* (Leader 2008) in order to examine the relationship between mourning, melancholy and trauma. Like Salcedo, I use furniture and objects as surrogates for the human body. I also employ the technique of repetition to suggest the endlessness of loss, and manipulate furniture through sewing to suggest motifs of wounding and healing. However, my particular interest is in using thread to ‘cocoon’ my objects and furniture, suggesting preservation but also a state of unresolved limbo. This is implicit also in the temporality of the salt as material as it is constantly crystallising and de-crystallising depending on the weather.

In the second chapter, I will be looking at *So It Goes* (1996) by South African artist Bridget Baker and will be examining issues of melancholic loss and memory in relation to nostalgia. I will also be exploring Baker’s use of materiality and process to suggest her unresolved mourning of the death of her father. I will further unpack the notions of loss and nostalgia in relation to family dynamics. I will discuss the ways photographic traces act as nostalgic triggers, conjuring both absence and presence. In this sense, photographs both enable and impede the processes of memory-work and the resolved working-through of mourning.

At the end of each chapter I will conclude with the formulation of my own work within the context of memory sculpture and nostalgia. In addressing these concerns, I hope to unpack how my work speaks of a loss of the family unit, made tangible through the way in which the space that was previously the family holiday home has become inaccessible. In working with the de-contextualized furnishings left behind in grief, I too will be trying to “give pain a home” (Bennett 2005: 54), albeit as a “non place” (Princenthal

2000: 57); as a space for the shoring up of fragmented memories, where wishes for preservation and nostalgia towards an idealised family life have developed.

Chapter 1

Memory sculpture: engaging with mourning, loss and trauma

In this chapter I will be looking at the works of Doris Salcedo, a Colombian artist who explores memory and trauma through sculpture. I will discuss two of Salcedo's works, namely her installation *Atrabiliarios* (1992-1993: Fig. 1) and *Unland: the Orphan's Tunic* (1997: Fig. 3) and highlight the ways in which these works function as 'memory sculpture', as defined by Andreas Huyssen. In both works, Salcedo responds to stories of atrocity through the use of found objects. I will analyse the significance of these found objects and explain how their materiality speaks to the themes of loss, memory, mourning, and melancholia. I will also investigate the different methods Salcedo has used to manipulate these objects and the effects of this manipulation. I will then describe how the pieces are accessed through the increasing proximity of the viewer, and show how Salcedo ultimately positions the viewer as a secondary witness in her exhibition space.

Throughout this chapter I will also refer to Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* (1939 [first published in 1917]) and liken the 'motions' of melancholia (as interminable or unresolved mourning) to the repetitious treatment of Salcedo's materials through motifs such as layering and stitching. Lastly, I will discuss how the techniques employed in these works have influenced my approach to creating memory sculpture.

Memory sculpture

Huyssen (2003: 110) describes memory sculpture "as a kind of sculpture that is not centered on special configuration alone, but that powerfully inscribes a dimension of localizable, even corporeal memory into the work" By this he means that:

the material object is never just an installation or sculpture in the traditional sense, but it is also worked in such a way that it articulates memory as displacing of past into present, offering a trace of past that can be experienced and read by the viewer (Huyssen 2003: 111).

Using objects that resonate with the viewer is crucial in the work of memory sculpture, as objects are the trigger in creating memory attachment. Salcedo uses familiar objects (such as tables and shoes – that

seem to link to the everyday) to engage with her audience. By using familiar objects, Salcedo encourages the viewer to engage with the objects on a more personal level and to project his/her own memories onto the objects. This technique has been applied within both *Atrabiliarios* (1992-1993) and *Unland: the Orphan's Tunic* (1997), where she uses shoes and tables respectively.

When looking at these works, we can begin to better understand the ways in which the materiality of her sculptures is key to the formation of memory connection – what Huyssen refers to as ‘corporeal memory’. In *Atrabiliarios* (1992-1993), Salcedo has created an installation comprised of niches which have been recessed into the walls of the gallery. Inside these niches, although barely visible to the viewer, are actual pairs of shoes (Figure 2). The pairs of shoes are displayed behind visceral semi-transparent sheets of animal skin stitched flush with the wall. They are not just randomly selected but are shoes which Salcedo collected from the families of the victims that had gone missing in Colombia, during the Columbian civil war.

The secondary witness

Despite the gravitas of her subject matter, Salcedo uses subtlety and understatement when it comes to making works that relate to trauma. In this way, Salcedo is able to convey effects of atrocities unintentionally without re-inflicting trauma. As Huyssen (2003:119) states:

As in other successful artistic work articulating historical trauma in unique media and materials, Salcedo's sculpture moves the spectator to the edge of the abyss only thinly veiled by beauty of the piece itself.

In other words, her works are evocative, engaging and beautiful even though the subject matter is one of grave pain; this allows the viewer to engage with the work without feeling overwhelmed. The key to Salcedo's exhibitions is the way in which she draws the viewer into the work so that he/she engages with it on many different levels. In turn, this gradual shift in perception alters the view of what seemed like a beautiful work which in turn highlights the trauma behind it.

To fully immerse a viewer into the story he/she has to become a secondary witness (Huyssen 2003: 119). A secondary witness is a person who is witnessing trauma for the first time through the stories of another, and is thus able to appreciate what the victim/grievers are going through. Secondary witnessing is enabled when the viewer has a personal connection to the objects. The viewer then relates the objects to an experience/ trauma and this shifts his/her personal experiences to coincide with that of the griever. The objects are used to create familiarity which helps the viewer to form an attachment and/or link a memory to the objects. Once this attachment has been formed, the viewer is then able to understand the work from a specific perspective. In essence Salcedo is arresting time so that the realisation of what matters comes to light (Huyssen 2003:120). It is in this way that Salcedo conducts "...memory work that activates body, space, and temporality, matter and imagination, presence and absence in a complex relationship with their beholder" (Huyssen 2003:111).

In *Atrabiliarios* (1992-1993), Salcedo conceals the shoes behind a visceral skin which is stitched into the wall. This creates a level of mediation and distance between the viewer and the work. The viewer therefore encounters a barrier which compels him/her to look closer in order to fully see the work in all its detail. The barrier acts as an incentive to draw the viewer closer to the work which allows for a more personal engagement. At the same time, the semi-transparent skin can also be seen as a metaphor for human skin evoking the idea of the body (Bal 2010: 52). It is only once the viewer has inspected the work in close proximity that he/she may notice the indentations of feet and realise that the shoes once belonged to someone - this realisation conjures a body through absence. The body is not forgotten, but rather its absence suggests the idea of trauma or a violent act in the past which inscribes the piece with memory (Huyssen 2003:111). When the connection of the object which once belonged to an actual person is realised, the viewer can begin to understand the installation. The shoes begin to function as metaphors for absent bodies as they belonged to missing persons. Moreover, by placing the shoes in boxes shaped like coffins and obscuring the items with the use of the visceral skins, Salcedo is highlighting the inconsolable loss that comes with the absence of definitive death. Salcedo can therefore be said to use materiality as a

means to encourage the audience to engage with her work: the materials themselves aid in telling a story which is witnessed by the viewer through a step by step engagement.

In *Unland: The Orphan's Tunic* (1997), Salcedo describes a story which is far more individualised than in *Atrabiliarios* (1992-1993). In *Atrabiliarios*, even though the narratives of loss were particular to the families who had someone go missing, there was still a link to a collective grief – many families experienced the same situation. In *Unland: The Orphan's Tunic* (1997), Salcedo's primary focus was on the specific story of a little girl and the traumatic events she faced. As Salcedo tells it:

It was the story of a girl from an orphanage, a six-year-old, who had witnessed the killing of her mother. Ever since that traumatic experience, she had been wearing the same dress day after day, a dress her mother had made for her shortly before being killed: the dress as a marker of memory and sign of trauma (Huyssen 2003:116).

The work consists of two damaged tables which have been grafted together, one side veiled in white silk, and laboriously stitched together with human hair (Gibbons 2007: 62). Salcedo took the motif of the tunic and instead of using a literal tunic to convey the story she used the idea of its functionality. The tunic in this artwork is translated as the silk fabric that seemingly grows and binds the two tables. It inserts itself into cracks and folds, embedding itself into the table and becoming a part of it, acting like a skin (Huyssen 2003:114). The tunic (silk fabric) acts as an object that can be related to the trauma experienced by the little girl as described by Salcedo in the above quote. The tunic becomes the object of trauma as it was the last thing made for her by her mother before she was killed in front of her; therefore the tunic carries an attachment to that trauma. The tunic in essence was a form of protection for the little girl as well as a connection to her mother. In Salcedo's work, the metaphorical tunic thus similarly acts as a protective layer and a link to a trauma. This is further suggested by the damage inflicted to the wood of the table, visible through the layer of silk. The table, through the humanising objects of the silk tunic and stitched hair itself, metaphorically takes on the form of a body – of the victim as well as the griever.

By using objects which the viewers can easily relate to (such as the table), Salcedo implicitly invites the viewer to tie his/her own memories to the objects. The table – in this case a kitchen table or dining room

table - typically reflects a place in the home where many things are shared amongst family and is therefore a familial object closely linked to loved ones and shared moments. By cutting the table, Salcedo suggests the undoing of these implied familial narratives. As stated by Huyssen, “forever absent are the communal or family events that took place around this table, the chairs, the people, the food and drinks served here” (2003:118). This is further evoked through the awkward grafting of the two tables, which are different sizes and heights and thus fit together uncomfortably. The table can therefore be seen as an object of loss as it induces a memory of family not only in relation to the story of the little girl but in every individual that sees it. Like *Atrabiliarios*, *Unland* too speaks of the communal pain of the loss of family. Through the objects being relatable to the viewer, Salcedo manages to create a space where there can be a collective grieving for those who have experienced similar atrocities. This is borne out not only by one’s realisation of the story embedded within the work but by the personal links that one formulates with the work which triggers one’s own memory of home.

As with *Atrabiliarios*, when viewing *Unland: The Orphan’s Tunic*, the viewer again begins to apprehend the objects from a distance. Firstly, the viewer engages with the overall view of the tables with their particular attributes, seeing what looks like a table half covered in white. The materiality of the tables is not clear until one can experience the work up close. Here, like in *Atrabiliarios*, Salcedo arrests time and induces a compelling personal engagement with the work through space and proximity (Huyssen 2003:111). The only way to fully understand the work at hand is not to only look from a distance but to get close to the artwork: the materiality of the silk and threads of hair are not clear until closely inspected. With the use of these subtleties, Salcedo manages again to change the viewer’s perception through time and proximity. When one is in close proximity to the work and the materiality of the silk is realised one can begin to see the violence that has been inflicted on the table and the painstaking stitching of human hair which has joined them back together. The hair is of great resonance here, and the action of stitching can be seen as a metaphor for grieving – a process of mourning which is repetitious and seemingly endless. Hair is viewed as a material which evokes fragility and vulnerability but Salcedo has converted it into a symbol of strength as it is the force which holds the two halves together (Huyssen 2003:18). Yet

the hair also stands in for the endlessness of pain and trauma so painstakingly worked through (Huyssen 2003:118).

In the case of *Unland: The Orphan's Tunic*, one is again confronted with familial ties, torn apart by violent death. In Huyssen's words: "The story forces us to take *The Orphan's Tunic* literally as an index of a death, a life, a trauma, something that did happen in the real world" (Huyssen 2003:116). This can be visually supported by the trauma inflicted on the table as well as the way that the tunic begins to resemble a shroud. According to Huyssen, the work evokes:

memory in a spatial sense, approximating it, never quite getting to it, compelling the viewer to innervate something that remains elusive, absent – the violent death of a mother that left the child orphaned, the orphan present only in residual tunic, which now seems more like a shroud covering part of a table (Huyssen 2003:118).

Once again Salcedo initiates the viewer as a secondary witness, using subtle methods to allude to violence without the viewer having to feel re-exposed to it.

Melancholia/Mourning

Gibbons (2007: 59) describes Freud's definition of melancholy to be, "a pathologised form of mourning, characterised by a severe crisis of identity concomitant with the loss of the loved 'object'". In states of mourning there is a definitive realisation of what one has lost and this allows for a state of disconnection through the process of grieving. There are similar traits within states of melancholy where the person also feels a disconnection with the outside world; however in melancholia one cannot recognise what one has actually lost. This is likened by Freud to an unconscious loss that the patient might not necessarily be fully aware of, or a situation where the patient does not realise what exactly they have lost in the absent person or love-object. This lack of clarity makes the process of grieving an impossible endeavour (1939 [1917]: 145).

According to Princenthal, *Atrabiliarios* originates from the Latin term '*atra bilis*' meaning 'melancholy' (Gibbons 2007: 59). This suitably describes the experiences of families who might struggle to grieve

those that are missing precisely because the circumstances surrounding the disappearances are unknown or vague. Where there is an intangible loss (1939 [1917]:145), melancholia follows. In *Atrabiliarios*, Salcedo has created what seem to be coffin-like containers for the intangible loss suffered by the families. Her work attests to a loss that is not able to be grieved, as the families are unsure whether the victims who are missing have actually died, which creates a level of uncertainty. Salcedo creates a space for the grief experienced in melancholia when there is no final resolution to a loved one's death, effectively creating a burial ground for those lost. By using the shoes of the actual individuals that are missing, Salcedo invokes a metaphorical body for those grieving – in essence providing a body that can be seen as buried to provide the person with a connection with that which has been lost.

In this way, by “offering a trace of the past that can be experienced and read by the viewer”, Salcedo has accomplished a “displacing of past into present” (2003: 111). This epitomises Huyssen's definition of memory sculpture. Salcedo has not only created awareness about what has happened to families in Colombia, but has provided a symbolic means of closure to those families. Her work enables a space for the process of mourning that was absent before for those families. At the same time, the victims' shoes – obscured behind the skins – suggest the continued and continuing cloudiness and intangibility of the loss.

Unland: The Orphan's Tunic is similarly inscribed with violence, pain and mourning. The hair used to stitch the tables together visually alludes to trauma, as the holes that have been drilled into the wood to facilitate the stitching speak of trauma to the body. Here the cutting and grafting of the tables can be related to a physical wound that has to be sewn back together – again re-iterating the links to the human body. The story informing the work is steeped in melancholy due to the child not wanting to take the tunic off. As such, it is illustrative of Freud's suggestion that lost objects can induce harm if not dealt with through the process of mourning (1939 [1917]: 158-159). Salcedo's work may be seen as providing the means to mourn by enacting the process of grieving. Through the laborious stitching of human hair and the combining of the two tables, she is metaphorically working through the emotions of the little girl. Salcedo in this sense is also symbolically giving the girl a place to grieve as well as allowing her to work through her emotions in order to heal. Salcedo has created a place to mourn, a space in which one can

express those emotions through the visual association of the piece with the mother that was killed. Even if the viewer does not know the initial story, the work is presented in such a way that all can collectively grieve.

My exhibition: “I’ve always known this place, familiar as a room in our house”

In my art practice I have created sculptural scenarios using found objects which are intended to trigger feelings of memory and loss in the viewer. I am applying similar techniques to those used by Doris Salcedo to create sculptural installations which function as memory sculptures. Whereas Salcedo’s works deal with physical loss and death, mine relate to death of a family ideal, brought about by the traumatic and painful divorce of my parents. Through my exhibition I wish to make visible the compulsive need for us to preserve things – even when such acts of preservation are ambivalent or impossible. The artworks are made from found objects and domestic furniture which conjure a family home scenario. The furniture is displayed in such a way that it disturbs normative ideas about the home as a place of safety and refuge. I have done this by manipulating each furniture piece in particular ways and then crystallising it in salt. This conveys the effect of something which is broken or abandoned, and which has been ineffectually mended and preserved.

My intention is that these objects will portray a sense of melancholic stasis by alluding to the intangible loss of an idealised family lifestyle. The idea is to create artworks based on memories of my past that have caused tension in my life – these relate directly to the unfolding of events due to my parents’ divorce. As with Salcedo’s memory sculptures, my ambition is to make something seemingly beautiful convey the ravaging effects of trauma on closer inspection. In part, the ‘beauty’ lies in the whiteness of the exhibition as well as the glistening of the crystals. Salt crystals are seductively beautiful objects but they are chemically destructive, especially in the case of my furniture. The two chairs which are covered in nails suggest the pain that was experienced by separation and the salt relates my attempts to preserve those memories. Yet the salt is slowly eating away the nails and warping the wood, essentially making the objects weak. At the same time, the process of cocooning has given the objects a strange feeling of physical strength. This relates to Huyssen’s description of the human hair joining the tables together as

providing strength in *Unland: The Orphan's Tunic* (1997) while the wood is seemingly weak (2003: 118). In many respects, this reversal in the normal properties of materials evokes the literal reversal of roles in the family dynamic, where the child is expected to take up a position of power before she is supposed to. *Mom and Dad* (2015: Fig.4) consists of a dining room table with two chairs at its longest ends. One of the chairs, titled *Dad* (Fig. 5), is placed at an angle away from the table to suggest that someone has left a conversation. The table is crystallised in a salt solution to suggest preservation as well as the stagnation of the memory. The nails and cotton in places have rusted from the salt solution which speaks of an ambivalent tension between the desire to preserve what was there and the destruction of that memory. It is in these ways that the chairs convey a sense of vulnerability alongside a form of stability; evoking the feelings and process of change that have occurred during the mending process.

There are several parallels between *Unland: The Orphan's Tunic* and my work, as it too speaks of loss and the painstaking methods one goes through to mend psychological wounds, exemplified in the physical action of manipulating the chairs and table. The objects themselves reflect processes of wounding and attempted healing – here the salt links metaphorically to the idea of healing and sterilization, as salt is seen as a home remedy for cleaning and drying out wounds. The table and chair installation thematises my attempts to move away from melancholia by working through my circumstances thus coming to terms with what happened and accepting it.

As with Salcedo's works, my objects may appear benign from a distance but it is again by confronting the objects in close proximity that the viewer can see the destruction of the chairs and how there has been some form of trauma inflicted on them. This is done through the process of hammering nails into the furniture, which is similar to the way in which Salcedo repeatedly ruptured the tables in *Unland: The Orphan's Tunic* to reference trauma. Salcedo's attempts to forge the tables together are not unlike my own, as I too am symbolically mending something that is broken by cocooning the chairs in white cotton. The cocooning process which I have used on the chairs and the table is thus a metaphor for the acceptance of circumstance. The embodied process of laboriously cocooning and salting the objects references a

gradual working-through and acceptance, and this in turn has helped me to engage with the process of mourning in order to move forward.

In *Atrabiliarios* (1992-1993), the indentations left in the shoes enable these mundane objects to function as metaphors for the human body. It is this trace left behind by the body that allows Salcedo to evoke presence despite the absence of the feet which made these indentations. In *Unland: The Orphan's Tunic* Salcedo uses the silk fabric to reference the tunic and the absence of its wearer, as well as human hair. In my work *Dad* (2015: Fig. 5), the cocooning process of the string wrapped around the nails transforms the empty space of the chair into a three dimensional form and it is in this way that I metaphorically allude to the absent body of my father.

When he left (2015: Fig. 6) comprises a wardrobe and suitcase filled with clothing and shoes which have been encrusted with salt. These clothes and shoes carry resonances of the past. They function as traces of the body and can be closely linked to the use of inanimate objects as a metaphor for the absent body. They become unusable as they are now stiff from the encrustation of the salt crystals. The salt, being corrosive, eats away at any metal components on the clothing and makes the cloth rigid – arresting them in time. The objects seem to have literally taken the form of a specific moment frozen in time, acting as a three dimensional photograph. By using familiar items I enable the viewer to identify and relate to the objects. It is in this way that I hope to position him/her as a secondary witnesses to my loss.

In each scenario I have grown the salt crystals in different ways and have manipulated the objects in various ways. In *Mom and Dad*, as discussed above, I chose the process of cocooning with cotton because I felt that the process spoke of the concept of fixing things. In *When he left* (2015), I worked with the very chaos of the separation that is never open to the public but contained behind closed doors. I worked with crystallizing clothes and shoes in salt solution, a process which takes months. The image of my dad being evicted from my house was very painful, and I struggled to come to terms with it. This is why I have chosen to do this scene in absolute disarray, to show the anger and chaos of the separation between parents and the image that a bystander might be exposed to. With this work, I wanted to speak of what it is like to view a separation from the side line, as a witness indirectly involved in the situation but not an

active participant. As I was a child, I was unable to do anything but watch my family fall apart in front of me and this image seems forever frozen in my mind - much like my objects seem arrested in time.

In *Don't come in* (2015: Fig. 7), the work is comprised of a bath tub and sink which have been filled with glass science boilers crystallised in salt. The use of material here comments on the fragility in familial relationships. The glass bubbles suggest the build-up of things unsaid; at the same time they affect the functionality of the bath as you are no longer able to get in without breaking the glass. The glass also begins to evoke the form of a body occupying space, and almost becomes like a skin.

Chapter 2

Trace: engaging with nostalgia, loss and the photograph

In this chapter I will focus on the work made by the South African artist Bridget Baker, *So It Goes* (1996: Fig. 8). This work is of particular intrigue to me as it also engages with motifs of memory and family. I will be unpacking the notions of family connections and how they can serve as a driving force behind inscribing objects with memory. Baker's work is informed by fractured memories of her childhood which she uses as creative inspiration when it comes to making the artwork (Kellner 1999: 135). I will show how the use of familial, autobiographical material induces a feeling of nostalgia. I will begin by discussing the concept of nostalgia, as theorised in various publications. I will also be looking at how photographs are inscribed with memory and trace, through references to Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (1977) and Annette Kuhn, *Family secrets* (1995 and 2002). This theory will elucidate my own series of modified family photographs which I will be discussing in this chapter.

Nostalgia

Nostalgia creates a falsified sense of past that the person in the present wishes to be a reality in the present day (Shaw and Chase 1989: 1). I find that, in the process of remembering and trying to remember our family connections, a form of nostalgia inevitably develops. This longing for an impossible past is common to the works of Bridget Baker as well as my own. In both cases, our works are formulated around ideas of our own families which make the works personal but also enable the inscription of family memories to be attached to certain objects. This is one of the requirements when understanding the development of nostalgia, that there has to be an object that triggers the feeling of longing for an idealised past, and this in turn creates a dissatisfaction with our present (Shaw and Chase 1989: 3-4). These objects of nostalgia are often preserved carefully and the meaning they carry is often ambiguous (Shaw and Chase 1989: 4). Triggers for nostalgia can be as simple as a photograph but almost all objects have the ability to be appropriated nostalgically. I will be applying the concept of nostalgia to the way in which Bridget Baker has selected specific materials and objects which link to memory formation.

So It Goes

Schmahmann (2012: 8) introduces *So It Goes* as follows: “In 1996, South African artist Bridget Baker (b. 1971) completed *So It Goes*, a work comprising of four Vicks Vapour Rub containers which each feature the same photograph”. This work primarily refers to the sudden loss of Baker’s father at the age of five due to a heart attack. The subject matter concerned in *So It Goes* (1996) is one of deeply rooted personal loss. Baker was still a child when her father passed away and during that time children could not attend the funeral. Following her father’s death her mother would not speak of him, and the children never asked about him as a courtesy (Kellner 1999: 135). The only memory she has of him is linked to a single photograph of them swimming together (Kellner 1999: 133). This photograph is the only image that Baker has of her and her father together, hence its use as nostalgic trigger in her work. In each ‘frame’, the image is slowly obscured by the Vicks Vapour Rub which has been layered at varying levels within each tin.

Materials, Time Frame and Memory Connection

The materials used in Baker’s *So It Goes* (1996) are chosen to evoke the notion of family, specifically her family and her experiences. In order for the viewer to fully appreciate the work the viewer has to be able to engage with the materiality and form an attachment to a memory. Baker does this by using objects of familiarity (the Vicks Vapour Rub tins) but goes even further by using an actual document of her personal history, the photograph.

Baker references her past by using a childhood photograph, one which the viewer can relate to through his/her own family photographs even if the subject matter differs. The allusion to childhood is further reinforced through the use of smell (Vicks Vapour Rub) as it is medicine which is associated with being young and vulnerable. Therefore one can associate memory visually in Baker’s work but also through the use of other senses such as smell. By placing the Vicks Vapour Rub tins on the wall Baker is creating initial distance between the viewer and the artwork. As the Vicks Vapour Rub tins are small they demand

closer inspection by the viewer, and this closer inspection allows the viewer time to associate the smell with memory before seeing the images that are submerged in the Vicks Vapour Rub tins.

In So It Goes (1996) there is a gradual layering of Vicks over the images, obscuring their details until the last image becomes obsolete. This shifts the association of memory to the smell of the Vicks rather than the image itself. In Baker's work, the allusion to a nostalgic past is implicit. The repetition of the image suggests unresolved mourning and the gradual obscuring of the photograph under layers of Vicks suggest that the loss remains ill-defined. I find the last Vick's Vapour Rub tin the most interesting because it conveys the idea of erasure and I question whether erasure allows us to find solace. In some ways we re-remember in order to grieve but can we truly overcome the effects of melancholic loss? I will be discussing this further in relation to the photograph as trace of a seemingly inaccessible past. The dual nature of the photograph as conjuring both presence and absence is important when interrogating its relationship to nostalgia and melancholy.

Photography

As Annette Kuhn (1995: 42) argues,

On the surface, the family photograph function primarily as a record: it stands as visible evidence that this family exists, that its members have gone through the passages conventionally produced in the family album as properly and necessarily familial... The photograph's seizing of a moment always, at that every moment, assumes loss. The record looks towards a future time when things will be different, anticipates a need to remember what will soon be past.

When looking at photographs in terms of memory we are primarily focusing on the acts of tracing and erasure, where the moment the documentary image speaks of is in the past. This links back to the notion of nostalgia as photographs comment on an inherent past that is irretrievable and in some senses can be viewed as idealistic. Family photographs often document moments that we wish to remember but through their existence they arguably destroy links to the past as they do not record all the subtleties and nuances of a moment. Kuhn (1995: 4) writes that,

The past is gone forever. We cannot return to it nor can we reclaim it now as it was. But that does not mean that it is lost to us. The past is like a scene of a crime: if the deed itself is irrecoverable,

its traces may still remain. From these traces, markers that point towards the past presence, to something that has happened in its place, (re) construction, if not a simulacrum, of the event can be pieced back together.

What Kuhn suggests is that, through photography, there is a partial, if ungratifying, access to the past.

The photograph can be seen as an object that stands for the absence of presence, it represents a person or place arrested at a particular time and space. At the same time, because of its status as document, the photograph pulls the past into the present, giving the photographed person or place a type of immortality. In Hirsh's writings on photography there is a relation posited between photography, death and loss, as the photograph once taken immediately creates a sense of pastness which imbues the photograph with absence (2002: 20). Moreover, the photograph will never be read in the exact context that it was taken as the viewer always sees it belatedly.

Photographs can be seen to act as a time-capsule where the people in them do not alter or change within the image. Sontag describes this through the words "embalmed in a still" (1977: 70), creating the sense that a photograph can begin to act like a death mask. The photograph can also link to the idea of preservation as it is a method of recording/documenting moments which pass – our link to history, culture and tradition (Sontag 1977: 56). Through the photograph we have created an extension/access to specific moments in time with a visual reference which helps in the re-formulation of information.

The image used in Baker's *So It Goes* (1996) is one that is heavily weighted with death – we know this from Baker's interview with Kellner when she describes that this is the last image she has of her and her father together before he died. The photograph plays a role in the act of time-capsuling an event as a means of tangible storage for our memories. If the photograph is looked after, the image itself is likely to outlive the people within it – as well as the fallibility of memory. It acts as a link to real events in the sense that it has frozen a specific moment that actually happened – this is more reassuring than memory as we know that memories can be distorted/re-constructed (Kuhn 2002: 20). At the same time, we can see that photography is open to interpretation as there is not necessarily a sub-text available – it is therefore open ended. The image itself can act as a trigger for memory or the creation of such because it functions

as 'evidence'. Although Baker doesn't have any memories of her father, as he died when she was very young, she is still able to use the photograph to access her shadowy past. The image allows her to re-construct the memory of him as there is a replica of him frozen in time. It relays to her what he looked like, his age and, in the essence of the image, the emotional connection they shared.

In *So It Goes* (1996), Baker subsumes the image of her and her father under successive layers of Vicks Vapour Rub. The smell of Vicks implicitly evokes a different memory to the one conjured by the photograph - that of a vulnerable sick child being cared for by a parent. This is contrasted with the image's allusion to a joyful and carefree moment swimming. There is something disturbing about the idea of happiness immersed within a smell which connotes sickness, the smell disrupts/disturbs the normative scene of the image and leaves one with an uneasy feeling. This unease is exacerbated by the disappearance of the image beneath the cloudy layers of Vicks Vapour Rub. This suggests a process of gradual forgetting and further loss. Normally nostalgic objects are preserved in pristine condition so that we may always refer back to them, but Baker has put the object of nostalgia under erasure.

Through Baker's process of layering over and erasing the image the nostalgic object is symbolically destroyed but its melancholy hold over memory persists, implicit in the lingering smell of Vicks and its association with illness. Similarly, repeated references to her father in other works suggest that Baker is constantly revisiting her memories in order to process the loss of her father. Baker deploys objects which relate to her father, in *Puncturable* (1995) and *Inflatable* (1995) (where she uses arm bands) and in *First International Exhibition* (1997) (where she uses her father's type writer). This constant revisiting of the image of her father seems to evoke an underlying feeling of melancholy. This links strongly with the function of the photograph, which nostalgically fixes the past and yet keeps it out of reach.

In this sense, Baker's immersion of the photograph hints at its ambivalent status as a ghostly remainder that 'haunts' the present. As articulated by Hirsh (2002: 20),

Photography's relation to loss and death is not to mediate the process of individual and collective memory but to bring the past back in the form of a ghostly revenant, emphasizing, at the same time, its immutable and irreversible pastness and irretrievability.

It is through Hirsh's statement that we can begin to theorise the photograph as a physical entity that impedes the process of mourning, therefore creating the onset of melancholy. This is because of its ability to exist between time zones. It becomes past as soon as it is taken, arresting a moment we cannot go back to even if it were mere seconds ago. Yet it exists in the present, creating a lingering attachment to a past that is nostalgic. It is believable as a form of documentation that visually records a moment. But this moment is often posed/staged – especially in the case of a family photograph – which means it is circumscribed to look a certain way. The photograph holds no written information either, so what one is presented with is a document that does not actually capture the moment it recorded. This feeds the impetus towards nostalgia as it opens up a space for idealisation. It also induces melancholia because of its ability to exist between past and present. We take images to record the past but the photograph impedes our actual ability to remember and to forget. It inserts itself as a stand-in for memory which we then frame and preserve. It is not something which we can easily throw away or let go of. As Hirsh notes, the photograph haunts us melancholically. In this sense, Baker's use of layers to make the image disappear could be seen as an attempt to undo the melancholic hold of the photograph. Yet even this act of symbolic destruction is ambivalent as it cannot eradicate the nostalgia evoked by the photographic trace.

In my work *It's in our blood* (2015, Fig. 9), I am addressing very similar concerns related to the trace. The work consists of a series of framed family photographs, spanning several generations that I have obscured under layers of salt solution. My exposure to these photographs first began when I was young; they were always hanging on our wall at home and for the most part terrified me. The photographs were in black and white, in old wooden frames. They depicted people I didn't know, the only thing I did know is that they were family and therefore I tolerated their existence. Yet although I knew they were family there was no meaningful connection to them for me – they came from a time when I did not exist and from a country I did not know. For *It's in our blood* I selected only our family wedding photographs as my exhibition addresses the disruption of this normative ideal. Kuhn (2002: 56) notes that family photographs are generally staged and the participants are invariably posed. Hence there is a lot of

underlying information that is not revealed beneath the surface of these seemingly happy photos (1995: 42). The ‘relatives’ photographed here are not people I know so I am looking at them through the eyes of an outsider, in much the same way that I experienced my parents’ divorce as a bystander – even though it affected me deeply.

The wedding photographs I have used were collected from my mom and my gran (my dad’s mom) so involve both sides of my family. What I found interesting when sifting through these images and hearing from my gran was that ninety percent of the unions depicted had ended in divorce or death and therefore some images are of first or second marriages. This disillusionment is interesting, as the construct of ‘happily ever after’ is an idealisation re-enforced by the supposed fixity of the photograph, which can be further underscored through the idealisation of the viewer. Kuhn asserts that (2002: 154):

... Photographs may ‘speak’ silence, absence, and contradiction as much as, indeed more than, presence, truth or authenticity; and that while in the production of memory photographs might often repress this knowledge, they can also be used as a means of questioning identities and memories and of generating new ones.

What Kuhn reiterates here is the duplicity of the photograph which cannot be taken for granted as uncontested ‘proof’, or read at face value as providing evidence of attributes such as enduring love. Hearing from my gran highlighted the status of the photograph as a partial record, as she was struggling to link names, times and places to these images. This was my only insight to the context behind these family events and seeing my gran’s struggle to remember made me realise that the information I have at my disposal is incomplete and flawed. Kuhn suggests that information linked to the past is often, “forgotten, mis-remembered, [and] repressed” and as such, memory is often distorted (2002: 155). In many respects, I am re-constructing family ties and links with information that itself is fragmented. This fractured information ties into the concept of divorce, as well as the sense of an irreconcilable fracture between the idealised past (nostalgically remembered as a time of familial harmony) and the disillusioned present.

To produce *It's in our blood*, I manipulated images by crystallizing the picture frames and glass in salt. The process I used here was to cover the frames in a fine mist of salt solution. Over time the continuous spraying and drying creates crystals and through the layers obscures the images, almost rendering them obsolete. This is similar to the process Bridget Baker uses in *So It Goes* (1996), where she uses the layering of the Vicks Vapour Rub to obscure and eliminate the image. Like Baker, I am commenting on the process of fading memory. I am also alluding to the irrelevance of these images due to numerous splits that rendered the marriages depicted obsolete. The suggestion here is that divorce fractures not just direct family but generational family too. In this aspect family photos become as Hirsh stated “ghostly revenants” (2002: 22), where we are haunted by the links we can draw from them. In my case, the photographs convey loss because I do not know who these people are. In addition, some of the images link strongly to motifs of untimely death and divorce. In two of the family photographs of my grandparents there is only one person still alive to this day. Both my grandpas died in my early teens and my mom’s mom died a year and three days before I was born. My grandpa on my dad’s side died of lung cancer and my mom’s dad died of septicaemia – things that one would deem avoidable causes of death. My gran committed suicide, which was a tragic event for my mom – the weight this image carries for me is the sadness my mom will never be able to let go of.

These images therefore link back to Freud’s notion of melancholia as an unresolved or incomplete loss, where the lost object/person continues to haunt the present through the traces left behind. Looking at these images also reflects the constant battle I am going through – the idea of pre-destination and fear that I will inevitably end up this way as it is *in my blood*. The family photographs of the past crusted with salt over time speak of faded memories and faded hopes. This is the end of the experience of divorce; the memories as a family begin to fade as well as the belief in marriage. At the same time, the use of salt functions ambivalently – on the one hand obscuring the images and rendering them obsolete, and on the other hand suggesting a nostalgic desire for preservation. In many ways this mirrors my own ambivalence and my own inability to let go of a past that I cannot fully grasp.

Whether I am mourning the loss of my family ideal or whether the ideal is just a nostalgic projection of a past that never was is undistinguishable to me. As such, the loss remains unresolved. This is highlighted in Freud's differentiation between mourning and melancholia: when one has accepted what one has lost, one is able to grieve and move on, whereas melancholy develops when there is an unresolved loss - where one has not realised what they have lost and therefore develops a melancholic inhibition (Freud 1917e [1915]: 245). Images of the past thus trigger a sense of stagnation – a reluctance to move forward or let go.

When looking at the use of objects in *So It Goes* (1996) and *It's in our blood* (2015), the links between photography, trauma and materiality are evident. Baker achieves this by placing a family picture in proximity to a familiar smell which stimulates memory recall. In my work I have used the repetition of family wedding photographs to transport an event from the past to present. The repetition of these images underscores the construct of marriage, and in my case, the seeming inevitability of divorce.

Another interesting correlation between my work and Baker's is the use of other senses such as smell. Baker uses the evocative smell of Vicks Vapour Rub and I am making use of salt, which infuses the air with a particular but subtle taste and scent. This hints to concepts of preservation and destruction but also alludes to the family holiday home which we shared by the sea side. Similar to Baker, I too want to create an environment which is experiential. It is for this reason that I have chosen, as my exhibition venue, a space which speaks of storage and forgetting – a physical space which relays what the photograph is trying to achieve in a physical form. The use of the warehouse in my exhibition is crucial as the space is essentially a non-place - a receptacle for that which we no longer need, but cannot let go of.

Conclusion

In my exhibition I have created works which are centred on nostalgia, loss and mourning - as well as my ambivalent relation to the past. The cocooning of some of the objects and crystallising of them in salt alludes to the tension between preservation and destruction that characterises my memories. In some of my works the use of thread and nails are quite prevalent as a means to symbolically injure and heal the furniture, thus suggesting the processes one experiences in order to move past a traumatic event. In this sense, I use process as a means of self-reflection, to come to terms with a situation that has become obscure to me. However, I also realise that the process of working through my loss and letting go of the past is frustrated by my nostalgic attachments to the idealised notion of the family we once were. There is a strange ambivalence that I harbour towards my memories – which point to a re-constructed idealisation of family on the one hand and to the truth of the actual events on the other hand. I have found it particularly difficult to realise what exactly I have lost: is it the family ideal (so readily reconstructed from photographs depicting a seemingly happy family), the actual family dynamic as it really was, or the idea of marriage itself?

Through working with my objects and family photographs, I have come to realise that there is an underlying feeling that I do not actually want to remember the past as it was. I struggle to come to terms with what happened partly because the re-creation of my memories seem so happy. This nostalgic longing for an impossible past translates into melancholy as I am not ready to let go – or in a sense not allowing myself to let go. At the same time, my desire to arrest and preserve the past in memory (in much the same way that photographs arrest their sitters) is also proving impossible.

In many respects, these two conflicting desires – to hold on and to let go – are manifested in my works, as an exploration of time/time based process. The materials and techniques I have used for this exhibition invoke time and temporality, and the unpredictability of process, in different ways. In *Mom and Dad* (2015), I experienced most of my ambivalence and frustrations. At first I had significant reservations about destroying the beautiful antique furniture by drilling and inserting nails into it. I see this as linked to the inertia of nostalgia, and the desire to preserve the past ‘just so’. My fear was that intervening in and

working with this memory object would render it obsolete. This apprehension to begin epitomised my melancholic longing for an idealised past and my inability to let go (Freud 1939 [1917]: 145). Yet I also realised that I had to make a start somewhere, and once I began to symbolically destroy the furniture it seemed easy to continue.

Thereafter the process of making the work entailed many setbacks, obstacles and re-workings, which also characterises the mourning process. Every time I hammered one nail in another would pop out compelling me to drill the holes deeper or hammer the nails harder. It seemed at every point in making *Mom and Dad* that my materials were fighting against me. When the chairs were finally covered in nails I was able to begin my cocooning process but after hours of threading and knotting my hands began to bleed and the process became quite painful. I look at these moments in retrospect and feel that there was significance in the literal pain involved in making my work, as this process allowed me to confront what my mind had suppressed all this time – my inability to mourn properly.

It was only when I tried to crystallise the chairs in a salt solution that I could truly appreciate the nature of my materiality and why working with salt is so fitting for this exhibition. The crystallisation process was both rewarding and soul destroying, as I was constantly trying to manipulate a material that I had very little control over. It would take months of repeatedly spraying the solution to build up tiny layers of crystals. I found satisfaction in watching them grow and grasping control of the medium. Yet all it took was a shift in weather patterns for everything I had laboured over for months to be destroyed. The crystals could literally de-crystallise in days, rendering all my hard work obsolete. It seemed as if the process of expressing loss had its own ways of working itself back to the melancholy beginning. Eventually I realised that my work needed time, time to grow and develop. I had to give the crystals a chance to grow as well as de-crystallise and grow again slowly, finding ways of preventing the rapid rate of de-crystallisation. The most important aspect of this was once the crystals had grown bigger they lasted much longer. The crystals in a sense had a life of their own and I liken this to my process of mourning. I discovered that, to process things, I first had to let go of my desire to control both past memories and future outcomes.

Through the process of engaging with memory sculpture as formulated by Huyssen, I came to better understand what is involved in making work about trauma that is relatable to the viewer. I feel that my work would not have been justified if there was no time and labour-intensive process involved as it is an exhibition which speaks of time and through time. As Huyssen says in relation to Salcedo's works:

The work is not simply there as object *in* the present, even though it is very much *of* the present. It leads the viewer back to some other time and space that is absent, yet subtly inscribed into the work: Celan's "strange lostness" that is "palpably present" (2003: 115).

Here Huyssen describes the viewer's process of reading the work as a journey – something that takes time. The viewer gradually attaches his/her own memories to the work which creates a doorway for the past to exist in the present. By extension, it is necessary that a visible element of time taken to make the work is evident.

By continuously working and reworking my objects, I learnt various ways of dealing with materials in order to make something seem beautiful when its subject matter is contradictive of such – the medium of salt was the key element to this. The salt is quite monochromatic yet has a subtle gleam and is prone to shift in colour in areas of rust and decay. I used everyday objects that related specifically to my subject matter, as Salcedo has done in *Atrabiliarios* (1992-1993) and *Unland: The Orphan's Tunic* (1997), and shifted them through my use of materiality, as Baker has done in *So It Goes*.

Like Baker, I also engaged with the family photograph in the work *It's in our blood* (2015). It was here that I began to grasp my ambivalent position in relation to my subject matter. The plethora of family wedding photographs that had ended in divorce or un-timely death was initially overwhelming, even though I didn't really know who these people were. I found that, after sifting through and hearing their stories, I was actually not sure what I was grieving – the loss of an idealised notion of family; the loss of a nostalgic construct of marriage as a lasting and permanent union; or the loss of family as a result of divorce. It became more and more prevalent that my materials were fighting my attempts to manipulate them not because I was making an exhibition that had resolution but because I was making one that did not. Through my repetitious process, I realised that the exhibition I am presenting for my Master's degree

is a snapshot of arrested time – which, like the photograph, is only a partial view of a larger narrative. The photograph creates an illusion of fixity and permanence that cannot be sustained. In this sense, the entire exhibition seems to fluctuate between preservation and destruction, the desire to hold on and the desire to let go, trapped in a melancholic limbo.

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Illustrations



Figure: 1



Figure: 2



Figure: 3



Figure: 3.1 (detail)



Figure: 4



Figure: 4.1 (detail of “Mom and Dad”)



Figure: 5



Figure: 6



Figure: 7



Figure: 7.1 (detail of bath)



Figure: 7.2 (detail of sink)

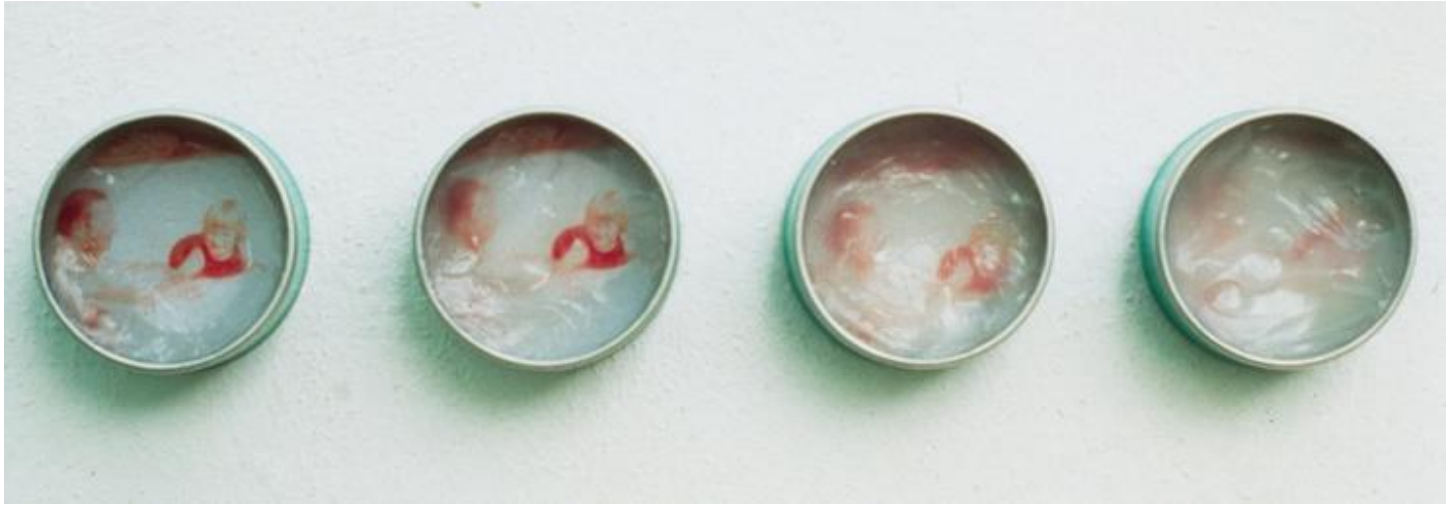


Figure 8



Figure 8.1 (detail)



Figure: 9



Figure: 9.1 (detail of photographs)