

Condemned to a Perpetual Jacuzzi... With Millions of Your Best Friends

An exhibition of painting, performance, and video

by

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## **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## **Abstract**

*Condemned to a Perpetual Jacuzzi... With Millions of Your Best friends* is a multi-media exhibition that investigates the personal, the socio-political and the cultural notions of home. The mind's vision of home is most often held as an idealized place – the location where meanings and attachments are personal and symbolically intense. Forms of utopian thinking are embedded as the very cornerstone of what the home represents, especially in contemporary media iterations of the home. My work grapples with the lived experience and materiality of the home by redrafting the imagery presented in Interior Design and Architectural publications. Through collage, painting, video and performance to camera I subvert the structured and predictable media's language of desire by creating unusual viewing. At first glance, my work appears "homey", as the magazine source material is evident, but as details register and accumulate, it becomes apparent that there is a tension between comfort and discomfort in the images. There is disruption and unpredictability in these inaccessible, aspirational spaces. You wouldn't actually want to live there even though it feels like you might.

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## Table of Contents

List of Figures	vi
There's No Place Like Home	1
A Rigid Shell, Enveloping Some Non-Descript Contents	3
Formed And Deformed By An Industry Known Simply as "Hollywood"	5
<i>Successive Transformations that Mock the Word Plan<sup>1</sup></i>	8
Intrusions Into The Home	10
<i>A Stranglehold of Seduction</i>	12
We Could Be Nomads In Our Own Homes	14
<i>The Last Spasm of Etiquette</i>	15
<i>Disorientation by Any Means (Mirror, Polish, Echo)</i>	17
<i>The Allure of Improvement</i>	19
<i>An Interior So Extensive That You Barely Perceive Its Limits</i>	20
References	21

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that all of the italicized subtitles, as well as the thesis exhibition title itself, are quotes from Rem Koolhaas, "Junkspace." (*October* vol. 100: 2002).

## List of Figures

Fig. 1 Kayla Witt, <i>Arrested Development</i> , single channel video, 7:00, 2019	3
Fig. 2 Kayla Witt, <i>Everybody Will Be Talking</i> , video stills, single channel video, 8:54, 2019	5
Fig. 3 Kayla Witt, digital collages, 2019	7
Fig. 4 Kayla Witt, <i>An Unhomely Uncanny</i> , digital collage, 2020	10
Fig. 5 Kayla Witt, <i>Selling Sunset</i> , acrylic and oil on canvas, 2020	12
Fig. 6 Kayla Witt, <i>Selling Sunset</i> details, acrylic and oil on canvas, 2020	13
Fig. 7 Kayla Witt, <i>A Well Ventilated Utopia</i> , digital collage, 2020	14
Fig. 8 Kayla Witt, <i>Soon The Walls Will Be Unnecessary</i> , digital collage, 2020	16
Fig. 9 Kayla Witt, <i>A Fantasy Unfulfilled</i> , acrylic and oil on canvas, 2020	17
Fig. 10 Kayla Witt, <i>A Fantasy Unfulfilled</i> details, acrylic and oil on canvas, 2020	18

## **There's No Place Like Home**

Human geographer and poet T. Cresswell defines place as a combination of location, locale and sense of place. Cresswell describes, "location as the where of the place, an absolute point in place with a specific set of coordinates and measurable distances from other locations. Locale refers to the material setting for social relations – the way a place looks. Sense of place refers more to the meanings associated with a place, the feelings and emotions a place evokes. These meanings can be individual and based on personal biography, or they can be shared. Shared senses of place are based on mediation and representation."<sup>2</sup> My particular interest in place lies in the place of the home. The home is an ideal kind of place – the location where meanings and attachments are most intense. The historical and theoretical study of home is complex because of the difficulties in defining its boundaries, its organizational type, its physical features, its participants and their experiences.<sup>3</sup> The term home means different things to different people, cultures and continents, and as such it is hard to define. I examine the place of the home through my individual personal biography, as well as a shared sense of place as defined by specific socio-political and cultural notions that are closely tied with Western ways of life.

Forms of utopian thinking are embedded as the very cornerstone of what the home represents. In an ideal world, home is where we feel safe, secure, and loved – a symbol of universal attachment<sup>4</sup>. However, these conditions can exist simultaneously with, or be dominated by, change, transition, discomfort, stress and trauma. The home is not transhistorical, or remarkably stable. The home is not definitively familial, it does not correspond to an architectural type, but instead relates to the oscillating sensations of attachment and detachment, comfort and alienation that accompany a subject's feelings of their built environments.<sup>5</sup> In spite of its apparent permanency, and presumed security and privacy within the imagination, in reality the experience of home is characterized by change.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, I believe the home should be understood as a verb or a process characterized by change, transitions, transformations and reorganizations – rather than a fixed, known site.

Social scientist and geographer Doreen Massey says that places are constituted by mobility (the movement of people, commodities, and ideas).<sup>7</sup> The home is defined by a number of conditions, a system of sorts that engages with elements of culture that are typically understood to be in the realm of the public sphere (such as politics,

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<sup>2</sup> T. Cresswell, "Place" (*International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*: 2009), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Tony Chapman, "There's No Place Like Home" (*Theory, Culture & Society*: 2001), 136.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Amy Tobin, *Homesickness* (*Oxford Art Journal*: 2017), 201.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> T. Cresswell, "Place" (*International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*: 2009), 6.

economics, and labour). Further, the home is a union of commodity and space. Objects, furniture, and décor all work together in a display of taste. Our choices demonstrate culture and an alignment with a particular class or community. The increasingly mediated reality of our late stage capitalist age permeates our homes and our culture at large. Home is the center of everything because people are cocooning, spending more time indoors with their entertainment centers, smart homes, Amazon, the Internet and social media. Styles go in and out of fashion so quickly that it becomes impossible to identify oneself with any of them. Because one must constantly be refreshing one's wardrobe, redecorating one's home, rewriting one's lexicon, this extreme transience creates a profound alienation between the subject and culture.<sup>8</sup> In *Place & Placelessness*, Edward Relph argues that places have become placeless because of mass production, the mobile world, and the 'Disneyfied and museumfied' places that are fake copies. It is impossible to be an insider in a mass-produced housing estate, and impossible to make significant attachments to place if we move about too much and never stop creating roots.<sup>9</sup> Even those who have not moved locations frequently can feel increasingly estranged from their own sense of place, and their sense of belonging.

In order to investigate the home, I give consideration to phenomena occurring within both the public and private spheres. Through painting, video, and performance to camera, I push against idealized and generalized domestic imaginaries<sup>10</sup> to grapple with the lived experience and materiality of the home. The idealized and generalized conceptions of the home are in part defined by mediation and representation, and thus the source material for exploration in my work comes from media representations of the home in interior design and architecture books and magazines, as well as Pinterest.

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<sup>8</sup> Karen Rustad, *The Economics of Beauty in "The Painter of Modern Life" and Pattern Recognition*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> T. Cresswell, "Place" (*International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*: 2009), 6.

<sup>10</sup> By this I am referring to the presumed general and idealized notions of home as safe, secure, stable, private and independent from the private sphere.



## A Rigid Shell, Enveloping Some Non-Descript Contents

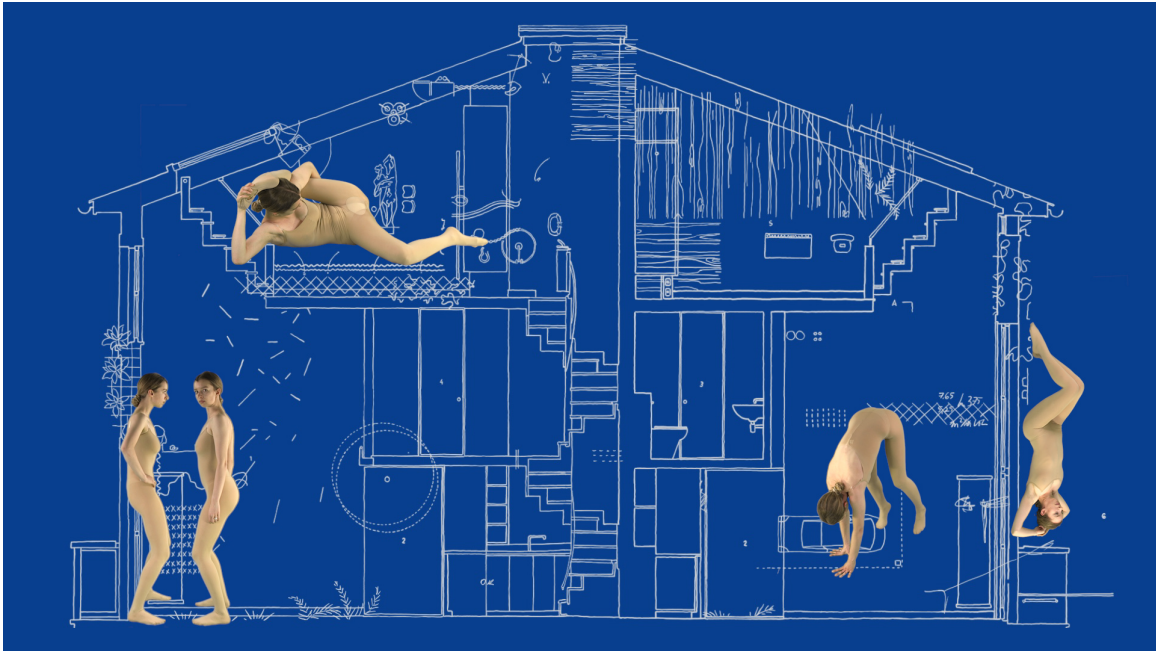


Fig. 1 Kayla Witt, *Arrested Development*, video still, single channel video, 7:00, 2019

In my video *Arrested Development*, my collaged bodies writhe around on an implausible architectural blueprint drawing of a home. The bodies exercise various unproductive, and repetitive gestures that appear to have no practical end goal. The architectural blueprint symbolizes a home that is not yet fully realized, under a process of development, a space in transition that must undergo labour for its evolution. While there are transformations in the background to reflect movement within the home, the outlined contours of cars moving in and out of the space for example, the background remains an architectural blueprint for the duration of the video, suggesting an inaccessibility of fulfillment. Arrested development. The actions of the bodies mirror this sentiment, as they pursue an anxious, psychological absurdity that has no function, leads nowhere, and accomplishes nothing.

In *Place*, T. Cresswell makes a connection between the social construction of place and bodily action, “Place is produced by action, and action produces place through a constant reiterative process that is both individual and social. Places are practiced, people do things in place and what they do is in part responsible for the meanings that place may have. In this sense, materiality, practice and meaning are all linked. The material topography of place is made by people doing things according to the meanings they might wish a place to evoke. Meanings gain a measure of persistence when they are inscribed into the material landscape, but are open to contestation by practices

that do not conform to the expectations that come with place. Practices often do conform to some sense of what's appropriate in a particular place and are limited by the affordances particular material structures offer."<sup>11</sup> In *Arrested Development*, the repetition or looping of actions implies dissatisfaction with the mundane, and a general boredom of the domestic economy, rather than willful acts of personality. Repetition is a deconstructive device, used to reveal the basic composition of the everyday and expose its flaws. The bizarre quality of my bodies' actions does not conform to some sense of what is appropriate behavior within the space of the home. There does not seem to be a landscape of logic transpiring within the space.

I wear a bodysuit as a means of defamiliarizing my body on the screen. The bodysuit produces a flattening effect that makes my body appear simultaneously both real and unreal. The scale and perspective of my body does not fit accurately within the home. Some bodies span multiple rooms, while others appear to defy gravity, blatantly disregarding the boundaries or thresholds outlined by the blueprint. In this sense, the body is not limited by the affordances of the material structure of the home. However, the inaccurate scale and perspective of the body suggests an inability to be integrated into the space, rather the body is 'out of place'. The body skirts a line between presence and absence, integration and fragmentation, or arrival and departure. It's a staging of appearance as disappearance. The treatment of my body's appearance, scale and perspective, speak to the exclusionary nature, both physically and existentially, of the home. Much like the body within the video, the contemporary home gains its identity from the oscillation between arrival and departure, or integration and fragmentation.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> T. Cresswell, "Place" (*International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*: 2009), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Nikos Papastergiadis, "Everything that Surrounds: Art, Politics and the Theories of the Everyday," in *The Everyday: Documents of Contemporary Art* (The MIT Press, 2008), 72.

## Formed And Deformed By An Industry Known Simply as “Hollywood”

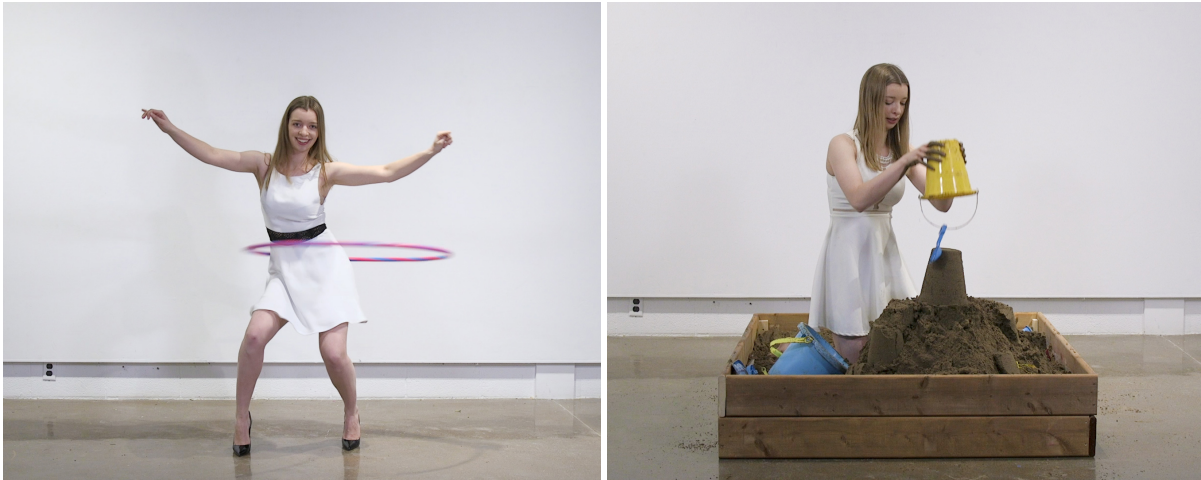


Fig. 2 Kayla Witt, *Everybody Will Be Talking*, video stills, single channel video, 8:54, 2019

As noted in the Introduction, the home is a system that engages with elements of culture that are typically understood in the realm of the public sphere. In this sense, the home registers emotion as it pertains to collective, social being. In my performance video *Everybody Will Be Talking*, I refuse a fetishization of the home as a retreat from the public sphere and its politics. While I do not explicitly reference the materiality of the home, the underlying ideas within the performances relate to themes of labour, repetition, and futility, which underscore much of my work about home. The video is constructed by a series of separate yet connected performances for the camera, moving from one performance to the next until it eventually loops back to the first performance. Within each performance there is presence of repetition, be it hula-hooping or walking in circles wearing five-inch heels on grass while trying to maintain my balance despite the pain of blisters. In another performance I attempt to build a sand castle, however, the fragility of the sand renders the castle in constant need of reconstruction. Here, the castle represents aspirations toward a particular lifestyle and a desire of permanence, though the castle continuously crumbles, suggesting an inaccessibility of fulfillment. The sand castle is always under a process of development, much like the home. In another performance, I fail to get comfortable within a kiddie pool that cannot fit my adult body. Here, I continuously change positions trying to ‘fit in,’ but the physical limitations of the pool make it difficult to get comfortable; rather my body is ‘out of place.’ These performances enact metaphors of aspiring towards a comfortable and secure life, the labour that entails, and the frustration of failing repetitively. This work considers emotion as it pertains to collective, social being, which is relevant to my exploration of the home. It is important to

consider relations among different forms of dailiness, including politics, culture, economic status, and media, and how these relations can engage with the home to inform one's sense of place.

In my work I often use popular culture, which bridges politics, culture and media, as a springboard for further investigations into the home. My particular interest in popular culture media lies in the magazine, as the magazine reveals significant cultural conditions. Women's magazines have historically focused on domestic commodities and step-by-step behaviors needed to use them, restructuring the everyday in a way that quantified work and leisure. Now, magazines tell us what's hot and what's not. They can open minds, kill time, sell both schlock and sublimity, dictate taste, create consensus, and use and abuse power to change the world.<sup>13</sup> Magazines as cultural phenomena are unique in that once they are read they can "linger" in the space of the home. A magazine can "sit" on a side table as a constant reminder of their content and messaging, unlike digital media that is ephemeral and fleeting.

In keeping with my research of the domestic interior, I began collecting interior design and architecture magazines and books. These media have the power to create meanings surrounding the home. Meanings associated with places are likely assigned to place by people with the power to do so – the people who inscribe text onto the material fabric of place.<sup>14</sup> Interior design and architecture publications have the power to harness utopian thinking to sell ideas of home in a particular way. The homes portrayed are inscribed with aspirations towards upper-middle class aesthetics and notions of respectability. We usually treat magazine texts, editorial images, and advertisements as independent entities, but it's a product whose value is derived from the collection of material.<sup>15</sup> The collection of materials within are affective in the way they influence the psyche to desire a particular lifestyle. Desire is embedded into the images, rather, a semiotics of inaccessible desire. A longing for the unattainable. I began scanning images from my collections of books and magazines, as well as additional images from Pinterest under the tag "dream home,"<sup>16</sup> and using the images to create digital collages in Photoshop. By collaging the scanned magazine images of interiors, I create a conception of the home that is not static and finished but open to physical manipulation and alteration.

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<sup>13</sup> Barbara Kruger, "Word Up!" in *The Magazine: Documents of Contemporary Art* (The MIT Press, 2016), 111.

<sup>14</sup> T. Cresswell, "Place" (*International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*: 2009), 5.

<sup>15</sup> Sally Stein, "The Graphic Ordering of Desire: Modernization of a Middle-Class Women's Magazine," in *The Magazine: Documents of Contemporary Art* (The MIT Press, 2016), 104.

<sup>16</sup> Pinterest is particularly interesting as the grid of repetitive similar images reflect mass response and mass obsession.

Collage is a hybrid language, feeding on diverse elements that must be viewed in relation to one another. Collage is not committed to autonomous objects, but instead to the unusual relationships formed between elements. Through the process of collage, I aim to subvert the magazine's language of desire by creating unusual viewing disruptions in these inaccessible, aspirational spaces. At first glance, the collages present themselves as homey spaces and their magazine source material is evident, but as details register and accumulate, it becomes apparent that there is a tension between comfort and discomfort in the images. They are both comfortable and alienating. They feel staged and lived-in at once. They lack function, as elements within the spaces appear to be working against their owners. You wouldn't actually want to live there even though it feels like you might.



Fig. 3 Kayla Witt, digital collages, 2019

### *Successive Transformations that Mock the Word Plan*

The collages are informed by a process that involves collecting, scanning, archiving, organizing, superimposing, reconstructing and editing. My process entails a continuous transformation of image, much like the process that informs the home itself. Given my belief that home is a verb or process characterized by change, transitions, transformations, and reorganizations – I believe it is conceptually important to my exploration of home that in its process the work undergoes multiple transformations. I decided that the collages should undergo yet another transformation to become the source material for oil paintings. The first reason being that the amount of labour put into the work is important to the subject matter, as these aspirational domestic interiors are indicative of just that labour. Not only in the labour that it would take to maintain such spaces, but also the labour required in order to reach the stability that would allow one to dwell in spaces, such as those featured in interior design magazines. Further, the viewer experiences the labour stored in a painting all at once, rather than unfolding over time like in performance. By revealing labour in one instant, painting compresses life and labour time, but allows us to experience both simultaneously in a way that it can, but doesn't have to, appeal to us.<sup>17</sup> The choice to paint then, in thinking about its compression of life and labour time, is not so dissimilar from the reality of the experience of home, where labour time is overwhelming yet easily forgotten.

Additionally, I chose to paint because *how* I paint can further inform the content of the collages. For example, I can take intentional textural breaks, use transparency in a way that surface can become both a surface and not a surface simultaneously, use colors' disjunctive qualities, or vary the amount of paint to inform the level of fragmentation or unity in the spaces. Even in areas where there is no trace of my hand, no visible brushstrokes, that is a statement in itself because of its intention. In painting, these decisions are imbued with my subjectivity, unlike the collages created digitally in Photoshop. Further, technology is more accurate than the uncertain hand of the artist. The development of technology is a process of creating a practical method of "embodying the ideal."<sup>18</sup> In the digital collages, the concept to be expressed is predetermined, but I am not interested in the one-way ideal execution of a concept. If the digital collages represent the ideal and practical artistic method, then painting, which is arguably the least ideal or practical artistic method, makes the most sense to employ in work that is at its core about disrupting ideals. However, the paintings leave evidence of their collaged construction, as the language of collage is

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<sup>17</sup> Isabelle Graw, "The Value of Liveliness: Painting as an Index of Agency in the New Economy." In *Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-Medium Condition* (Sternberg Press, 2016) 100.

<sup>18</sup> Lee Ufan, "The Domain of the Painter." In *The Art of Encounter* (Lisson Gallery, 2018), 138.

important conceptually to the reading of the work. Further, the paintings maintain the exact format proportions of a magazine cover, as the source material too is conceptually important to the reading of the work.

I am indebted to the work of artists Jonas Wood, Vikky Alexander, Margaret Priest, and Matthais Weischer who have engaged creatively and critically with interior space through the collage-painting tradition. I am particularly interested in Jonas Wood's paintings, formally speaking. I look to Wood's paintings in terms of how he constructs his spaces, the level of unity or disjointedness in the spaces, as well as the level of evidence he leaves of their collaged composition. Wood's paintings are larger than body height or scale, whereas my paintings are not, though they're very close. My paintings' nearness to body scale renders the paintings seemingly accessible, rousing the viewer to enter the space. Yet, their scale exists in the space in-between enterable and non-enterable, rendering the viewer's access to the space just out of reach. If the scale had been small, the viewer would be prevented from entering immediately. And if the scale had been bodily, the viewer could enter freely. This nearness to entering adds a tension that relates to the content of the paintings themselves. Further, the scale makes plain the fact that the spaces are constructed, that they're paintings. While Wood's paintings are enterable in terms of scale, he paints with a much more shallow sense of space than I do, making his interiors feel like a claustrophobic enclosure. This claustrophobia adds tension to his spaces, teetering a line between enterable and non-enterable. I believe that while Wood and I make different formal decisions, ultimately our goals are aligned.

Within this painting series, I decided to omit the figure, representing a shift in my artistic practice. Even devoid of people, the personal effects animate the spaces, adding narrative entry points into the image. Interiors can be understood as a reflection of a state of being of the maker of that space; they can be thought of as portraits even without human subjects present. The objects within the spaces point to a human presence.

## Intrusions Into The Home



Fig. 4 Kayla Witt, *An Unhomely Uncanny*, digital collage, 2020

In *An Unhomely Uncanny* there's a tension between traditional and contemporary ways of being. The pitched roof is a signifier of traditional domestic space, and is a link to a reassuring collective past. The ceiling at this stage is a skeleton of joints and beams unfinished, waiting to be enclosed and covered with ceiling materials. Yet the objects in the painting point to a contemporary present. The Home Project Centre sign and the home-sized Jeff Koons sculpture are symbols of postmodern banality and consumerism. The television represents a historical relationship between broadcasting and domesticity, as it reorganized domestic time around sitcom schedules.<sup>19</sup> The television continues to organize our domestic time and space today, just in every room of the house with streaming

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<sup>19</sup> Melissa Gronlund, "Return of the Gothic: Digital Anxiety in the Domestic Sphere" (*e-flux*: 2014).



websites available on our computers. The hula-hoop is a symbol of repetition<sup>20</sup>. With the additions of the Hell Hurts sign, the boxing gloves, and the burning clock - all the inserted objects speak to tensions and conflicts in time.

Displayed on the television is a still image of young, queer, witch Willow with her doppelganger in the show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Historically, the emergence of the inhuman (like monsters, vampires, witches, or doppelgangers) in popular culture represents a range of anxieties about change, otherness and modernization. The otherness of gothic villains (in their monstrosity, and non-humanity) reflects the scale of these domestic alterations, and the inability to make sense of them.<sup>21</sup> They represent intrusions into the home. Gothic tropes are returning as a reaction to the unprocessable changes of the “information age”.<sup>22</sup> Many television shows that emerged in the early 2000s, like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, are a return to Gothic tropes in the wake of the emergence of the Internet. Willow’s character in particular, as a queer witch with a doppelganger, is replete with Gothic anxieties about change. Doppelgangers are uncanny<sup>23</sup>, and they often appear in popular culture in moments of existential crises, a conflict of past self and present self. Accordingly, the choice to insert Willow with her doppelganger on the television screen is an explicit negotiation between past and present.

Willow is not the only doubling that’s occurring in the image, as there’s also a doubling of space in the unfinished pitched roof that occurs twice. Much like repetition in the *Arrested Development* video, doubling also implies temporality. However, unlike the repetition that became a full loop in *Arrested Development*, doubling is just a shift or change. Difference is introduced through doubling, creating the contextual conditions for change. As I was making the preliminary collage, I was thinking about changes occurring within the public sphere in the information age that informs the private sphere. It is interesting to think that our culture has undergone many dramatic shifts in recent years, especially with gendered roles changing, and the introduction of the Internet, and architecture is struggling to register these shifts. In this painting, the doubling implies a shift but it is not enough to create any real transformation to the spatial organization of the home. The much-needed changes in spatial organization have not been fully realized or attained. For this reason, I plan to leave a portion of the roof unpainted, leaving the underpainting exposed.

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<sup>20</sup> As previously discussed in regards to performance video *Everybody Will Be Talking*.

<sup>21</sup> Melissa Gronlund, “Return of the Gothic: Digital Anxiety in the Domestic Sphere” (*e-flux*: 2014).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>23</sup> Uncanny comes from the word ‘unhomely,’ which renders the title of the collage a doubling in itself.

## *A Stranglehold of Seduction*



Fig. 5 Kayla Witt, *Selling Sunset*, acrylic and oil on canvas, 2020

The home is a union of commodity and space. While there is a symbolic union of domesticity and commodity, I started to notice a very literal overlap between domestic space and retail space in the books and magazines that I was sourcing. A bathtub placed in the middle of a shoe display in a store. A window display that is set up to look like a disheveled domestic space for the brand Diesel. Retail spaces borrow display techniques from homes, as homes borrow display techniques from retail spaces. *Selling Sunset* is a blending of retail space with domestic indoor and outdoor space. The front desk with the bell, the flip-flops on display, the “life is now” signage, the lottery ticket in the praying hands<sup>24</sup>, and the Time magazine mirror<sup>25</sup> with a composited shadow of a clothing

<sup>24</sup> This is a sculpture by artist Jennifer Small entitled “649 and Extra,” 2018.

<sup>25</sup> This is an artwork by Mungo Thomson entitled “TIME”, 2013. This work was included as a reference to the magazine as the source material for the paintings. Further, the inclusion of this work also refers to yet another form of retail - art as commodity.

rack are all clear indicators of retail. The skateboard, a consumer object that signifies leisure time, is in actuality nonfunctional due to the positioning of the wheels. It is a display item only, commenting on the little importance that is placed on leisure time in our productivity-driven economy. The California Republic flag links the idealized lifestyle of California to the reality of the skateboard itself, an illusion. It appears as a symbol of a lifestyle, but ultimately does not function as it is idealized within the consumerism of leisure.



Fig. 6 Kayla Witt, *Selling Sunset* details, acrylic and oil on canvas, 2020

The way in which I have chosen to paint each diverse element within the painting contributes to its overall meanings. I painted all of the flip-flops the same color, over and over, because that is the reality of the object and its function. Mass consumer trends mean that everything sold in stores is homogenized, and even the slightest variation in product produces a false sense of individuality and the unique. To quote architect and architectural theorist Rem Koolhaas, a huge influence in my work, “We are always unique, utterly predictable, and yet intensely familiar.”<sup>26</sup> The praying hands holding the lottery ticket symbolize the idealized notion that equality can be shared by all; yet, the reality is that equality is prayed for and requires the “divine” to be achieved. I painted the hands a sickly blue, to comment on the negative health impact of income inequality. The pixelated beach ball is a reflection of the Internet’s influence on our current moment. I painted the pixelated beach ball thickly to reference its artificiality and

<sup>26</sup> Rem Koolhaas, “Junkspace.” (*October* vol. 100: 2002), 177.

the disjunctive nature of the digital experience. The tree, which acts as a load-bearing beam, is left unpainted to comment on consumerisms' negative impact on the environment. The tree appears to disappear amongst the brightly colored, highly rendered surfaces of the retail environment. Thus the tree, as an element of nature, is consumed by the commercialization surrounding it.

The blending of indoor and outdoor space in this painting is a reflection of mediated consumer culture at large, entering the domestic interior. The fluidity of space reflects barriers between architecture, retail design, and culture in the process of dissolving. Yet there is a tension between the momentary nature of retail and the relative permanence of the built environment.

### **We Could Be Nomads In Our Own Homes**



Fig. 7 Kayla Witt, *A Well Ventilated Utopia*, digital collage, 2020

In the paintings, gestures break with repetition that consolidates cultural constructions that we perceive as normal happenings within the domestic interior. Doreen Massey says that places are constituted by mobility (the movement of people, commodities, and ideas).<sup>27</sup> This conception of place she calls a ‘progressive sense of place,’ with a no longer clear inside or outside.<sup>28</sup> In the painting *A Well Ventilated Utopia* there is no transition between inside and outside; I even include a lost dog sign indoors. I offer a continuum of place and placelessness, because locations typically contain various degrees of both. The space is both permeable and permanent. It is not constructed based on keeping some threatening force out. Given that this space is partially outdoors, it is always under process or construction. The lack of transition from inside to outside makes it harder to make judgments about insiders and outsiders, so in this sense the painting is hopeful. However, the overgrown, untended-to needs and maintenance of nature within this space would be exhausting to live within.

### ***The Last Spasm of Etiquette***

The greenhouse represents an aspirant, DIY home-improver self-sufficient lifestyle, and nostalgia for a greener life. Typically greenhouse spaces are walled by glass. The transparent glass frame functions as a display case, a structure for viewing and classifying biological specimens that have been wrenched from their habitats; it offers a structural/aesthetic motif replete with contradictions, echoing and compounding some of the tensions inherent in its partner, the home.<sup>29</sup> Transparency incorporated into the Western home has historically been thought to eradicate suspicion, tyranny, and irrational behavior as the opened up architecture allows for one’s morality to be on display. If private lives are placed under scrutiny then people will edit themselves and construct a version of the domestic ideal. Transparency allows for spatial penetration, and thus separations between interior and exterior fail. Of course, for most people it would be their worst nightmare for their bedroom to be in public view. The fear is not of the space being on display; rather the lives lived being on display. The stripper pole and the camera in the painting<sup>30</sup> add to this idea of being on display. In this digital era there is a lack of privacy even in our own homes.

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<sup>27</sup> T. Cresswell, “Place” (*International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*: 2009), 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Gill Perry, *Playing At Home: The House in Contemporary Art* (Reaktion Books, 2014), 176.

<sup>30</sup> Actually, the camera is recurrent in every collage/painting.



Fig. 8 Kayla Witt, *Soon The Walls Will Be Unnecessary*, digital collage, 2020

There are other elements within the painting that make the space unhomely. Given that it is a greenhouse, otherwise known as a hot house, the thermostat is set to 92 degrees Fahrenheit. The air-conditioning unit waters the plant below, a reference to Mika Rottenberg's work *AC and Plant* (2018). There is a fan directed at a huge a pile of sand, complete with some seashells, on the bed<sup>31</sup>. Every person who lives by the beach understands the nuisance of sand in the bed, and here the absurd amount of sand is taken to a comedic extreme. The outside is taking over, making proper housekeeping and cleanliness futile, as indicated by the neglected wine glass that is been overturned on the rug.

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<sup>31</sup> This is a reference to Alice Aycock's *Sand/Fans* (1971/2008)

*Disorientation by Any Means (Mirror, Polish, Echo)*



Fig. 9 Kayla Witt, *A Fantasy Unfulfilled*, acrylic and oil on canvas, 2020

In my work I try to grapple with the lived experience of the home, but also the materiality of the home. I think about the architectural materials that constitute the place of the home – like ceramic, wood, brick, concrete, glass, etc. Reflections in glass can be uncanny because of their close proximity to both the familiar and the strange. Reflectivity, the reversal of transparency, has a similar uncanny effect to mirroring. In *A Fantasy Unfulfilled*, the floor is a reflection of a library, despite there being no library present in the space. The reflection continues the space downwards in a way that doesn't belong. The reflection appears to open up the floor into a new space entirely. The space is not grounded, producing a sense of instability. This sense of instability is heightened in areas where objects meet the floor, like the Eames chair that appears to be anxiously balancing on one foot. The tension between

the familiar and the strange is furthered by an ambiguity as to whether or not this space is lived-in or staged, as proposed by the Ikea sticker on the window.<sup>32</sup>



Fig. 10, Kayla Witt, *A Fantasy Unfulfilled* details, acrylic and oil on canvas, 2020

Much like in my video *Arrested Development*, there are moments when the scale and perspective of the objects do not fit accurately within the space. This refusal of realism is a method of distancing, by pointing out that these are in fact constructed spaces. The viewer believes the space while simultaneously believing in its construction. For me, this is a way to insert my sense of humor, as I find amusement in the size 46 flip-flops<sup>33</sup>, the XXS cushioned chair, and the crude perspective and scale of the orange couch. I leave evidence of the collage, even including Photoshop mistakes where objects were poorly cropped from their backgrounds. Along the back wall I placed a heater, an absurd gesture given the fabric roof of the space is opened to the outdoors. On the pillow there is an image of David Hockney's *A Bigger Splash* painting from 1976, alluding to his work as a major influence of mine.<sup>34</sup> The small size of the picture reminds one of how the biggest influences can be dwarfed by the power of the space of home. The Hockney pillow speaks to anxieties about art's potential to be subsumed into the domestic space

<sup>32</sup> Similarly to the Home Project Centre sign on the stairs in the collage *An Unhomely Uncanny*.

<sup>33</sup> Before I began painting I had projected the digital collage onto the wall to see if my perception of the image changes at a large scale (versus the scale of my computer screen). At this large scale the flip-flops appeared so large and so absurd that I actually cried from laughing.

<sup>34</sup> As well as the sad reality of critical works of art becoming mass producible commodities.



as an emblem of taste and class. Art in domestic space merely becomes commodity, losing its efficacy as critical objects when it succumbs to the perils of private ownership.<sup>35</sup>

### *The Allure Of Improvement*

Across all of the paintings everything is offered to the viewer in equal parts – space, place, subject, object, absence, presence, comfort, discomfort, consumerism, threads of nostalgia, politics, taste, desire, aspiration and self-construction woven through public and private spaces fraught with the dynamics of change. No one particular element is offered to the viewer as the *most* important take-away. All of these elements work together to reflect tensions in our current reality. Furthermore, offering all these elements in equal parts reflects the Internet. Everything is flattened. There is no hierarchy, only an ever-mounting surplus of images, information and commentary. Across the paintings, there is an underlying shallowness or vanity present. In this sense, the paintings are a portrait of the current moment; a response to phenomena that is occurring right now.

The home is fraught with dynamics of both individual personal biographies, as well as shared elements of culture typically understood to be in the realm of the public sphere. We live in an era where one can rent an outfit for a photo-shoot. Social media content creators rent apartments for photo-shoots as surrogates for their homes in order to convey an image that aligns with their subjective taste and socio-economic class. There is a generational shift away from radical possibilities of the homeplace, towards compulsive and passive consumerism. And there is a broader socio-political and cultural moment that is defined by an extreme transience, which creates a profound alienation between subject and culture. The home is struggling to register these cultural shifts. Forms of utopian thinking continue to be embedded as the very cornerstone of what the home represents, especially contemporary media depictions of the home. In my work I try to grapple with the lived experience and materiality of the home, pushing through the home as utopia in the imagination, instead understanding the home as a place of attachment and detachment, comfort and alienation. In reality the experience of the home is characterized by change, both personal and socio-political/cultural. Through collage, I offer the home as a constant redrafting of sites, and call to attention the imaginative fictions that surround the place of the home. The best utopias can serve the negative purpose of making us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment, and therefore the best utopias fail.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Helen Molesworth, "Louise Lawler: Just the Facts," in *Interiors* (Sternberg Press, 2012), 20.

<sup>36</sup> Teresa Kittler, "Living Differently, Seeing Differently: Carla Accardi's Temporary Structures (1965-1972)." (*Oxford Art Journal*: 2017), 91.

*An Interior So Extensive That You Barely Perceive Its Limits*

It only seems responsible and pertinent to mention that in the intervening time the circumstances were such that the Covid-19 pandemic coincided with the writing of this paper. During this pandemic, I no longer had access to my art studio and my thesis exhibition was cancelled. I was unable to turn my home into an art studio due to the limitations of my space. I have been using this time planning future works that respond to my thesis, including sculptural furniture pieces, decorative wallpaper works, and an audio installation.

During this pandemic I cannot help but reflect on my relationship to home. Until recently, I had never felt a sense of belonging or a connection to a place where I had lived. There had been many experiences that contributed to this lack of connection, from being first generation Canadian, to experiencing trauma in the home. Recently, I was able to find a sense of belonging in Los Angeles, my home. I cannot help but think that my thesis work is rather timely, while the whole world is quarantining in their homes. I imagine the majority of people, globally, during this pandemic are questioning their relationship to home. While I was already questioning my relationship to home, that's only become heightened in quarantine. Now begins a new cycle of reflection, reflecting on the ideas in this paper in relation to the current circumstances.

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