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The Longest Way Round Is the Shortest Way Home

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Graduate Program in Art and Visual Culture

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Fine Arts

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Abstract

In combination with a Masters of Fine arts thesis exhibition, *The Longest Way Round is the Shortest Way Home*, this dossier has three components: An extended artist statement with an introduction, documentation of my work and a comparative case study of Geoffrey Farmer and Hannah Hoch. These components will illustrate my research, visual development and engagement with items of décor, ornamentation and design elements of daily life.

Keywords

Home decor, ornamentation, design, collage, photomontage, sculpture, assemblage, taste.

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Introduction

This thesis dossier is presented alongside my MFA Thesis exhibition, *The Longest Way Round is the Shortest Way Home*, which takes place at Satellite Project Space from May 15th to 28th 2017. Over the period of my candidacy many changes have occurred for me personally. I moved back into my childhood home, reconnected with old friends, got married, lived apart from my new husband and accepted his proposal to move to Belgium for the next two years. To say that my time in London has been a whirlwind would be an understatement. For me as an artist the aforementioned events inevitably made their way into my artistic practice in a variety of ways. My self-reflexive studio based research has grown over the duration of the program and each element of this dossier acts as an integral building block to my development as an artist. The building blocks of this dossier include a comprehensive artist statement, a written practice component in the form of a comparative case study of Geoffrey Farmer and Hannah Hoch and documentation of my artistic practice. Together these elements represent research carried out over the course of my MFA Candidacy in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Western Ontario.

The first component is a comprehensive artist statement, which provides clarity and examples of specific observations I have made during my time in London. In this section of the dossier I provide an overview of my artistic interests and my personal history. I then describe and analyze influential artists and their seminal projects as well as historical context significant to my work. Finally I explain my methodology, process, and body of work I intend to produce for my MFA thesis exhibition in order to coalesce my thoughts and provide a systematic and comprehensible reading of my artwork.

The second component to this dossier is my artistic practice documentation. The images provided are organized chronologically and reflect the MFA's program structure of fall and winter critiques. I have also included summaries of what I was inspired by at the time of creation of this work.

The third component of this dossier is comparative case study of Geoffrey Farmer's *Leaves of Grass* and Hanna Hoch's posthumous retrospective exhibition at the *Whitechapel* Gallery with a focus on her series entitled *From an Ethnographic Museum*. These artists have been influential to my artistic development and both have, in differing ways, pioneered techniques in photomontage and collage to challenge forms of representation, authorship, narrative and ideas about social class and social change. As a means to gain further understanding of these selected works, I will be applying Victor Shklovsky's theory of *defamiliarization*¹, Roland Barthes theory of *authorship*² and Walter Benjamin's theory of *reproduction*.³ The elements of this dossier represent the research and exploration I have done during my MFA candidacy concerning home décor, ornamentation and design elements of daily life.

1 Victor Shklovsky, In *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1965. 5–22.

2 Roland, Roland. *The Death of The Author*. (Ubu Web Papers, 1967), accessed August 18, 2016, http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death_authorbarthes.pdf.

3 Benjamin, Walter. *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. New York: Penguin Adult, 2008, 28-31.

Comprehensive Artist Statement

My studio-based research stems from a deep-rooted interest in home décor and design elements of daily life. During my MFA candidacy, I have undertaken many material explorations relating to collage and assemblage. In addition, I have also developed a conceptual exploration of home décor in relation to the commercialized show room in retail outlets, art galleries and art fairs. In the following sections, I will provide a discussion of my studio-based research, its origins, and its contribution to the field of visual arts. Firstly, I start with an overview of my artistic interests and my personal history. Secondly, I describe and analyze influential artists and their seminal projects as well as historical context that is significant to my work. Finally I explain my methodology, process, and body of work I intend to produce for my MFA thesis exhibition in order to coalesce my thoughts and provide a systematic and comprehensible reading of my work.

My Artistic Interests and Personal History

I left London Ontario when I was eighteen. Now, eleven years later, I have returned to my hometown to pursue a MFA. The combination of returning to live in my childhood home and reconnecting with friends some of whom are now homeowners has become a source of inspiration for my art. Living in the suburbs has allowed me to

recognize similarities in items of décor for the home (both interior and exterior) and evaluate how these choices are influenced, or whether they are choices at all. With access to a limited offering of home décor retailers, the choice of goods becomes limited by the selection on offer in that community. The selection is developed by a group of tastemakers who inevitably influence the whole community on what is trendy today, thus resulting in conformity of taste. Roland Barthes observes interior design elements of 1968 and writes:

... [t]aste constituted a poetic discourse, an evocation of self-contained objects that responded to one another; today objects do not respond to one another, they communicate-they have no individual presence but merely, at best, an overall coherence attained by virtue of their simplification as components of a code and the way their relationships are calculated.⁴

This calculated coherence of décor is sold through promotional images of ideal spaces that encourage the pursuit of the home decorator as an artist by means of assemblage. However, due to the conformist expectations the creative element is undermined. Within the suburbs, families of similar economic status live in proximity to one another. As a result, the suburban conformity has clouded my ability at a young age

⁴ Roland Barthes. *The System of Objects*. (London: Verso, 1996), 23.

to perceive visual signifiers of status and class as well as symbolism pertaining to my own culture. It was not until recently I began to understand the assumed class system associated with building materials and items of décor.

Calculated codes of object relationships that Barthes previously refers to can be seen in IKEA showroom displays. IKEA markets its goods to all classes, prioritizes simplicity in design and instruction. Similarly in the 19th century Bauhaus school's aspirations were to combine creativity in manufacturing and rejuvenate design for everyday life. Today it is almost impossible to find a home without an IKEA item. IKEA has been in the Canadian market since 1975 and has had forty-two years of influence on Canadian tastes. I am interested in the idea of the IKEA showroom (and retail showrooms in general) as a site for commercialized display while mimicking an idealized domestic space. This interest has spilled over into how I can view commercial art gallery spaces and art fair booth displays as temporary installations with an intention for profit by means of display. It is my artistic idiosyncrasy to recontextualize these sites and utilize their strengths and weaknesses for and against each other so that they can be seen anew.

There are many threads that are woven through my process-based visual practice. Internal reflection of my own identity has led me to this path of discovery in order to reconnect with my childhood and my introduction to making. As another form of inspiration, I found myself window-shopping. I critically observed IKEA displays and the methods of display and objects in London's second-hand stores. It is from these outings that I gained an awareness of what an ideal space consists of or doesn't consist of. The

items of décor for sale at Goodwill in my opinion, exhibit a cultural shedding of what has been viewed as unnecessary and out of fashion. From these two retail outlets, I have deduced a certain language within materials and objects that can be found in my studio work. I view these outings with the same regard to how I would view historical artifacts presented in a museum. Museological display was a terrain that I explored in my first term of my MFA candidacy and has remained of interest. I view the museum as the idealized home for any artwork to be displayed and stored. With professionally trained conservators artwork is kept in temperature and humidity controlled vaults or rooms with specified light levels that have been proved to aid in preservation. The art is arranged with white-gloved hands whether it is on display, in transit, or in storage and kept clean or repaired with the utmost care. It is safe to assume that most of the objects and artwork in a museum's collection have long outlived the life span envisioned by the creator, which in my opinion can be attributed to the proper housing of the works.

My studio based research considers the contemporary home as the site for display, storage and arrangement of possessions and investigates how decoration and ornamentation reflect socioeconomic status and consumer culture.

Historical Context, and a Description and Analysis of

Influential Artists and Their Seminal Projects:

As foundation for my research I have developed an understanding of the historic Arts and Crafts movement that emerged in the late Victorian era England and gained

popularity in America during the mid to late 19th century. The movement was a reaction to mass production and division of labor practices. It championed the designer as craft-person and influenced the development of architecture, ceramics, textiles and furniture of that time.⁵ This movement focused on five principles: design, unity, joy in labor, individualism and regionalism.⁶ The Arts and Crafts ambition for social, economic and design reform still is of value; however, the resistance to industrial methods of production led to its eventual disruption. What we have been left with is a culture that values expendable craftsmanship with an appreciation for design. William Morris argued that art should meet the needs of society and that there should be no distinction between form and function.⁷ Closely following the influence of the Arts and Crafts was the Bauhaus school of art and design.

The Bauhaus style, also known as the *International Style*, was marked by the absence of ornamentation and by harmony between the function of an object or a building and its design.⁸ The Bauhaus school was established in 1919 with the mandate of creating a total work of art.⁹ This idea can be translated into a single word in German,

⁵ Elizabeth Cumming and Wendy Kaplan. *World of Art Series: The Arts and Crafts Movement*. (London, Thames and Hudson, 1991), 27.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Elizabeth Cumming and Wendy Kaplan, *World of Art Series: The Arts and Crafts Movement*. (London, Thames and Hudson, 1991), 32.

⁸ Ulrike Muller, *Bauhaus Women* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009), 2.

⁹ Ibid.

gesamtkunstwerk, meaning all arts including architecture would be brought together.¹⁰ In complete contrast to the idea of *gesamtkunstwerk*, it is necessary to highlight a lecture with significant influence on early ideas of modernism. Adolf Loos a prominent Austrian architect gave a lecture in 1910 titled *Ornament and Crime*. Loos states that,

“[e]very age had its style, is our age alone to be refused a style? By style, people meant ornament. Then I said: Weep not! See, therein lies the greatness of our age that it is incapable of producing a new ornament. We have outgrown ornament; we have fought our way through to freedom of ornament.”¹¹

In this lecture, Loos links the idea of cultural development and progress to human evolution and taste. He argues that, “[t]he evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from utilitarian objects.”¹² This lecture, eventually published in 1913, proved to be an influential link from the view of the Arts and Crafts reformers to the developing ideology of the Bauhaus and modernist ideals. *Ornament and Crime* is racially offensive and sexist with an intention to infuriate artists, however “[b]ehind much of Loos critique is the idea that ornament is a debased form of personal self-expression, a desperate form of self-promotion that taints all artistic practice, reducing it

¹⁰ Ulrike Muller, *Bauhaus Women* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009), 4.

¹¹ Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime* (California: Ariadne Press: 1997), 10.

¹² Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime* (California: Ariadne Press: 1997), 12.

all to advertisements for oneself.”¹³ Loos argues that a lack of ornament is an attempt to make one’s taste invisible, and in a sense omnipresent, omnipotent.¹⁴

With this in mind, I would like to reference a photograph by Louise Lawler titled *Pollock and Tureen: Arranged by Mr. and Mrs. Burton Termaine, Connecticut*. Lawler illustrates art’s omnipresent quality by framing an arrangement of possessions within the home of established art collectors Mr. and Mrs. Burton. The Burton’s choice in wall colour, wooden buffet and style of frame around their Jackson Pollock painting is brought into focus in one complete composition. What I find most interesting about this work is that Lawler observes a pre-existing composition made up of artworks and objects functioning as ornamentation in a home and transformed it through photography to represent a similar form of ornamentation. The tureen and the Pollock painting share equal space within the photograph, and I consider this as an effort to obliterate any form of hierarchy within the displayed forms of art and to highlight the commodity status and decorative nature of Pollack’s formalism. This photograph reflects themes of social class, home decor, fine art, craftsmanship and institutional critique.

Working within the institution and investigating themes of the home and ornamentation is also relevant to John Armleder. In 2008 Armleder was given the opportunity to install in the main exhibition space of the *Centre cultural Suisse* in Paris

¹³ Rob Horning, “Ornament and crime” *Pop Matters*, Last modified April 26, 2006, http://www.popmatters.com/post/ornament_and_crime/

¹⁴ *ibid.*

and invited French interior decorator Jacques Garcia to see Armleder's conceptual project through. This exhibition allowed Armleder the opportunity to question the notions of interior design and appropriation using ornamentation as a conceptual medium.¹⁵ Jacques Garcia created an "authentic and meticulously detailed neo-bourgeois apartment containing an entrance hall, dining room, lounge and bedroom."¹⁶ With this work, a fictionalized private space is made public and Garcia's use of ornamentation and chinoiserie is arranged alongside works by George Condo, Helmut Newton and Armleder himself.¹⁷

John Armleder's collaboration with Jacques Garcia and Louise Lawler's photograph are of relevance to my research. Though continued reflection of identity construction, my reflexive studio-based practice responds to the situated home décor and design elements of daily life.

Methodology, Process, and Body of Work

Materially the foundation of my artistic practice is in collage. Collage is the best visual tool to illustrate my thought process and emotional response to life. My

¹⁵ "John Armleder: Jacques Garcia," *e-flux.com*, last modified May 15, 2008, <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/39305/john-armleder-jacques-garcia/>

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

comprehensive interpretation of collage as a medium embraces photography, photomontage, assemblage, painting and sculpture. Using the significance of home décor and design elements of daily life as the catalyst for making, within this program I have developed several methodologies for different bodies of work.

The first series of works I will describe is entitled *Showroom* and begins with photographs of domestic interiors. I have sourced and created contemporary and vintage photographs from Google searches, magazines and by visiting IKEA showrooms. These photographs are transformed into black and white and altered in clarity using effects within Photoshop. I choose to print on a large format black and white plotter, which mimics the aesthetic of a smaller scale photocopy. By printing in this way I address the mass production of the goods within the photographs. Compositions are created from cutouts by projecting images of both contemporary and antique furniture and decorative objects onto the photographs. I trace the outline of multiple projections and then intuitively cut out and around areas of interest. Latex paint often used in homes, is then applied to the surface. My colour selection was initially informed by miss-tints sold at the hardware store, however I am now moving away from this prescribed selection in an effort to remain unrestricted by my own process. Within this series of works I have experimented with multiple layers and colours of paint, both minimal and overloaded imagery, and considered various material implications.

In the first year of my studies at Western I created a series of photomontages entitled *Inherited Vessels*. This work is assembled by scanning and manipulating images

of ceramic vessels found in historical books, printing them and inserting them into one another. By manipulating images of ceramic vessels in Photoshop I considered myself working as a digital ceramicist stretching and pulling the clay forms in an effort to make each form my own. Once the prints were cut out and spread on a table, I approached the arrangement of each vessel much like a sculptor. From this project, the most interesting element for me was the re-presentation of an already existing object and the alteration of a canonical form. My access to these three-dimensional historical ceramic vessels has been through books in the library containing their two-dimensional photographic documentation. Because I cannot see these vessels in person I have to trust that they actually exist in space. The element of trust is supported by their publication. As a way to subvert this assumed trust, I wanted to alter their forms slightly and represent them as a whole. I view these works as the assemblage of multiple ceramic histories from around the world brought together in order to create a fictionalized sculpture.

As a counter action to my fictionalized sculpture-collages I have pushed myself to work three dimensionally. Examples of my most recent sculptural work include, a series of neo-classical planter urns made of concrete and weeds, a flocked fuchsia wooden plate, a slumped glass oil lamp and a paper accordion partition. These objects came from a desire to reinterpret forms that I view as connected to the home and exist as elements of ornamentation. I view elements of ornamentation as transient, cyclical and signifiers of era and social class. In order to facilitate a discussion around this body of work I arranged and rearranged these objects as an interior decorator. This activity led me to discover a new approach collage.

Continuing the role-play of interior decorator I paired images of ikebana with fabric and carpet samples in a series titled *This Goes With This*. These collages have led me on a path to view interior design mood boards as a collage method by evoking a particular style or concept. Recently I have wanted to insert autobiographical elements into my work and I find that this collage technique has allowed me to do so inconspicuously.

For my final thesis exhibition I will embrace the interior design mood board technique and present various collages in the form of an installation. Keeping in mind my conceptual interests in the exploration of home décor and design elements of daily life, the final method of display I choose will be critical to the reading of the collages themselves. Currently, I am considering constructing a 4x8' table made of drywall and found table legs. This table will be the support surface for a variety of collages containing images, objects and materials to be displayed. By choosing drywall as the surface I will transform the vertical plane of the artist's studio mood board to the horizontal interior designer's.

For the exhibition I am also considering exhibiting a series of planter urns made of concrete and local weeds. This form of planter urn is prevalent throughout the community in which I grew up and for me signifies conformity and lack. This form led me to question the history of common elements of the home and their relevance. Presenting several urns will highlight their commonplace nature and mass production. The way in which they are made is very rough and unpolished. I embrace imperfections

and cracks caused by the embedded weeds and transform the intended ornamental function of the planter urn itself.

Due to the nature of my creative process, I cannot map out the arrangement of works within the space beforehand. I continue to create images, objects and supports so that I have a plethora of works to choose from. By providing references to my personal history and historical context, my final thesis exhibition will crystallize my situated reflexive practice and signify a moment of my continual artistic development.

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http://www.popmatters.com/post/ornament_and_crime/

Practice Documentation

My work has developed significantly since the start of my MFA candidacy and this practice documentation provides evidence of this. Organized chronologically I provide a summary of what the inspiration was in creating each work. Titles and dimensions are listed below.

December 2015: Sky Glabush Studio Seminar

The following images were presented in my first public critique during Professor Sky Glabush's studio seminar course. During the creation of this work I was interested in ceramic how-to manuals and in representing stacked ceramic forms pictorially both 2-dimensionally and 3-dimensionally. In my collages I contrasted historically significant ceramic forms with rudimentary, un-glazed clay bowls. I would slice the images and insert one form into another. I presented these works in a manner that referenced commercialized window displays as a way to speak to the mass production of items of décor.



Wedgwood Intervention, Collage, 8.5 x 11" 2015



Ceramics How-To Manual, cut pages from found book, 7x10", suspended on 80 x 100" laser print, 2015



Image Sculpture, Laminated laser print on card

presented on 36x40" toner print, 2015



Image Sculpture, Laminated laser print on card

presented on 36x40" toner print, 2015



Image Intervention, Collage, 7x10", 2015

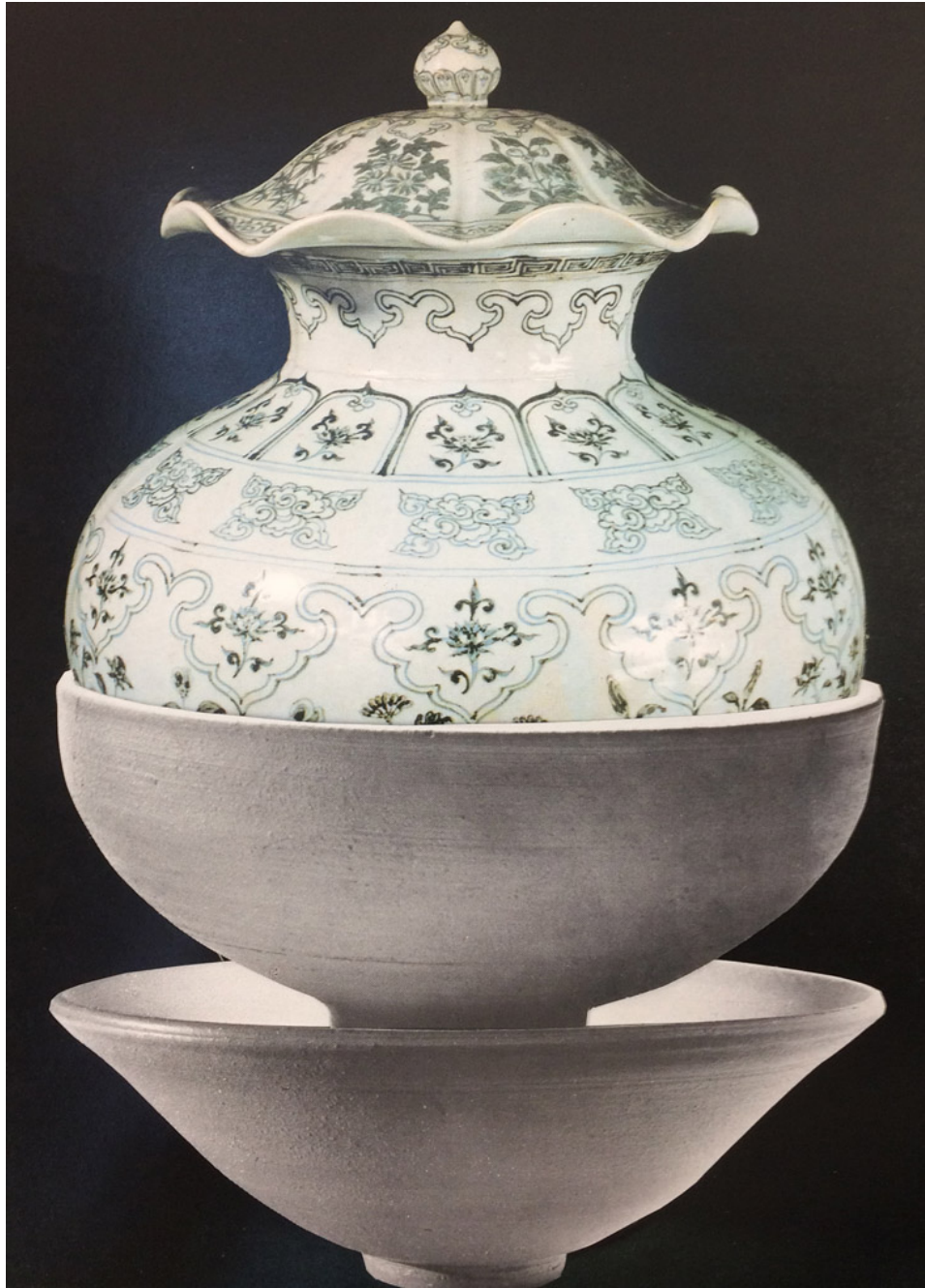


Image Intervention #2, Collage, 7x10", 2015

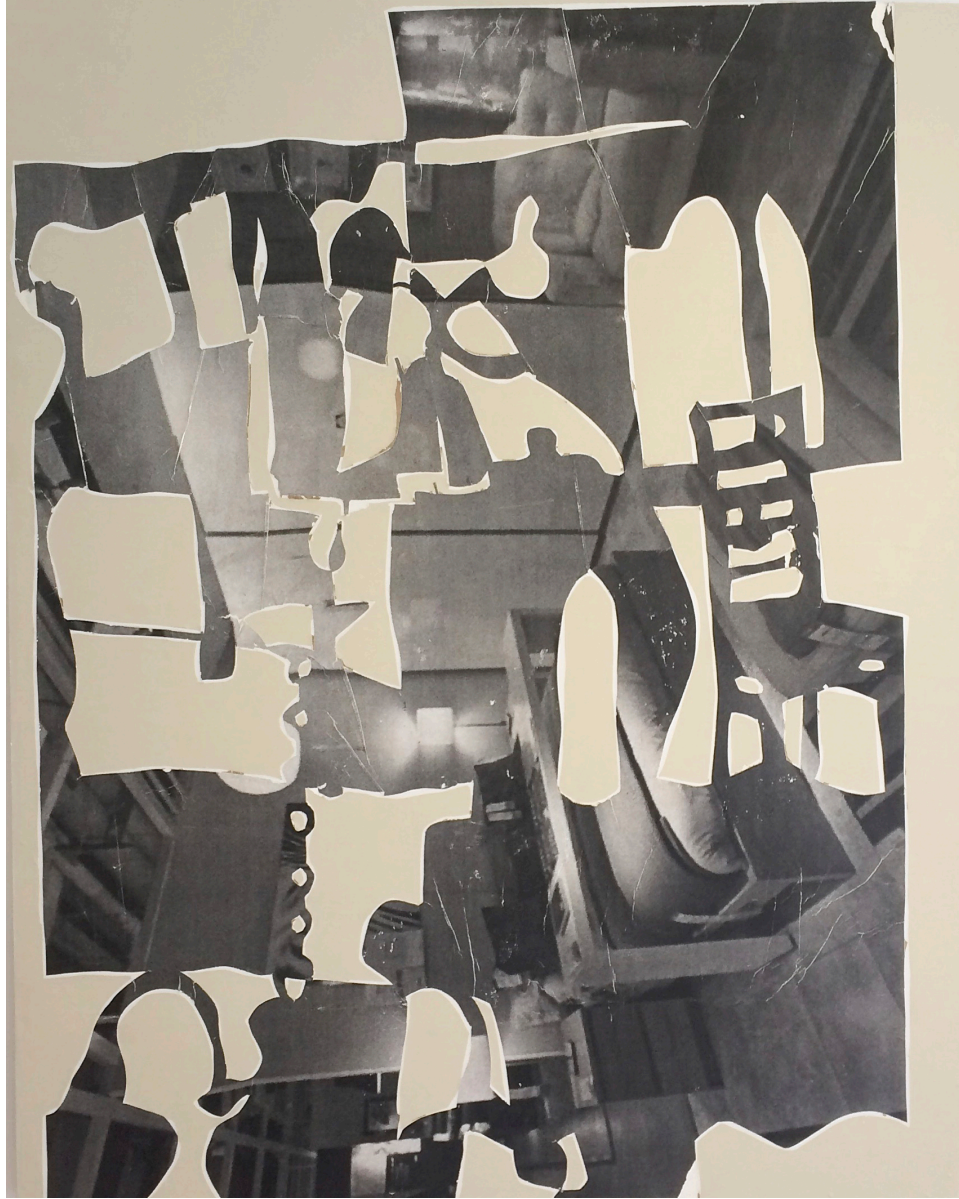
April 2016: Kelly Wood Studio Seminar Course

During this period of study I wanted combine collage with painting. I sourced colours of latex house paint from home renovation stores only selecting the miss-tints. I saw the miss-tints as an opportunity to collect data of London Ontario's slightly undesirable colours. I would print out large scale black and white images of home interiors and IKEA showrooms and cut out intuitively antique furniture shapes.

The Inherited Vessel #2 contains photocopied and scanned images of significant ceramic forms arranged and presented as autonomous sculptures in a group. For this piece I was interested in representing mass produced items of décor and challenging modes of representation.



A Piece of Home, Ink jet print on
panel, latex paint,
40x50", 2016



Show Room #1, Ink jet print on panel, latex paint,
40x50", 2016



Show Room #2, Ink jet print on panel, latex paint,
40x50", 2016



Inherited Vessels #2

Acid Free Paper, Acid Free Glue, archival pigment
prints on matte photo paper, ceramic magnets,

35 x 50", 2016

September 2016 Art Lab: I Know What You Did Last Summer

For this double sided installation I used a large movable wall. On one side of the wall I colour matched the painting to the wall. On the other side of the movable wall, I used trendy IKEA shelves as the primary method of display to organize collages, a photomontage and a painting.



Show Room #3, Ink jet print on panel, latex paint, 40x50", 2016



Install in the Art Lab, the opposite side of the wall presenting *Showroom #3*



These Curtains Go With This Image, Collage,
6x9" 2016



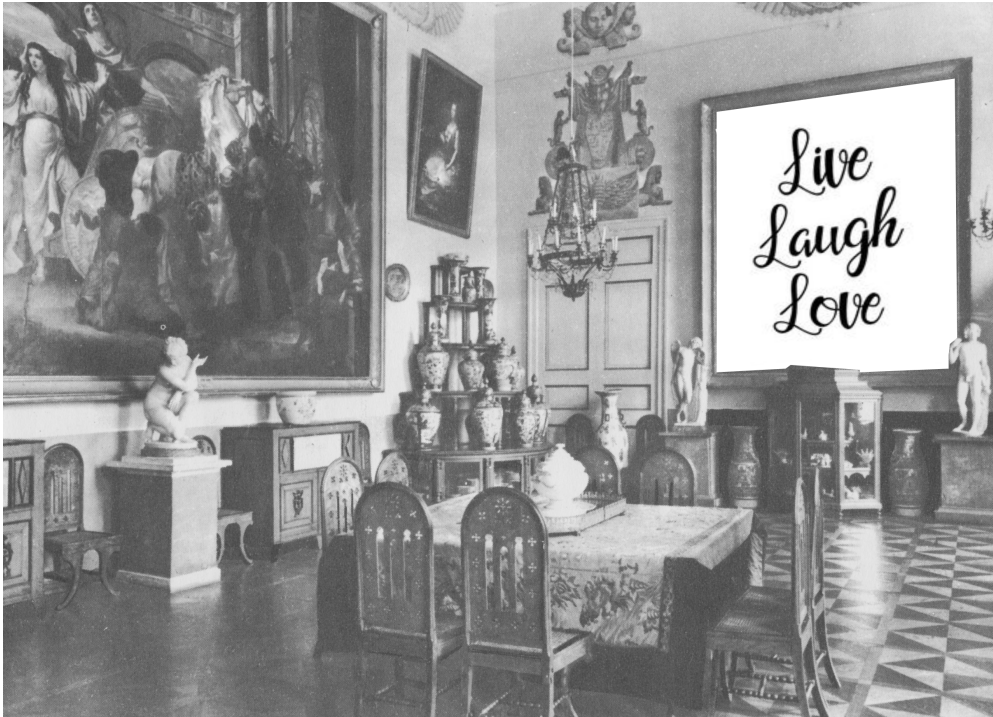
*These Fabric Swatches Go With This
Image, Collage, 6x9", 2016*



*These Carpet Samples Go With This
Image, Collage, 6x9", 2016*



Untitled Drywall Collage, found image,
ink jet print on drywall, 16 x 20", 2016



Live Laugh Love, c-print of digital collage, 8x6", 2016

December 2016: David Merritt Graduate Studio Seminar

For this installation I wanted to use methods of display that reference home furniture arrangement, retail show rooms, window display and art fair booths. The white plinth on the floor acted as my coffee table on which I arranged several images and objects. The swath of fabric underneath the coffee table acted as my area rug in an effort to tie the space together.





Showroom #5, Ink jet print, latex paint on panel, 16 x 20", 2016



Untitled Plate, Flocking on wood plate, 2016



Untitled Plaster Collage, ink jet print, canvas print, plaster on panel, 16 x 20",
2016



Untitled Oil Lamp, slumped glass vessel, found glass vessel, oil lamp burner, cotton, 2016



(Left) *Untitled Planter*, Plaster and local weeds, 2016

(Right) *Showroom # 6*, Ink jet print, latex paint on panel, 16 x 20", 2016

Case Study

The following case study compares Geoffrey Farmer's installation entitled *Leaves of Grass* and Hannah Hoch's posthumous retrospective exhibition at the *Whitechapel Gallery* with a focus on the collage series *From an Ethnographic Museum*. These artists have been influential to my artistic development and both have, in differing ways, pioneered techniques in photomontage and collage to challenge forms of representation, authorship, narrative, ideas about social class and social change, and have also documented human history. By comparing these artists I will illustrate their relevance and respective influence on contemporary art. Hannah Hoch's work precedes Farmers by decades however the two artists are compared in a manner that takes into account her evident influence on his practice. In viewing these exhibitions I will be applying Victor

Shklovsky's theory of *defamiliarization*¹⁸, Roland Barthes theory of *authorship*¹⁹ and Walter Benjamin's theory of *reproduction*²⁰ as a means to gain further understanding.

Geoffrey Farmer's photomontage installations are intricate in detail and grand in scale. Farmer "mines popular culture to create hybrid displays of photomontage, sculpture, installations, video and film."²¹ His meticulously constructed stage-set installations "pivot on the capacity of social and cultural histories to prompt an active engagement with the construction of meaning".²² Spanning 124 feet, *Leaves of Grass* is assembled from a *mélange* of clippings from vintage *Life* magazines mounted on dried

18 Victor Shklovsky, In *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1965. 5–22.

19 Roland, Roland. *The Death of The Author*. (Ubu Web Papers, 1967), accessed August 18, 2016, http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death_authorbarthes.pdf.

20 Benjamin, Walter. *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. New York: Penguin Adult, 2008, 28-31.

21 "Artist: Geoffrey Farmer," *Canadian Art* accessed September 3, 2016. <http://canadianart.ca/artists/geoffrey-farmer/>

22 *Ibid.*, 4.

grass sticks, creating a total of 16 000 figures.²³ This work gained critical acclaim at *dOCUMENTA(13)* contemporary art showcase in Germany in 2012 and was later on display at the National Gallery in Ottawa, where it is now in the permanent collection.

Hannah Hoch's work has obviously influenced Farmer's as she collected visual ephemera from a wide array of sources, primarily among popular culture and mass media products. An important member of the Berlin Dada movement and collage and photomontage pioneer, Hoch's work splices together found images that create a humorous and often moving commentary on society during a time of tremendous social change.²⁴ Unlike Farmer, Hoch does not invite the viewer to create meaning but rather implies it more specifically. Born in 1889, Hoch lived her adult years in Berlin and experienced World War I and the rise of Fascism throughout Europe. This social climate influenced her artwork immensely resulting in politically charged works. Her posthumous retrospective in 2014 at the *Whitechapel Gallery* brought together over one hundred works from major collections that included collages, photomontages, water-

23 Ibid., 4.

24 Anna Jones, "Press Release> Hannah Hoch," Whitechapel Gallery (2014): accessed August 16, 2016. <http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/about/press/hannah-hoch/>

colours and woodcuts from 1910 to the 1970s.²⁵ Included in this survey of works was her series entitled, *From An Ethnographic Museum*. Combining images of body parts (often female) with tribal masks and objects presented on museum plinths and in display cases, Hoch resists homogenizing ideals and confounds museological aesthetics. This work criticized a fragmented society by creating fragmented works referring to the self and presented fictional forms as historical entities.

Geoffrey Farmer's *Leaves of Grass*, and Hoch's *From An Ethnographic Museum* both invest in cultural criticism and surveys time and history. Farmer's disassociated images of popular culture are re-presented and displayed chronologically in the same fashion as Hoch's retrospective at the *Whitechapel Gallery*. But unlike Farmer, Hoch's collages reside on the static page. She has selected the composition and committed to its precise placement glued onto the paper surface. Farmer on the other hand, relies on drawing connections between freestanding images mounted vertically on dried leaves of grass. He takes into consideration site specificity, alteration, and scale. Besides the obvious visual and material similarities that these artists share, I would like to introduce the theory of *defamiliarization* here, applying it to collage as a way to fictionalize images and create alternative narratives.

25 Anna Jones, "Press Release> Hannah Hoch," Whitechapel Gallery (2014): accessed August 16, 2016. <http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/about/press/hannah-hoch/>

Defamiliarization is known as presenting common things in an unfamiliar or strange way in order to enhance our perceptions of the familiar.²⁶ The most well known example of this can be seen with Marcel Duchamp's urinal entitled *Fountain*. This technique encourages active participation in perceiving things and thinking about their meaning, soliciting engagement from an otherwise passive, inactive audience. Russian literary theorist Victor Shklovsky first coined this term in 1917.²⁷ *Defamiliarization* is a central concept of twentieth century art, ranging over movements including postmodernism and Dada. In Victor Shklovsky's seminal essay, *Art as Device* (or sometimes translated: *Art as Technique*), the author states:

“[T]he purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art

26 Chris Baldick. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. London: Oxford University Press, 2008. 263.

27 Victor Shklovsky, *In Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1965. 5–22.

is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is
not important.”²⁸

Shklovsky highlights the act of perception becoming habitual and thus unconsciously automatic. If we consider flipping through a magazine as an unconscious and automatic act, then by cutting out images and removing them from their source, the image may become transformed in meaning and become autonomous. Based on Shklovsky’s definition, defamiliarization is innately associated with collage. Both Hoch and Farmer embrace this theory and technique in their works, by removing images from their sources with the intention to subvert their intended purpose. The images may have once functioned as an aid to encourage sales, or accompanied a piece of writing, but now the cut out has become an autonomous entity and servant to the artist. Hoch was one of the pioneers of this technique and created fictionalized artifacts and politicized posters. Farmer took this technique and pushed it further by presenting two-dimensional images as three-dimensional sculptures.

Working three dimensionally Farmer takes into consideration the artwork’s physical presence and multiple perspectives. For *dOCUMENTA(13)* Farmer was asked to select an audio piece to accompany *Leaves of Grass*. He chose *Some Where Over the Rainbow* by

28 Ibid.,

Judy Garland from the *Wizard of Oz*.²⁹ Farmer mentioned in an interview with Rosemary Heather,

“American soldiers used to play it in Germany as a kind of anthem at the end of the war. In the movie, it is a hopeful song, but when listening to it and looking at the piece, it has another effect, making the piece, and history, feel like a very strange dream.”³⁰

It comes as no surprise that Geoffrey Farmer would be inspired by a multitude of art and popular pop culture references as he routinely incorporates these preexisting forms into his practice. When considering authorship and appropriation in contemporary art it is generally considered problematic to claim that any idea or creation is entirely original. Appropriation is known as intentional borrowing, copying, and altering preexisting images and objects. Both Hoch and Farmer use images that are sourced from widely distributed publications and media that are so familiar as to seem like public property. Literary theorist Roland Barthes’s text *The Death of the Author* presents an idea

29 Rosemary Heather, “Geoffrey Farmer Discusses His Big Documenta Hit,” *Canadian Art* (2012): accessed August 16, 2016. <http://canadianart.ca/features/geoffrey-farmer-reveals-process-behind-documenta-13-hit/>

30 *Ibid.*, 16.

of authorship that argues against the assumption that a work of art has anything to do with the author's personal history or location. Barthes insists upon the "disjointed nature of texts, their fissures of meaning and their incongruities, interruptions and breaks."³¹ Barthes claims that the work of art does not belong to the author, it belongs to the public, and therefore narrative and meaning are open to interpretation. Farmer seems to adhere to Barthes's presumptions regarding how meaning should be understood regarding art. This is to say, that Farmer's work does not explicitly convey meaning, whereas Hoch's does. Though Farmer does not reference this idea specifically he has referenced Barthes and his theories in interviews.³² It is possible that the reason the two artists under consideration here differ in their means of communication is as the result of their respective social, political, and economic climates. Farmer was born in a time of relative peace and prosperity, allowing for what might be termed, 'pacifistic art' (open to interpretation), whereas Hoch lived in a time rife with political, economic and social turmoil. Hoch acted as a political iconoclast and critiqued societal views and challenged social norms.

German cultural critic Walter Benjamin theorizes politicized artistic production and dissemination in his seminal essay titled *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical*

31 Roland Barthes. *The Death of The Author*. (Ubu Web Papers, 1967), accessed August 18, 2016, http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death_authorbarthes.pdf.

32 Ibid., 15.

*Reproduction.*³³ In this essay Benjamin discusses the concept of authenticity in regards to reproduction. He argues that the “sphere of authenticity is outside the technical,”³⁴ indicating that the original artwork is independent of the copy. He argues that any reproduction is lacking by comparison to the original and is deprived of an *aura*.³⁵ When considering Farmer’s *Leaves of Grass* and Hoch’s *From an Ethnographic Museum*, though the source materials used are reproductions, the artwork transcends the source image’s purpose(s) through artistic intervention. Through careful selection, overlap, overlay, scale and process the *aura* as Benjamin refers to is created. Benjamin was aware of the risk of mechanical reproduction being commandeered for capitalistic intentions. With the use of reproductions in the photographic sense, the view of the camera becomes the method of communication and assumed truth. The camera eye can operate on bias just as easily as our own eyes can. What Geoffrey Farmer and Hannah Hoch have done with collage has welcomed the view of their artworks from the perspective of the mode of production. Hoch’s work was produced in contemplative isolation while Farmer embraced a mechanized and ritualized form of production. In an interview with *Canadian Art Magazine* Farmer discusses the process of creating *Leaves of Grass* through shift work, not unlike a conveyor belt assembly line.

33 Walter Benjamin. *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. New York: Penguin Adult, 2008, 28-31.

34 *Ibid.*, 19.

35 *Ibid.*, 19.

“In the last few months, we had about 90 volunteers helping us. We had quotas to keep. We worked in shifts. There was a small group of us who, in the end, I think, were working 20-hour days.”³⁶

One can only assume that Farmer went to great lengths to organize a team of volunteers to help create his work to have an impact at *dOCUMENTA(13)* by means of accumulative display. Walter Benjamin mentions in his essay the changes in values in regards to exhibiting artwork based on the context in which it is displayed.³⁷ Farmer’s ritualized form of production is a prime example of what Benjamin predicted. Benjamin noticed that works of art that were once viewed privately are now in contrast with the publicity of modern art; which has an emphasis on mass exhibition as well as the means to show it to much larger audiences than previously possible. As a result of Farmer’s accumulative display and the triumph of *Leaves of Grass*, he solidified his international reputation and proved to Canadian experts and the artworld at large that he is an exceptional talent. From this success he has earned his place in representing Canada at the Venice Biennale of 2017, which is arguably the worlds largest mass exhibition. The intention of the Biennale is to provide a location for a global survey of the best in

36 Ibid., 1.

37 Ibid 21.

contemporary art and the contemporary world places great value on public display. Farmer's work will be well received as he uses imagery of global history that any visitor from any nationality can relate to.

Both Hannah Hoch and Geoffrey Farmer use source imagery as means to create a mass-cultural-collective biographical portrait. Farmer's method of display is accumulative and grand, while Hoch's is minimal and static. Their work speaks to the contemporary world by using nostalgic materials and encourages individualized self-reflection. Their practices go beyond the narrative of who they are or where they come from and connect to culture, history and human development in ways that estrange and create wonder, among their other attributes. In observing these artists and their respective works and applying the theories of *defamiliarization*³⁸, *authorship*³⁹ and *reproduction*⁴⁰ it is clear that collage and photomontage are multifaceted mediums that have been reinvented in use and interpretation over time and will continue to do so. Its formation comes from the arrangement of different parts to create a new whole, which can be an interpretation for any creative endeavor. It is from this constant re-arrangement

38 Victor Shklovsky, In *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1965. 5–22.

39 Roland, Roland. *The Death of The Author*. (Ubu Web Papers, 1967), accessed August 18, 2016, http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death_authorbarthes.pdf.

40 Benjamin, Walter. *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. New York: Penguin Adult, 2008, 28-31.

that growth; development and new realizations can arise and enhance perception of the familiar.

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Image Appendix.

Fig. 1



Fig: 1. Geoffrey Farmer, *Leaves of Grass*. 2012 Installation view at Neue Galerie Kassel courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jefferies commissioned and co-produced by dOCUMENTA(13)/ photo by Anders Sune Berg.

<https://canadianart.ca/features/geoffrey-farmer-reveals-process-behind-documenta-13-hit/>
(accessed August 12, 2016)

Fig 2.



Fig 3.



Fig 4.



Fig 2. Hannah Hoch, *Indian Dancer: From an Ethnographic Museum* 1930. Cut-and-pasted printed paper and metallic foil on paper, 10 1/8 x 8 7/8" (25.7 x 22.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

<http://www.moma.org/collection/works/37360?locale=en>

Fig 3. Hannah Hoch, *Untitled: From an Ethnographic Museum* 1929. Photomontage with collage 19 3/10 × 12 4/5 in 49 × 32.5 cm. Whitechapel Gallery London England.

<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/hannah-hoch-ohne-titel-aus-der-serie-aus-einem-ethnographischen-museum-untitled-from-the-series-from-an-ethnographic-museum>

Fig. 4 Hannah Hoch, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany*. 1919-1920. Photomontage and collage with watercolor, 44 7/8 x 25 7/16" (114 x 90 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

<https://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/audios/29/704>

Curriculum Vitae

Education

- MFA, Current Candidate at the University of Western Ontario
- 2014 BFA, Ontario College of Art and Design University

Solo Exhibitions and Projects

- 2016 Cc:, DNA Artspace, London Ontario apart of Nuit Blanche London ON.
- 2016 Inherited Vessels, Huntclub, Toronto ON.

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2016 Dogleg, 20 Kitchener Ave. London ON.
- 2016 Blank Canvas, Art Auction, Museum London ON.
- 2016 Plexus, DNA Artspace, London ON.
- 2016 I Know What You Did Last Summer, Art Lab, London ON.
- 2016 Summer Group Exhibition, General Hardware Contemporary, Toronto ON.
- 2016 Closed System/ Sustainable Growth, Art Lab, London, ON.

- 2015 Noetic on Accident, Carrier Arts Organization, Toronto, ON.
- 2015 Winter Emerging Artist Exhibition, Gallery 1313, Toronto, ON.
- 2015 Festival of the Body, OCADU, Toronto, ON.

- 2014 Afterhours Projects, The Fire Doesn't Burn Itself, 109 Niagara Toronto, ON.
- 2014 Depth Perception: Fusion of Art and Culture, Artscape Youngplace, Toronto, ON.
- 2014 Far Out, Dorothy H. Hoover Library, Toronto, ON.
- 2014 Out of Pocket, Carrier Arts, Toronto, ON.
- 2014 Recent Grad Show, Walnut Contemporary, Toronto, ON.
- 2014 Recent Graduate Booth, Love Art Fair, Toronto, ON.

Scholarships/ Awards

2016-2017 University of Western Ontario Graduate Research Scholarship

2016 Jose Barrio-Garay Bursary

2015-2016 University of Western Ontario Graduate Research Scholarship

2015 Chair's Entrance Scholarship, University of Western Ontario

2014 Mrs. W.O Forsyth Award

2010 The Matthew David Stein Memorial Scholarship Award

Press

2016 London Free Press

<http://www.lfpress.com/2016/12/02/on-the-canvas-piece-for-every-style-budget-in-gallery-sale>

2016 Online Student Exhibition

http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/exhibitions/online_student_exhibition.html

2016 Second Look: Sarah Munro

<http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/docs/Second-Look-Exhibition-Text.pdf>

2016 Nuit Blanche London Ontario Event

Program <http://www.londonfringe.ca/nuitblanchelondon/pdf/Nuit-Blanche-2016-program-June-4.pdf>

2014 Affordable Art Fair Makes First Foray Into Canada with Love Art

<http://canadianart.ca/features/2014/05/08/love-art-fair/>

