

**Sydney College of the Arts**  
The University of Sydney

MASTER OF VISUAL ARTS

2007

DISSERTATION

**'Ik ben zo blij dat ik hier ben'**

translation

**'I am so glad that I am here'**

by

**Angela Femia**



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This volume is presented as a record  
of the work undertaken for the degree of  
Master of Visual Arts  
at Sydney College of the Arts

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Mum, I dedicate this work to you!

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is a brief consideration of the nature of my art practice. It seeks to discover the importance of memory to the spatial, emotional and political constructs that inform my understanding of place. Within the broader context of the Australian immigrant experience, history and personal memories are explored by looking into the notion of domestic space as embodied by the house and its relationship to the home. The female role in the family is discussed in terms of the commonly understood stereotypes associated with home in western society. By traversing a range of ideas from philosophical and scientific domains, with a focus on contemporary art, the significance of memory is highlighted as the thread that holds these notions together.

## INTRODUCTION

*Every child has a place that is remembered  
as being the most protected in the world.  
Maybe it was under a table,  
in a comfortable corner or covered by a cardboard box.  
It is an intrinsic part of childhood to experience,  
even for only a short time, the deep seduction of security.  
This experience represents our first home,  
no matter where it is, or how tentatively we knew it.  
Like childhood itself, our first home can never be remembered perfectly.  
It only appears during brief glimpses.*

*Forever building on echoes,  
we buy tables and chairs that we seem to recognise,  
choose familiar colours for our walls,  
lay down carpets in a certain way - always searching  
for the right pattern to unlock the combination  
that will let us back inside the memory.*

*We tend to chapter our lives by the houses we've lived in.*

*So it is like snails that little children carry home on their backs,  
sheltered though they wander away,  
eating from unknown kitchens, running down imaginary hills,  
playing late into the night. They are at home everywhere.  
Until, that is, someone tells them that home is too small a place.  
Until, all too soon,  
they grow a little bit bigger and must move into another house,  
and then another and another,  
each of which fits them less and less securely  
than the one they first remember.<sup>1</sup>*

Like a child trying to find my way back to that secure place, this text is an investigation of the ideas that underpin my research and inform the origin and manifestation of my artwork.

Chapter One introduces my notion of home and its symbol the house. Referring to writings by scientists, anthropologists and psychologists, I touch on topics as diverse as insect organisational behaviour and obsessive-compulsive disorder, in order to explain the way in which my personal experiences have influenced my research. The work of the French philosopher and poet, Gaston Bachelard, whose book *Poetics of Space* discusses the house in terms that resonate strongly with my concerns, is also consulted.

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<sup>1</sup> Angela Femia



My artwork is examined in light of these findings and considered together with key works by American based, French artist Louise Bourgeois, American photographer Robert Adams, German artist Gregor Schneider and the Australian Mathieu Gallois.

In Chapter Two I discuss the relationship of memory to the perception of home, place and the Self. Scientific research and cultural theories relating to memory are referenced and my practical work and the work of the Australian artist Aleks Danko are considered in this regard.

In Chapter Three an outline of a personal view of place is examined by briefly raising relevant concepts by Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gaston Bachelard. They are discussed in relation to my artwork and the work of the British artist Rachel Whiteread.

Feminist issues underpin much of this dissertation and my investigations acknowledge the vast body of writing on this subject. However, feminism will not be the primary focus.

This research is at all times accompanied by a personal narrative which not only underlies and structures the discourse but also informs and directs the practical work I have undertaken.

memories are motionless,  
the more securely they are fixed in space  
the sounder they are.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *Poétique De L'espace. (English) The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) p.9.