

Not part of sale

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Documents submitted to the Faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of the Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Art

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I make portraiture both with people and without people. I think portraiture could be anything. If the picture represents the expression, personality, and mood of the subject, I believe it is a portrait. I'm really interested in human beings. I am inspired by an African saying, "The earth is a beehive; we all enter by the same door but live in different cells." I understand this quote in terms of a neighborhood; the houses may all look alike but inside their homes people live out very different lives.

One of my main interests is trying to explore what choices we human beings make in our lives and how those choices help determine who we are. Based on the history of portraiture, most people would think a portrait means a picture of a person's face or body. However, in my point of view, personal belongings such as clothes, ornaments, furniture and so on are just as important if not more important in conveying the expression, personality, and mood of the subject. For example, in my experience in South Korea my family and other families that I knew did not hang many decorations, photographs, or paintings on their walls. During my time in the United States, however, I have noticed that such decorations are more common. In my art, I wish to investigate some of the larger social and cultural motivations for differences such as these in the ways that people collect and use objects. We don't choose our physical appearance but we do choose where we live, how we live, what things and possessions we live with. This is why I explore the human being by photographing their homes.

I document the specific homes in which someone has lived at least 20 years. Since I was 20 years old, I have moved apartments once a year and my belongings like my furniture reflect this. I buy very little furniture because I know I will move again soon. So, I am interested in long-term homes that people have furnished with items meant to

last for years because I think their home represents their history. We can imagine how many people have lived in a house by its number of rooms, chairs, or beds. The place keeps telling a family's story through their possessions. Initially, this project began from my first experience with estate sales. I thought that these sales were like yard sales, where someone sells off a few of their extra or unwanted possessions. However, once I got there, I realized in this area of North Carolina almost all sales happen because somebody has died and their family wants to sell everything in the house—sometimes even very personal items like framed family photographs. For example, in *For Sale #6*, you can see the wigs on the bed, decorative handkerchiefs, and used wallets and watches on display. These items are so personal that they seem to tell us about their owner: the watches and wallets are numerous and look expensive, the silky handkerchiefs come in many colors to match many different suits and with the many wigs would allow him to adopt many looks. Yet they are all for sale. Whenever I go to an estate sale, I feel melancholy while seeing someone's items because this is all that still remains of that person's life but it is all sold to strangers.

At an estate sale, professional estate agents decide the material value of each item and mark it with a price tag. When someone wants to buy something, they rip the bottom half of the tag off and take this ticket to the agent, pay them the price, and then go retrieve the object. I see emptiness in this transaction. These are objects that could have been priceless to their former owner. So when price tags are placed on these private belongings, the real values of those objects are lost. I believe that the collection of items at the estate sales represents a person's life through their favorite books, dolls, hobby, and so on. So I take portraits without people at these sales.

Still, after everything has been sold, the place keeps telling us their story in other ways.

We can see the trace of times through a mark, a stain, a track in the carpet and so on.

In my work, I would like to capture moments that tell us something about how human beings determine their lives and how those choices help determine who we are.

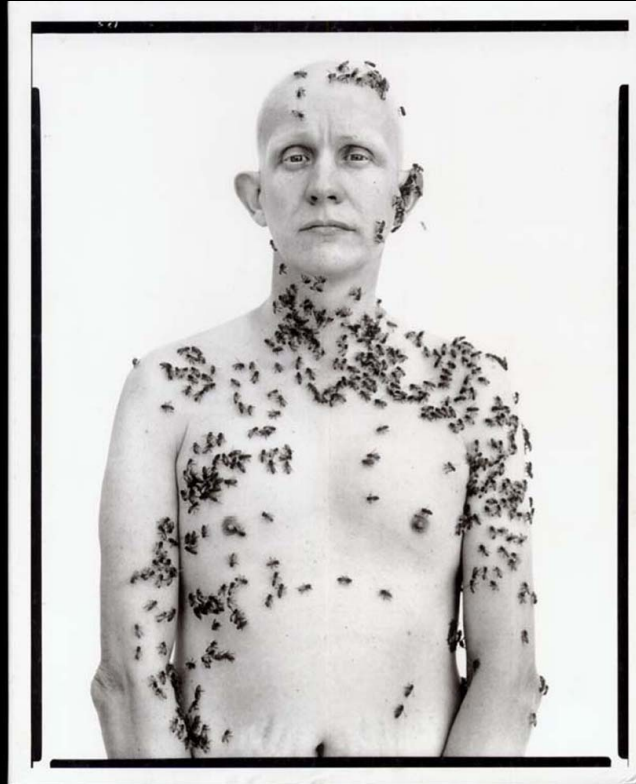
“After it was over,”

MINJIN KANG

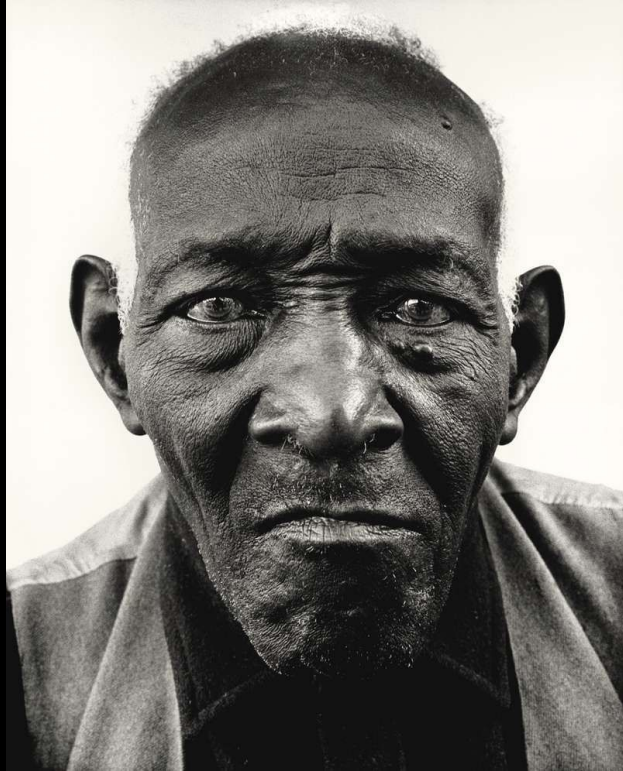
Lewis Hine said, "If I could tell the story in words, I wouldn't need to lug around a camera."



"Grandfather", 2009



Richard Avedon "Ronald Fishcher" (1981)



William Casby, 1963





"Untitled", 2010





"Ham Radio", 2012/13







"Invisible", 2013

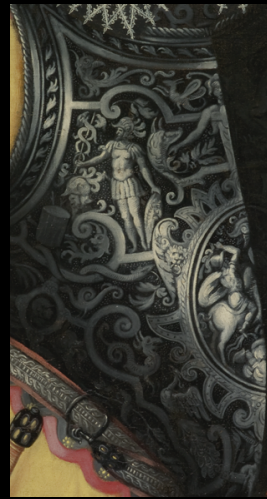








Unknown British Colonel George Goring





“Not part of sale”, 2013/2014







Jeff Wall 'Invisible Man'



Jeff Wall *"The Destroyed Room"*



"Not part of sale", 2013/2014







"After it was over," 2013



Not part of sale, installation shots, 2014



Not part of sale, installation shots, 2014, Dye sublimation on aluminum





