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# Lost and Found Memories: An Examination and Critique of My Past Through Art

**Alice Chi**

Prof. Nancy Macko, Advisor

Prof. Kasper Kovitz, Reader  
Prof. Alyson Ogasian, Reader



**SCRIPPS**

THE WOMEN'S COLLEGE  
• CLAREMONT •

**Department of Art**

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# Abstract

Ever since I was young I depended on triggers to retrieve my deeper memories. It is because of this quality that I think I have developed a tendency to collect and assign sentimental value to various items that I associate with certain people and moments. Over the course of my life, I have kept many objects, trinkets, and documents because of this. To catalog these memories and confront my lost relationships, I have collected these found sentimental items around my home and compiled them into a documented history of the lingering relationships throughout my life. The resulting product is a cohesive catalog of the various items that I have kept as well as a variety of projects that were inspired by or resulted from these items.



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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Memory can be an extremely persistent and yet ephemeral entity. I can perfectly recall moments from my childhood over ten years ago, picking clovers and digging a hole in the middle of my elementary school field but at the same time I can't remember what I had for lunch two days ago. I think that it is because of this simultaneous quality of persistence and ephemerality that memory is both treasured and yet taken for granted.

In my experience, I have noticed that I personally am very bad with recall memory, which is the retrieval of long term memory without a trigger (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2007). If someone asked me to recount my past month right now, I would just completely blank. I very much depend on reminders and triggers to retrieve my deeper memories which is typically referred to recognition memory (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019).

It is because of this quality that I think I have developed a tendency to collect and assign sentimental value to various items that I associate with certain people and memories. Over the course of my life, I have kept many

## 2 Introduction

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various objects, trinkets, and documents due to this sentimentality. Being back in my childhood home recently has surrounded me once again with the many objects that I have kept over the years of my life due to my personal attachments and associations.

In an attempt to catalog these memories and confront my lost relationships, I have collected and compiled these found sentimental items around my home and compiled them into a documented history of the lingering relationships throughout my life. This project aims to present the artifacts of my past, allow me to reflect on my previous relationships, and create a space for others to reflect on their own past relationships. In pursuing this project, I sought to explore and share the narrative of my past and to honor as well as let go of it by using these items within my art.

## Chapter 2

# Background

This project touches on many different themes including memory, connection, collection, and categorization. Each of these aspects not only have relations to each other in context of this project, but they also hold unique relations to me in particular. The following sections describes each of these themes and their significance to me in relation to this project.

### 2.1 Memory

As mentioned before, memory is closely tied to collection for me. The items I collect are often attached to memory, assigning additional value to these items above their mere monetary value. In some cases, I have collected items solely due to the attached memories. Things like pictures from photo booths or Polaroids tend to fall into this category. These are physical images created and kept typically for the purpose of storing a memory. In other cases, the items I collect take on the memory of their circumstance. Whether

loosely tied to a certain moment or person, the reason for collection is usually unrelated to the reason for collection in the first place. For example, I collect pins just in general but some pins that I buy and collect will retain a memory alongside it usually relating to something that may have happened that same day or a person I was with when I got it. Because I depend a lot on recognition memory to recall my deeper memories, the collection of items directly corresponds to memory for me since the collection of these items is equivalent to the collection and documentation of memories.

I think memory is also inherently tied to connection. Connections formed between people are naturally related to memories that are created and shared between those people. For me in particular, spending quality time is one of the most important things to me when forming relationships and friendships with others and with spending time together naturally comes the forming of memories between people.

### **2.2 Connection**

Forming relationships and connections with others was always difficult for me. In addition to being naturally introverted and non-confrontational, I quite rarely form close relationships with others where I feel truly comfortable sharing personal topics. To this day, I can count the number of people I trust with my secrets on a single hand. It is because of these characteristics of mine that make the theme of connection multifaceted in this project.

First, because this project focuses my past romantic relationships, a lot of these connections were very deep and important to me at the time. For

me close relationships are rare and so this project lays some of my closest relationships to bare. Because of this aspect, my project directly converses with the theme of connection through the presentation and discussion of lost connections through my broken relationships.

In addition to this however, there is also a more indirect relation to the theme of connection. By presenting my past relationships through these items that are very dear and personal to me, I am forcing myself to be vulnerable to a larger subset of people than I am normally used to. By offering up my own vulnerability however, it opens a path to form new connections to the people who interact with my project. By fully letting go of the connections presented in this project, I am also forming many new connections with whoever may view this project through sharing my past relationships with them.

## **2.3 Collection**

From a young age I was always intrigued by collecting. I'm not entirely sure when this interest manifested within me but for as long as I can remember, I have always had an urge to keep and collect items regardless of how seemingly meaningless these collections were. I collected many different things, some were commonly collected items like pins and stuffed animals. Some were a bit more uncommon like the tabs from metal cans and a particular series of fairy themed children books. In the beginning I believe my desire to collect was more systematic in nature. I had an interest in organizing, categorizing, and cataloging which naturally follows with

collecting. It is because of these habits that I began to keep items despite their typical classification as "trash" by my mother. This, I believe, influenced my tendencies to keep and collect memory laden items later on in my life.

### **2.4 Categorization**

With collection naturally comes categorization. For me, part of the joy of a collection is being able to organize and arrange it. Throughout my life I have always categorized my collections by their physical forms. This has been a straightforward method of categorization since physical forms reside in a binary space, an item objectively is something (i.e. a pin) or it isn't. Therefore, as a young child, it was always natural for me to categorize my collections in this way. As I grew up and collected more items throughout my life that I associate with memories and people, I tended to single out these items while still keeping them within their physical categories. I singled these items out in particular because of the additional value they gained due to their connection with a memory or moment. Even though I acknowledged this as a child by noticing these items were different and more important to me, I had never categorically considered these items by anything other than their physical forms. With this project I wanted to challenge my previous conceptions on the categorization of my items and to reflect on myself to see how I organize and separate these items using categories that are not binary but complex and multifaceted. This process of categorising these items based on the memories and sentiments that come with it also acts as an investigation on my perception and relationship with each of these items.

## Chapter 3

# Process and Methods

### 3.1 Process

To start I collected and took inventory of the items around my childhood home. I documented letters, items, and other materials by scanning them or taking pictures of them and then I compiled them into an organized catalog.

For each item, the catalog records an item code, name, description, year, and a link to an image or pdf of the item. The items are in no particular order but are generally grouped by person which is indicated by the item code. For the catalog, I not only curated the items that I decided to include in the catalog, but often each item would be attached to several specific memories so I also had to curate which memories to share and present.

After putting the catalog together, I had to decide on a medium for the presentation of the items. I experimented with video and web VR, but in the end I decided on using a website format to allow people to explore the items on their own without a particular order or guidance.



## 3.2 Methods

### 3.2.1 Concerns

Throughout the semester, I had several concerns about working with this project that I had to overcome. Some of the early concerns include being able to integrate digital media into my work in a creative and cost-effective way. I was also concerned about potentially losing my way since I tend to get psyched out when there's a lot of pressure to make a good piece and since I will be using items that have deep sentimental value to me the pressure might be overwhelming.

To address these concerns I did the following:

#### Finding a Creative Way to Integrate Digital Media

Do more research to see what other similar artists are doing to integrate digital media into their work

Ask others for their ideas and opinions for an interesting way to utilize digital media into my work

Try to utilize my experience with hardware and computer science to brainstorm a way to integrate digital media

In the end, I integrated digital media by using digital media as my main form of presentation. For the final presentation of my items, I used a hand drawn digital aesthetic to create icons and pages to create the space for my items to reside in.

#### Overcoming Pressure of Using Highly Sentimental Items

Part of the point of this project is to let go of some of my sentiments so I guess one way to address this is to just get over it

Filtering through my items to see what I am willing to let go of and what I am not before starting a piece so the stakes are a bit lower initially and then incorporating the other items later once I feel more comfortable

To handle this concern, I ended up primarily using digital media to present my objects so my original items were able to be untouched and preserved.

### **3.2.2 Website Design**

In building the website there were several goals that I kept in mind with how I wanted people to interact with items and how I wanted to present the items. The most important goals for me were to create an online space that would allow people to explore my items freely at their own pace, such that everyone's experience could potentially be different. A self guided exploration through my items and my past. My other goal was to maintain this vague theme of a juxtaposition of personal topics with a touch of comedy and a more formal and technical presentation. This was first seen with the catalog itself which contains informal and somewhat comedic titles and descriptions but they are cataloged in a formal way being housed in a spreadsheet and denoting a year and code for each item. This theme of juxtaposition was really important for me to maintain in the project because I enjoyed the over-dramatic nature of treating my found items in a formal

and official way.

For creating a space that would allow people to explore all the items at their own pace, I decided to go with an open website format which lays all the items out on the opening screen. The items are drag-able to in a sense allow people to sift through the items. The items on the site only directly have the item code with the context behind the items contained in a catalog that must be accessed separately. This allows people to explore the items and the contexts independently if they wish to. In effect it is possible to look at all the items without looking at the context, look only at the context without really looking at the items, and to look at both the items and context in tandem which is the effect I want to allow people to explore the items in anyway they want.

For reiterating this theme of juxtaposition between casually comedic and more officially formal, I decided to portray the website through a hand drawn desktop aesthetic. This would pair and juxtapose the more personal themes with hand drawn aesthetic and icons with the more official and formal structure that come with a desktop and other apps and programs such as the structure of the "mail" page.

Overall, the format and aesthetic of the website were heavily influenced by the overarching themes in the project and the ultimate goals I had for how I wanted people to interact with my project overall. This resulted in a very free-form and flexible format with a hand drawn aesthetic to resemble a desktop for the final website.

## Chapter 4

# References and Influences

Throughout the course of working on my project and conducting research, I found several artists that worked on similar topics and ideas. The following is a brief review of their work and how it relates to my project.

### 4.1 Chuck Ramirez

Chuck Ramirez was a contemporary conceptual artist and photographer. Much of his work surrounded photographing seemingly banal items that held larger sentimental meanings relating to his heritage, past, and sexuality (Ford, 2020). Our works hold several similarities such as bringing attention to mundane items that hold deeper meanings and sentimentality. In particular I am bringing attention to these items that some others might typically throw away without another thought, old letters from an ex, old tickets from a past event, etc. What others might consider to be trash is my treasure and what I hold dear and this concept is also prevalent in the works of Chuck Ramirez.

## 4.2 Kristin Texeira

Kristin Texeira is a contemporary artist that often works with memory in several different ways. Most notable is her collection of memory map paintings where she uses paintings to capture and record memories and moments (Texeira, 2020b). In particular I was inspired by her series *Collected Conversations* which feature a series of paintings accompanied by short conversations that are associated with the painting (Texeira, 2017). While both of my project and this series of work deal with memories, her paintings are a reactionary result of memories and her attempt to document and capture them by creating painting. My project focuses more on the memories we store in seemingly mundane items and presenting those as they are.

Another piece she worked on that is heavily related to my project is her project *YAAADSALE* where she puts items that contain memories up for sale for people to buy. With each item, she shares the memory tied to the item and offers to it sell for a price (Texeira, 2020a). My project relates to this not only because of this connection between items and memories, but also in tone with the use of casual and slightly comedic titles and descriptions paired with the more formal structure of the online site.

## Chapter 5

### Future Work

After the completion of this project, there are many avenues to expand and continue work. One possible avenue to explore with this project is exploring items that I associate with people who have passed through my life that I have had purely platonic relationships with. This would include passing friendships, mentors and mentees, even old neighbors or coworkers. I would include this section under the title "Things That Remind Me of People I Don't Talk to Anymore (But Still Follow on Instagram)". This is a fairly natural expansion of this project since the overall theme of collecting and presenting these items that I associate with people who are no longer a part of my life but had some significance and impact on my past is the same, just with a different category of people (purely platonic versus romantic).

Another possibility for future work is to include items and concepts that I haven't necessarily collected physical items of but remind me of a particular person or memory. This is somewhat represented in The Hall of Minor Tragedies where I included imagery of ducks, coconuts, and spoons

which aren't related to physical objects I have kept, but instead are concepts or general items that I associate with certain people and/or memories. Including these items would be able to expand more on the memory and connection themes of the project. However, it does not line up with the themes of collection quite as well since the original theme touched on the collection on physical objects rather than concepts and ideas.

Additionally, it might be interesting to organize and categorize these same items in different ways, sorting them by type of object or by year and seeing what trends arise and how this might alter how I present and catalog these items.

Finally, another way to continue this project is to continue on working on smaller projects and derivatives to add to the overall collection. Essentially adding more things like the TikTok video. These smaller derivative projects take the items and put them together to create a new piece or project. Working on smaller projects that utilize different items in the collection is another way to further expand the project.

In addition to these possible expansions to the project, there is also future work that could be done in just maintaining and updating the current catalog. As I collect more items and objects throughout my life experience, there is more possible future work to be done to add these items to the catalog and website as I collect them.

Overall, this project can be expanded in many different ways due to the broad nature of the multitude of themes. There is a lot of different potential for future iterations and expansions, particularly in the realm of collections itself as well in the organization and presentation of collection of items.

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