

DETAILS OUT OF PLACE: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN MEMORY AND PLACE

By

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I am exploring the connection of place and memory. There are 3 specific single apartments that were pivotal during my development as an adult. These places are the point of departure for this work. By reinterpreting maps, interior architecture, floor plans, and specific events I chart and document my memories of these personally important spaces with sculpture and jewelry. I use predominantly jewelry because of the personal nature of the media and the subject of this work. Though this work is derived from a personal journey, I leave the work open ended enough to also evoke memories of a place in the viewer.

DETAILS OUT OF PLACE: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP
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A Thesis

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By

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INTRODUCTION

The details of the apartments I lived in over the last ten years are like bookmarks in my memory. Each is a chapter in my journey to adulthood. What do we remember most about the places we have lived? Is it the first color we painted the walls to cover old watermarks, the obstructed view out a kitchen window, or the squeaky floorboard halfway down the back hall? Picturing these intimate details of particular place also recalls context, events and people associated with that period of life.

Clare Marcus Cooper, in her book *House as a Mirror of Self*, notes: “As we change and grow throughout our lives, our psychological development is punctuated not only by meaningful emotional relationships with people, but also by close affective ties with a number of significant physical environments” (Marcus, 4). As we set out into the adult world, there are many things we have to teach ourselves along the way. I picked my first apartment at 19. This was the first time I had complete control over my personal environment, a rich and heady feeling. My parents lived 600 miles away so there was no one there to direct me in how to be domestic or to create a home. I learned how to clean, cook, repair, and decorate, discovering how the environment I chose to inhabit became in many ways a reflection of myself. The time I spent in that space and the apartments that followed are the environments where I have done the most self-discovery.

Despite the importance of these places they are clouded and incomplete in my mind. As I try to examine a memory, details are elusive and malleable;

parts that are clear are disproportionally large and seem to repeat. The mind replaces vague unclear elements with those that are crisp and solid, building a memory that is largely abstracted from reality. For example, I remember a flight of stairs from an early apartment that now seems impossibly long and steep, huge compared with the rest of the house. Spots of especially vivid color are contrasted with expanses of white and gray, as if everything but that detail has been faded with time and disuse. This thesis work balances my need to remember and crystallize these important spaces of self-discovery with the reality of this fallible human memory. I embrace the faded, non-continuous, and repeated memories of these homes, reinterpreting them into tangible objects of personal adornment and sculpture.

The phrase 'connection to place' is one that has directed my research for the last eight years. It began when I moved to Pittsburgh Pennsylvania where I realized that creating a connection with a place, to feel at home in Pittsburgh, was an essential activity. Thomas Moore, in *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life*, defines home as "an emotional state, a place in the imagination where feelings of security, belonging, placement, family, protection, memory, and personal history abide" (Moore, 77). How do we connect these feelings of home that reside in our imagination to a new physical place? In Pittsburgh I developed a body of work that reinterpreted the physical landscape around me. It was through the research and formation of this work that the desired connection to place was made. Since that first body of work about Pittsburgh, I have continued to closely examine an individual's connection to place.

My move to Greenville, North Carolina shifted my attention from using the vocabulary of an urban environment to an agrarian one, changing from smokestacks and power lines to grain silos and tobacco barns. This change of location also made me aware of the difference in the social landscape.



Figure 1: *Seed Smuggling Necklace #1* 2010

Copper, tin, found objects, glass vials, vegetable seeds

20in x 3in x 1.5in

The *Seed Smuggling Series* (Figure 1) was a response to the research I did into farming and food politics, issues that are a prominent part of the culture in my current home. After reaching out to explore my home as part of a larger culture, in my thesis I have turned to seek to define home in more intimate and personal terms. I realize the experiences I am drawing upon are singular and specific to

me, but within this personal narrative I am using symbols and forms, such as a house, chair, or stairs that are recognized and related to by a broad audience. It is with this balance between specific and universal that I hope to bring forth the viewer's own memories and individual narrative of a place and their connection to it.

CHAPTER 1: DETAILS OUT OF PLACE

Chosen Apartments

My previous work interprets the exterior landscape and culture as a way of defining home. The realization that this was only one side of a coin, was the beginning of *Details out of Place*. Clare Cooper Marcus describes the relationship we have to domestic dwellings: “The greater the control we exercise over an object or environment the more closely allied with the self it becomes” (Marcus, 54). The house, given our ability to choose and alter it, is a reflection of the self. These works can be considered elements of self-portraiture when also considering my reliance on my own memories.

I have chosen three apartments from the last three cities I have lived: Richmond, Pittsburgh, and Greenville as the focus of this research and exhibition. These spaces were pivotal in my journey towards self-discovery. For each group of work I created a vocabulary of colors and forms that are derived from the individual interiors and my memories from that period of time. For the Richmond work I use yellow wood and tin, which remind me of the goldenrod yellow back door. I also use thin coats of liquid white enamel on square steel tubes and rectangles to represent the aging white interior architecture of this Victorian row house. Pittsburgh pieces have blackened steel elements that are derived from my memories of the large black mantel and countertops that dominated the tiny apartment. Red and teal are used often in the Greenville work because of the vintage red counter tops and light green paint I choose

when I moved in. This was the first time I had been able to paint the apartment I lived in. The use of rectangles and squares relate to the rectilinear space of these house interiors.

The emotions, events, and people of that time period also inform the choice of color and form. In the earliest group of pieces I draw upon memories from almost a decade past. The abstraction of real physical space is most evident in this work. In comparison the time in Pittsburgh was challenging emotionally and sometimes quite physically dark and overcast, a period of uncomfortable growth that is illustrated by the dark, more somber pieces. My current residence and life in Greenville are both colorful and rich.

Each of these series includes a large free-standing sculpture. I made these sculptures imagining the space of the apartment, house it was a part of, and the city it was located in. I see each of these pieces as a keystone for the other work in the group. While each jewelry piece is derived from a specific element or memory of the apartment, I am describing the broader memory of the whole place and time with each of the *Memory Space* sculptures.

Chosen Materials

I choose many of my materials out of environmental concerns, this also gives me the challenge of making the work within these specific material parameters.

Steel: Most of these pieces are made from steel. It is the most recycled material in the world, also light and very durable, making steel an ideal material for

jewelry. Steel is also easy to manipulate to create clean precise linear and rectangular forms.

Liquid Enamel: The use of liquid enamel provides a wide variety of colors, textures, and imagery. Thin coats over steel form a highly stable bond. The thinness of the coat also allows for more delicate drawing and scratching into the surface of the enamel prior to firing.

Found Objects: Found objects and tin have been a large part of my vocabulary in my work since I moved to Pittsburgh. When a found object is repurposed, it continues to carry its previous history and sense of time and age. I find these qualities very appealing and useful when designing my work. Tin has many of the same attributes. If I am able to use tin or a found item already in the world that suits the piece, then it is my preference to appropriate rather than create new from raw materials.

Brass: I have chosen brass as the base metal to fabricate many of the backs, findings, and complex elements in these pieces. All three of these older houses had brass doorknobs and other fixtures. Tarnished brass has a visual connection to the passage of time and disuse, making it an excellent compliment to this concept.

CHAPTER 2: 1005 WEST FRANKLIN STREET #2, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA
(2005-2007)

At 20, I had just completed my sophomore year of undergraduate at Virginia Commonwealth University and was about to move out of a twice-condemned apartment that I was living in with three other young girls. My declared focus was metalsmithing and would be moving into 1005 Franklin just in time to begin my first full summer away from my parents' house. Learning how to throw a party, barbeque, and bake were all part of this early self-education. I under cooked the chicken a couple times, went on my first real dates, fell in love, and bought a vacuum. Everything was new to me.

My mind wanders through my apartment, from living room to hallway, then kitchen, details crystallize, blur, or escape my grasp. The whole place was painted white with large baseboards, wallboards, mantel, and crown molding. The ornate paneling was off set by the cheap, gray office carpet that ran throughout. I hated it because the rest of that beautiful two-story Victorian apartment had elegance, in a rental sort of way. The windows were huge and I had my mom's old lace curtains, making things feel soft, feminine, and airy. The back door out of the kitchen led outside into what felt like another world, the backyard was closed off from the rest of the city with its bums, crime, and noise by a chain link fence. I got a grill soon as I moved in. The back door was painted yellow on the outside, bright and proud. There was a large crack in the bottom of the door and you could actually see through it. It really needed to be

replaced but I never complained because I thought that having that yellow door brought life and character to the whole place.

This group of pieces made for this apartment uses mostly white enamel on steel and yellow found objects such as wood and tin. Being new to living alone, I had few personal possessions, leaving the home largely empty of furniture or clutter. The forms and scribing work are inspired by the decorative interior architecture. In *1005 Franklin #1* (Figure 2) I am celebrating the two elements of this space that I loved the most, the white molding and the yellow door in the form of a traditional pendant style necklace. In *1005 Franklin Catalog of Belongings* (Figure 3), I tallied up all of the appliances, furniture, and bathroom fixtures. The abstracted shapes are publically displayed as a neckpiece that hangs the length of the torso. In the main sculptural piece of this group *1005 Franklin Memory Space* (Figure 4), I am focused on conveying the feeling of space that the apartment embodied. This is also a portrayal of the many gaps in my memory about that place and time.



Figure 2: *1005 Franklin Necklace # 1* 2011

Steel, enamel, tin, copper

18in x 1.5in x .5in

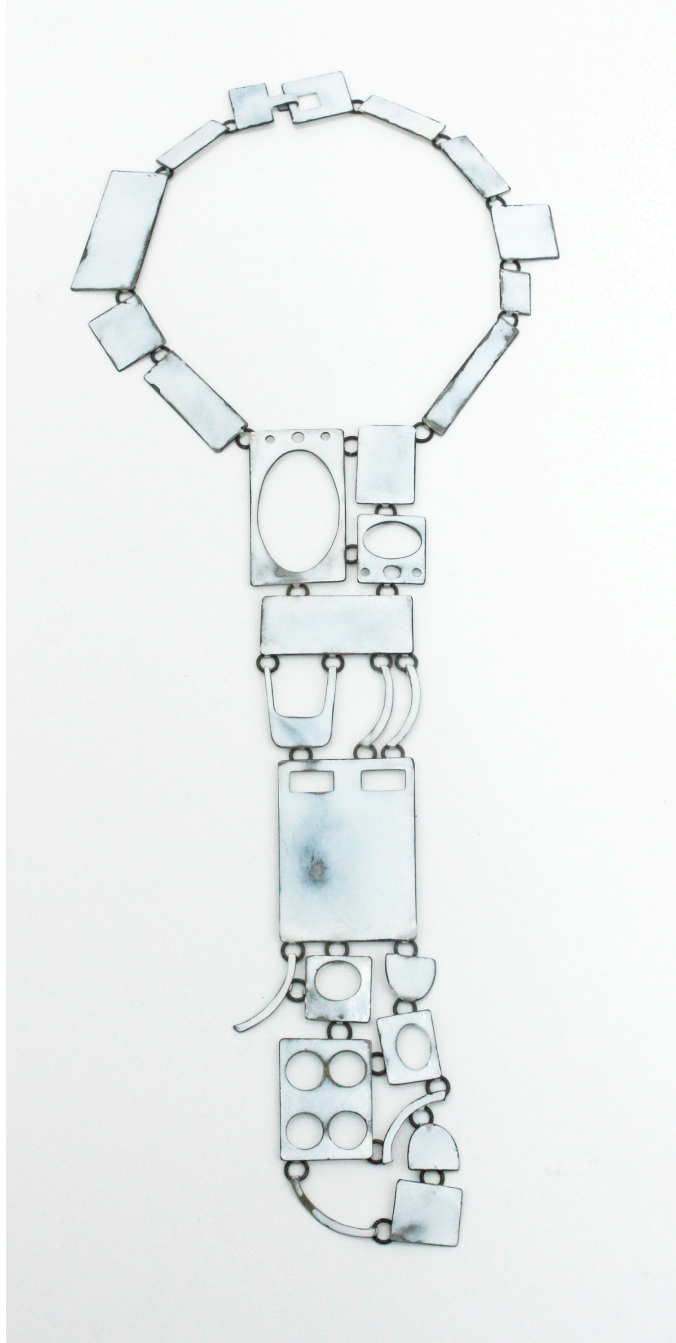


Figure 3: *1005 Franklin Catalog of Belongings 2012*

Steel, enamel

30in x 3in x .1in



Figure 4: *1005 Franklin Memory Space* 2011

Steel, enamel, brass, concrete

6ft x 3ft x 1ft

CHAPTER 3: 418 SOUTH ATLANTIC AVENUE #1, PITTSBURGH,
PENNSYLVANIA (2007-2009)

This was the first move I made without school or family to give me social connections. As a recent graduate with no real plans and in love with a guy who moved to Pittsburgh for his Masters, I followed him. I was 22. A job as a waitress paid the bills and a metalsmithing bench took up most of my small living room. The relationship wasn't healthy, but by then I had landed a job at the Society for Contemporary Craft and was getting an amazing opportunity to learn about and work in my field. It rained all the time so I made work about the clouds and Pittsburgh. The Steelers won the Super Bowl twice and the Penguins won the Stanley Cup almost twice. Eventually, I got a real studio, had my first solo show, learned about relationships and heart break, and met a lot of amazing artists.

The apartment in Pittsburgh was odd. It was, like every other apartment I have lived in, a converted house. The beige and black exterior was softened by the ivy growing up one side of the house. This brick exterior house had pine siding on the inside and it covered all of one wall. This was complimented by a raw brick wall and beige watermarked plaster. I lived on the first floor at the front of the house. It was just to the right of the heavy steel front door that would rattle my flimsy hollow core apartment door when it opened and closed. The only item of color in the two rooms was the blue tile in the bathroom. It was powder blue and obviously from when the house was first broken up into individual

apartments in the 1970's. I had been attracted to the place because of the giant floor to ceiling windows in the small living room/kitchenette. But I came to realize that they were quite a problem since having them open meant that everyone on the street had a fantastic view inside. The blinds were almost always kept closed. Closed blinds, black countertops, a large black marble fireplace, Pittsburgh's cloudy weather, and an emotionally challenging period of time, has made my memories of South Atlantic Avenue dark and muted.

Steel, black tin, and brass are main materials for this grouping of work. The steel is an appropriate material to describe my memories of that "Steel City". Overlapping brass, in reference to the interior pine siding, is used as the back-plate to the brooch *418 Atlantic #2* (Figure 5). This recognizable element is paired with an abstract bundle of blacken steel tube forms that hints at the rather chaotic time. In the necklace *418 Atlantic #1* (Figure 6) I used repurposed tin and brass to fabricate what looks like a heavy, unapproachable steel door. The piece is actually quite wearable and light and the clasp makes the familiar, yet out of place, sound of a safety chain being put into place.



Figure 5: *418 Atlantic Brooch #1* 2011

Steel, brass

4in x 2in x 1.5in



Figure 6: *418 Atlantic Necklace #1* 2011

Tin, brass

16in x 2in x .5in

CHAPTER 4: 405 SOUTH SUMMIT STREET #2, GREENVILLE,
NORTH CAROLINA (2010-2012)

I drink wine on my porch with friends and take afternoon naps in the hammock, even in the winter. Time seems to move slower here, giving me the opportunity to soak in all that my environment has to offer. I have learned to tend the earth and grow food. My life in this small town has given me friendships that will last a lifetime. As a maker, I have found direction in my work and a passion that will sustain.

I fell in love with the color of the front door. A friend lived in 405 South Summit before me and I was quite jealous of such a fantastic salmon pink colored front door. The oddness of the color choice reminded me of my yellow door in Richmond. I have never had a porch before let alone a porch swing and find myself quite enamored with it. The apartment feels full, comfortably so but I still like sitting on the porch because there's no stuff, giving space to think. There are tall ceilings and hardwood floors. The rooms are full of well-loved, colorful furniture I have acquired in recent years. The kitchen is just the right size for me with vintage red counter tops and an enameled sink that's not quite deep enough. When this work is contrasted with Pittsburgh, it is lavish and full of color, textures, and forms, as if in bloom. In many ways these pieces are a celebration of my growth in graduate school, portrayed through the details of an apartment I have happily occupied.

In the neckpiece *405 Summit Catalog of Belongings* (Figure 7) I have again taken stock of all the furniture, large objects, and appliances I live with and displayed them in a vibrantly red enameled collar that plays off my red speckled kitchen counter tops. *405 Summit #1* (Figure 8), celebrates the salmon pink front door that originally drew me to this apartment. I have also fabricated a brass doorknob-like clasp, inspired by the old, finicky, brass doorknob on this door that occasionally stops working.

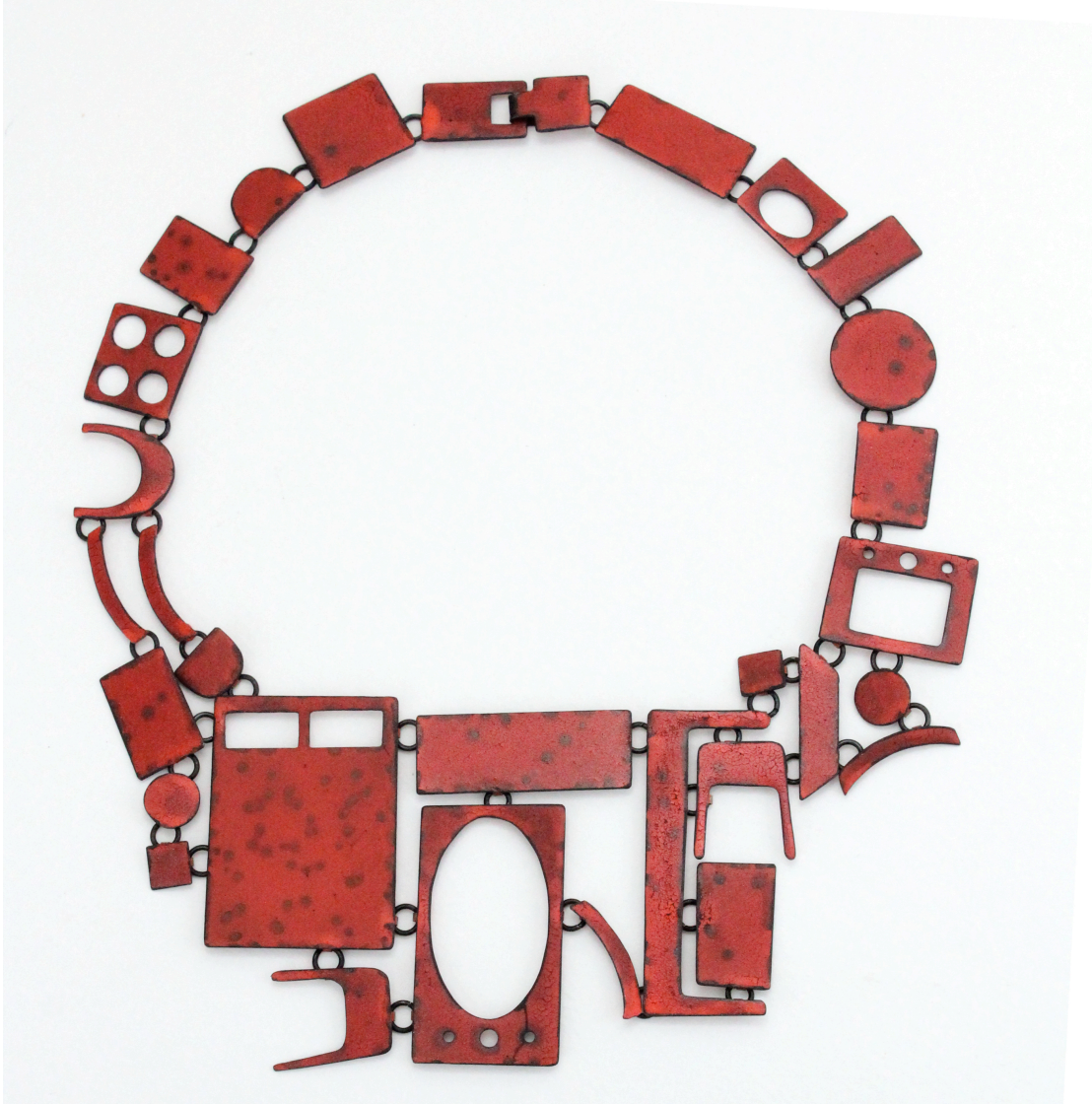


Figure 7: *405 Summit Catalog of Belongings 2012*

Steel, enamel

18in x 4in x .1in

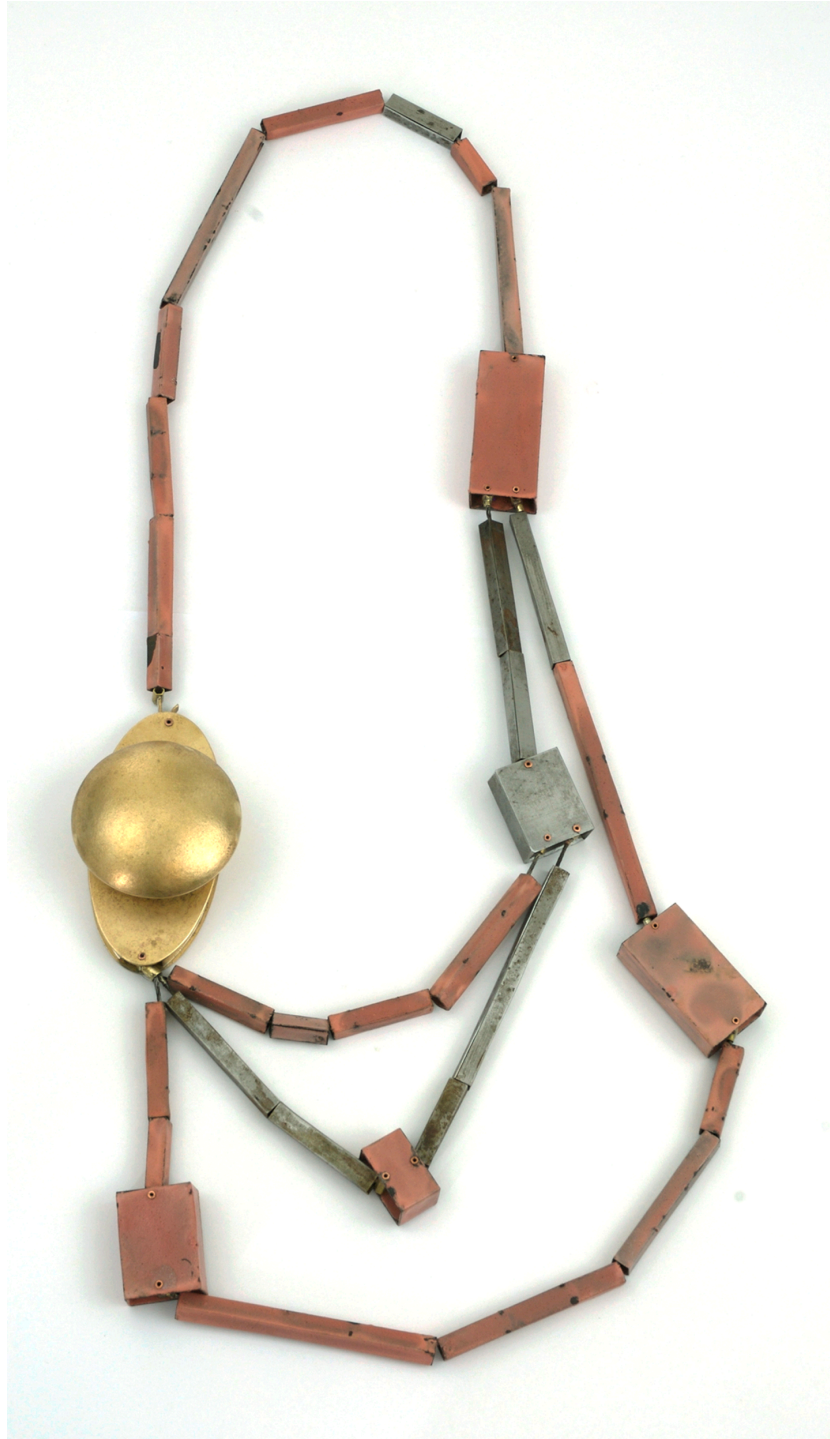


Figure 8: *405 Summit Necklace #1* 2011

Steel, enamel, brass

30in x 2in x 2in

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

I have cataloged, drawn, written, fabricated, soldered, enameled, and interpreted my memories and possessions of three different periods and places in this exhibition. The physical making of each piece allowed me time to further contemplate each detail I remembered. There were several occasions where the unhurried examination of memories while I built the work led to remembering things that were previously buried or lost. The chain link fence on Franklin and the blue tile on Atlantic are both examples of these late blooming memories.

The process of making and the resulting objects have solidified my relationship to these past and present habitats. I have grown to see aspects of my time on Franklin, Atlantic, and Summit in the larger context of my journey towards adulthood. I have honored these places and am now able to put them to rest. The next move is quickly approaching and I have already begun to consider how I will approach this next landscape. The idea of maps and map making has been on the edge of my research, and I look forward to more directly addressing this concept in future work.

The intimate connection we develop with a place often occurs unnoticed while we are busy living our lives. To take the time to look up, out, and around can give a moment of clarity and context to our lives. I continue to seek these moments and translate them into the objects I make. With every move we make, short or long, the relationship between individual and place is renewed.

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