Nostos

Diane Hiscox

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NOSTOS

by

DIANE HISCOX

Under the Direction of Craig Drennen MFA

ABSTRACT

_Nostos_ is an exhibition of paintings and textile works that are manifestations of my experience of this extraordinary past year. The work reflects several themes: documentary of the everyday as a form of resistance, feminist art practice, and art-as-therapy. A feminist perspective reclaims domestic or quotidian subject-matter as socially and culturally significant, and acknowledges the place of traditionally female labor in the pantheon of fine art. In representationally-painted images and stitched “maps,” I process personal realities such as domesticity, comfort, geography, the passage of time, and how I observe the world.

INDEX WORDS: Painting, Textile, Window, Screen, Pandemic, The Odyssey.
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by

DIANE HISCOX

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Art

in the College of the Arts

Georgia State University

2021
NOSTOS

by

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1 INTRODUCTION

In Homer’s epic poem *The Odyssey*, the word *nostos* meant several different things: it meant escaping death, safe landings, returning home from war, and being back home.

This past year has been an odyssey of sorts: not a literal quest over great distances as the epic describes, but a physical and existential journey nonetheless. Escaping death and being home could aptly describe our lives this year. Safe landings and returning home from war might also describe the lives of essential workers who continued to serve throughout the pandemic. Like much of the world, I have been confined to my home: my corporeal journey is a repetitive and seemingly endless track from the kitchen to the study, to the bedroom, bathroom and back.

Meanwhile on the world stage, extraordinary and historic events have unfolded at a head-spinning rate. Health, environmental, social, and political emergencies collided simultaneously. Many of us watched these spectacles unfold, in real time, on screens. Living where I do in urban Atlanta, I also witnessed evidence of turmoil from my window. Other times my view was banal and quotidian. It was hard to concentrate during this time, and my attention was drawn fleetingly to little details like the omnipresence of helicopters, and the frequent visits by ambulances on the street below. The small paintings that punctuate the exhibition reflect how I distractedly took in these phenomena.

*Nostos* is an exhibition of paintings and textile works that process this experience. Forced in 2020 by circumstance (the Covid 19 pandemic), but also by inclination, much of my exterior reality has been experienced through the window or the screen. The paintings depict often mundane details of my day-to-day life, and in some cases are
diaristic in nature. The textile pieces are more cartographic, tracking my repetitive, daily movements within my apartment. As I transcribe my experience I touch on such art-historical tropes as the window, the woman in the window, voyeurism, mapping, and diaristic practices.

I also introduce the therapeutic, self-soothing aspect of art-making, particularly stitching: how haptic pleasure and repetitive small-motor gestures affect neurological regulation. With a history of complex PTSD and brain injuries, I often turn to strategies such as reiterative, rhythmic stitches or brushstrokes to calm my over-stimulated nervous system. In this regard, this paper will also explore the relationship between brain function and art, specifically how certain art practices can assist the artist to self-soothe a hyper-aroused state. I will look at scholarship in the fields of neurology and art therapy, and artists who may have used their practice to self-regulate. I will tell a little about my own story and why this is important to me.

It is impossible to ignore the momentous events of this year, and these will naturally inform my artistic narrative: my own experience of distance and disconnect, and the limitations on my movement and activities, occasioned by the pandemic. The outcome of this work will be a record of a moment in time from my idiosyncratic point of view. I hope to capture something of the quality of a moment in passing: a fragment or a feeling seen and acknowledged. Some pieces may read as social- or political critiques. Viewers in the present will have lived through the same world events and may reflect on their own experiences. Viewers in other countries might notice differences in how their worlds look in contrast. Future viewers might see the work as a visual archive of a troubled period in history.
The significance of the work lies mainly in the time period it is recording, and the singular point of view of this particular artist.

2 PAINTING THE QUOTIDIAN

2.1 Genre Paintings

Genre painting has held a low hierarchical position in art history, but it has always been the form that attracted me the most, I think because I could best relate to it: domestic routine and the rituals of hospitality are part of my lived reality. Religious, heroic, and military pictures usually leave me cold because I cannot see myself in them; I feel excluded.

In this body of work my observations of the everyday include views of the street below my window: in one case an empty street, in others the same street peopled with protesters, workers, or loiterers. Other images depict helicopters and ambulances (again viewed through my window), and images of surveillance cameras, in locations in or around my building. In observing the surveillance helicopters and cameras, I play with the notion of observing the observer; this echoes themes of seeing and being seen that resonate with modernist enquiries around the window (and the camera as window) as an artistic device, which I will touch on later, and also a similar reference in my discussion of the Zoom portraits in the exhibition. When I set out on this enquiry I had intended to concentrate more on objects or interior scenes of everydayness, but consistently I found myself drawn to the window, or the screen, and the world outside.

Still lives and other genre paintings have been enduring themes throughout Western art, though only began to attract critical discourse in the last decade of the
twentieth century, when a renewal of interest occurred. Artists and curators began to address the quotidian in numerous international biennales, site-specific projects, historical overviews of modernism and themed group exhibitions. In the introduction to a 2008 anthology entitled *The Everyday*, the editor Stephen Johnstone writes:

Drawing on the vast reservoir of normally unnoticed, trivial and repetitive actions comprising the common ground of daily life, … the rise of the everyday in contemporary art is usually understood in terms of a desire to bring these uneventful and overlooked aspects of lived experience into visibility.

Jonathan Watkins, the curator of the 11th Sydney Biennale (1998), notes a similar burgeoning interest in the quotidian amongst contemporary artists in the exhibition catalogue entitled *Every Day: Everyday*. He writes that this shift in focus:

… constitutes a rejoinder to played-out operatic tendencies and an overloaded academic (often pseudo-academic) discourse in visual arts, engendered by early postmodernism... Emphasis here is placed on the significance of every day, and any day…. Selected works are characterized by efficacy and unpreciousness. They are unforced artistic statements, incidentally profound observations on the nature of our lives as lived every day.

This year “the everyday” took a dramatic turn. More than once this summer I watched news of Black Lives Matter protests in Atlanta on my computer screen; the crowds were just a few blocks away. Looking out my apartment window, I could see the same city skyline and the same helicopters as those on my screen, but from a different angle. I could hear the percussion bombs set off by the police to break up the protesters,

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first from the audio broadcast, and then echoed in real life. Police cars and SWAT armored vehicles streamed, and screamed, past my building.

All this was happening, yet from day to day we still had to wake up, make our coffee, and go to work, if we were still lucky enough to have jobs. Buy groceries, walk the dog. Things can look very normal, even though the apocalypse may be occurring two blocks over. This dual existence is what suffuses ordinary scenes with disquiet.

I admire the women artists of the generations before me, both for their valorization of domestic subject-matter but especially those who, through dogged perseverance, created artistic lives for themselves. In spite of my feminist beliefs, I also succumbed to the patriarchal paradigm, wherein my life- and career goals were supplanted by those of my husband. In the 1980s we were told that “women can have it all,” but this proved to be untrue for me, and probably for most women: you could have half a career, most of the duties of parenting, and almost all of the physical and emotional labor of running a home and family. I struggled to maintain my identity as I raised three active children, kept a home, painted when I could, studied law and attempted to cobble together a law practice.

I identify with the late Canadian painter Mary Pratt (fig. 1), both in her choice of quotidian subject-matter, and in the socially-mandated obstacles she was forced to overcome. She was a generation older than me, and faced more resistance than did women of my generation, but her struggles with division of domestic labor and opportunity still echo today: this has been elucidated and amplified by women’s experiences during the current pandemic. Pratt studied art at Mount Allison University in the rather remote province of New Brunswick. The school was conservative artistically,
and focused primarily on technique. It was associated with a style or approach to painting that is loosely called “Atlantic Realism,” and although Pratt never identified herself as such her work is certainly realist, and her work often has the “air” of Atlantic Canada in its subject-matter. Pratt and the Atlantic Realists have been commercially successful, but for the most part have remained outside the canon of contemporary art, largely because of their commercial appeal.

Figure 1. Mary Pratt. *Supper Table*. 1969 oil on canvas 61.0 x 91.4 cm. Collection of the family of Mary Pratt.

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She married a classmate, Christopher Pratt (fig. 2), who became phenomenally successful, by Canadian standards, although his talent was weak in comparison to hers. In contrast to her rich coloration and paintwork, Christopher Pratt’s paintings appear cold and flat. The prevailing convention of the time, as Pratt was told by one her professors, was that there was only room for one artist in a marriage, and that it was going to be her husband, and she was thus discouraged from pursuing her career.\(^4\) She kept a home for her husband and raised four children. She continued to paint, and later in life achieved the recognition that was duly hers.

Figure 2. Christopher Pratt. *Cottage Interior*. 1973.

Her early exclusion from the Canadian art canon was not only because of the commercial appeal of Atlantic Realism, or the competition for the resource of time with her husband. In the decades-long reign of high modernism in the art world (read: muscular white male), there was an abject rejection of femininity. Second-wave feminist

\(^4\) Ibid.
artists like Judy Chicago arguably broke through that glass ceiling, although *The Dinner Party*, the work for which she is principally known, toured only second-tier museums in America (fig. 3).

![Image of Dinner Party](image)

**Figure 3.** Judy Chicago, *Dinner Party* (detail). 1979. Brooklyn Museum.

Pratt’s subject-matter was intimate and domestic (fig. 1). She painted beautiful vignettes of home life, infused with loneliness and sadness. She painted food in various stages of preparedness; she painted the unmade bed, laundry on the line, and dishes left on the table after a meal. She showed a private side of the home – not the “*Good Housekeeping*” or “*House Beautiful*” magazine version, but the house beautiful of everyday life, the un-cleaned up version that we normally do not let people see: the mess, the prep work.
Figure 4. Mary Pratt. *Fish Head in Steel Sink*. 1983. Oil on Masonite. 52.1 x 77.5 cm. Private collection, New Brunswick.

Pratt employed a full palette, with a luminosity reminiscent of Vermeer’s (fig.5) and Chardin’s (fig. 6) light-bathed interiors and still-lives. She captured a sense of stillness, of some poignant quiet drama awaited or just occurred.
Figure 5. Johannes Vermeer. *Milkmaid*. 1658-1660. Rijksmuseum.
Although Pratt did not state such when she was painting household scenes, her work is largely seen as subversively feminist. Tightly-cropped, closely-observed objects of domestic labor indicate the subjugation and highly-circumscribed life of a 1960s housewife. Paintings of the dining table, littered with detritus from a meal, evoke a unique kind of loneliness that the wife/mother feels as the family members have gone and she is left to tidy up.
Pratt’s domestic paintings have shown me that there is a rich vein of content in domestic life. It is a subject-matter that can provide comfort in troubling times, and at the same time be revolutionary through social critique, and also allude to universal themes such as loneliness and alienation.

I don’t set out to make art that is beautiful or ugly; my aim is to make it true to my experience or intent. In the late 1990s, I simultaneously wore the hats of a part-time graduate student, part-time counsel to a government department, and full-time parent to three children under 10. My kitchen sink looked like this (fig. 7):

![Figure 7. Diane Hiscox. Sink. 1997. Private Collection. Oil on Linen, 40 x 60 cm.](image)

Lois Dodd is an American artist born in 1927 who, like Pratt, paints the everyday world around her, but unlike Pratt, commits to the gritty and the nondescript, and does not appear to set out to create beauty. Her paintings call for the viewer to consider what is
so commonplace as to have become invisible. She studied at Cooper Union in the late 1940s, lived and worked in the Bowery district, and was a key member of the post-war New York art scene. While the scene was dominated by the Abstract Expressionist movement, Dodd remained committed to observational figurative and landscape painting.

Dodd’s comfort with modernist precepts is evident in paintings of laundry drying on the line, and of scenes through windows (figs. 8, 9, and 12). Both themes place rectangles within the rectangular confines of the picture plane, reinforcing the notion that the painting is a flat surface. In an interview with John Yau she refers to a psychological aspect of this formal device, that it is about blocking sight as well as seeing: the rectangle of a sheet on a line blocks the center of vision, and everything else is squeezed into the space around it.5

In the same interview, Yau suggests that that her paintings are diaristic in the way that they move from day to day and season to season. “At the same time,” he writes, “you don’t tell a story, they’re not autobiographical, they’re not social.”6 Dodd’s work seems less intimate, less personal than Pratt’s, yet it still speaks of a quiet, domestic world. Formally her paintings are cooler. Her treatment of light, atmosphere, and color are understated within a circumscribed palette, in contrast to Pratt’s full palette and luminosity.

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6 Ibid., 10.
In my painting *April 14* (fig. 10) I was not considering modernist principles – at least not consciously – when painting the view from my window. I placed the rectangular sheets illusionistically at an angle within the rectangular picture plane, as did Dodd. I was
unaware of Dodd’s paintings at the time, but the similarity is striking in both form and content. My painting of Trump on the tablet in my bed plays with a reversal of the sheet blocking a view within a window: instead it shows an electronic screen, representing a window, superimposed on a sheet, on the inside of a window looking out (fig. 11).

Dodd paints about the experience of being a solitary woman, and more specifically an older one. It is a common societal trope that women become socially invisible as they age. In a culture so firmly entrenched in patriarchy, and from a patriarchal point of view, women have value only insofar as they are attractive to men.
Dodd’s paintings seem to say that she is just fine with that: she is content with herself and her circumstance, and finds power in her artistic life. John Yau writes: “In Snow Tree Window (fig. 12), the droplets of condensation on the windowpane are every bit as important as the bare tree …. What comes through this and other scenes glimpsed through a window is an atmosphere of solitariness, a sense of isolation gracefully accepted.”

Most painters have an intimate relationship with solitude, and whether that relationship is happy or not will be reflected in the work. Like Pratt, and like me, Dodd paints about her experience in solitude: probably in all three of us there is some ambivalence, some story to be told, and also some quiet contentment.

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Figure 12. Lois Dodd. *Snow Tree Window*. 2014.
2.2 The Diary

A lot of my work has a diaristic aspect. In *End of Winter 2012* (Figs. 10, 13, and 14) I painted the view out my window, daily, over the course of three months. The series, when installed together, can be read as a record of the changing season, or of changing mental states. At the time I was recovering from head injuries, and also mulling devastating decisions about making life changes.

Mary Kelly and her groundbreaking work *Postpartum Document* (fig. 15) was the first diaristic work I encountered in my art education. In this work, Kelly documented the first five years of her child’s life, including, most notoriously (and scandalously at the time), preserving and exhibiting the liners of her son’s cloth diapers, replete with fecal stains. This was also amongst the first overtly feminist work I had encountered: alongside exhaustive lists and notations of her son’s diet, development, etc., Kelly wrote and
displayed analytical texts about the invisible daily experience of women engaged in
domestic labor. I was moved by this work, both because of its feminist message and also
because it expanded my notion of what could be considered as art: I was familiar with
numerous conceptual artists already, but in contrast they seemed cerebral, removed, and
mostly male. Other feminist artists like Marina Abramovic and Judy Chicago (fig. 3)
were reclaiming the body, and history, in their work, but Kelly’s willingness to delve into
the gritty everydayness of women’s work was eye-opening to me.

In On Kawara’s *Today* series, he painted the date on which he made the painting, daily, from 1966 to 2013 (fig. 16). These are literally, and entirely, “everyday” pictures. They are nearly universal in that most of us experience and register time in the same way. Kawara arrived in New York in the 1960s, at a time when the muscular antics of American Abstract Expressionism were beginning to wane, to be supplanted by the (also largely macho) Minimalist and Pop Art movements, and the Conceptualists. All three of
the newer movements eschewed the subjective expression of the artist in the work: the Minimalists adopted an austere rigor, and Pop artists a certain sardonic exuberance. Conceptual artists, like Kawara, turned to process, documentation, language, and action that would assert the primacy, and often the only necessary element, of the idea over the finished aesthetic object.

There are traces of autobiographical information in Kawara’s paintings (and in the packaging in which they are stored), making the series a self-portrait extended over time. He traveled quite a lot, and adopted whatever type of date notation was common in the location where the work was created. He stored the paintings in boxes which contained a newspaper from the time and place of their creation which could be exhibited with the works or not. The scale of the paintings was determined to a degree by the circumstances of their creation: those done at home in the studio could be larger than those done in hotel rooms, for example. The limitations in Kawara’s practice remind me of the years I spent, when my children were small, painting small works in a corner of the kitchen – no studio was available and I had to be present and able to assume child-care duties at any moment; I also had to be able to pack up my paints quickly to get ready for dinner (fig. 7).
2.3 Maps

I have also explored themes of solitude and interiority, mostly in my textile-based works. I made *These Uncertain Times*, part of the *Odysseus I* installation in the exhibition (fig. 17) in the early weeks of the pandemic. Essentially this piece is a map of the movements I make around my apartment: from the bed to the bathroom, to the kitchen, to my easel, etc. The surface is densely stitched in places, representing the well-worn paths I trod. Names from the news are embroidered in red: the names of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Rayshard Brooks, all Black men or women who were killed during the period in which I worked on the piece. I also embroidered the names of two personal friends who died during this period.
Many artists have employed maps or mapping in their practices, using maps as materials, maps of real places, imaginary maps, and map-like imagery.

Shilpa Gupta is an Indian artist whose work is read as socio-political in nature, as much of her work addresses border issues in a politically-unstable geography, but Gupta argues that her work is more about the everyday realities. In some of her works she uses maps that remind me of my textile maps. For One Hundred Maps (fig. 18), Gupta asked 100 people to draw a map of their country (India) from memory. Gupta then superimposed these drawings to create a composite drawing.

The thin, frenzied wiry lines of this work were the imagined drawings of individuals invited by the artist to draw maps from memory. Superimposed on
each other, the fuzzy, furry lines are a unique cartography of places existing in minds, either as powerful projections or complete fictitious imagination. The drawings appear powerful and futile at the same time; on the one hand a microcosm of the valiant attempt to demarcate borders and establish an identity, on the other hand, in its abstract waviness and imperfection, small and pathetic in its helplessness to actually assert any defined borders, or to change them.\(^8\)

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What I like about Gupta’s work, and which I would like to speak to in my own, is the suggestion or impression of a geographical reality, which is vague, permeable, and changeable. Political borders such as those referenced in One Hundred Maps are completely artificial, changeable, except insofar as the land mass is circumscribed by the sea; similarly, my movements within my apartment (fig. 17) are arbitrary and changeable except insofar as my movements are limited by the placement of walls and doors.

### 2.4 The Window

The window has been an artistic and literary device for millennia. In her book The Window in Art, art historian Carla Gottlieb traces its history in a pithy paragraph, describing its use in Ancient Egypt, Greek philosophy, Eastern and Western religions, and then in modern art:

Modern art uncovered the unexpected facet in the innocuous: from the boundary of an object, the [window] frame became an instrument that mutilates; from a road to a view, the windowpane became the carrier of the view, moreover, it was joined in that metamorphosis by the shade, its opposite, an obstacle on the road to a view; and from a means that extends vision. The window became a means to demonstrate its limitations.⁹

This window-as-boundary idea was especially evident in Victorian times, when the window represented a threshold between private and public spheres. For women of this time, windows represented their confinement to the domestic world. The twentieth century saw a great emancipation for women (at least in most of the developed world);

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we now have the right to choose whether or not to participate in public life. Sometimes, through inclination, people prefer to dwell within the domestic realm. There is comfort in being held; there is safety in being amidst one’s things. I, for one, prefer the Great Indoors, and the comfort and safety of my home. The pandemic has, in fact, been a boon to me: I have reveled in staying home alone. But for many people this period of confinement has been a novel and uncomfortable experience.

For years, if not decades, a large part of my subject-matter has come from looking out windows. One reason is purely practical: I can sit comfortably indoors and draw or paint what I see. As I look back through my old sketchbooks, I find scores of drawings I made looking through hotel windows (fig. 19). These drawings make me recognize a psychological paradox within myself: I am adventurous enough to travel (usually alone) to far-flung places, but timorous enough to want to stay in my hotel room once I reach my destination.
Nearly as ubiquitous and venerable an artistic and literary device as the window is that of the woman in the window, usually to illustrate the Odyssean contrast of heroic
mission with domestic stasis. If we accept the modernist ideal subject as the *flaneur* then the reviled opposite is the feminized domestic space, the home. For the most part this trope, when historically employed by men, reflects at worst a deep-seated objectification of women, and at best a willingness to use women’s bodies as semiotic tools. In this body of work, I self-consciously position myself as the woman in the window, but as one who chooses to be the observer and not the observed.

In the 1950s the television screen became a new iteration of a window. It was a revolutionary development, in that it brought a much broader swath of worldly experience directly into the heart of the home. Fast-forward to today, when every piece of recorded information, textual, aural, or visual, is available 24/7, on a hand-held device that is carried at all times by more than 48% of the world’s population. Most of the information and experience we think we “know” is in fact filtered through the technology of the internet: we are familiar with places, people, and things that we may never see for ourselves. The window on the world provided by the internet extends the reach of the voyeuristic gaze as never before.

I wonder how this new technology affects the modernist ideal of the *flaneur*; whether the trope has lost its strong appeal now that “the street” is so easily brought inside.

2.5 The Voyeur’s Gaze

Often, because of my perspective from a window or a screen, I find myself in the position of a voyeur. Because my intent is benign, or perhaps because I have never been

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caught, it has never felt ethically transgressive.

Twentieth century philosophers have discussed “the gaze” at length. According to John Berger, “To look is an act of choice.” Looking is a willful practice, usually involving a reciprocity of gaze, except in the case of surveillant methods and technologies. According to scholar Caroline McKay, “Whether the gaze is socially acceptable or transgressive appears to be a function of the viewing relationship, intention and power plays.”

There is also a long history of artists engaging with the idea of voyeurism and the gaze. Artists have always been in the business of looking. Before the advent of photography, the artist’s model had an acute awareness of the artist’s direct gaze. Photography, as it developed past the initial studio phase, gave artists the opportunity to be clandestine when observing their subjects / quarry. Surveillance technology, and platforms on which subjects post their own images voluntarily, provide a whole new catalogue of imagery that artists may harvest without being physically present. While the normative gaze of social convention is one that can be returned, one of the roles of an artist is to push boundaries and challenge conventions. “The role of the [artist] … can be many things including the questioning, subversion or resistance to expectations, assumptions, social order or meta-narrative to create experiential response, awareness or transformation.”

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14 Ibid.
In March of 2020 the developed world turned to Zoom or other simultaneous conferencing technology. The transition was so abrupt that no social etiquette had yet been established. There were many funny anecdotes about people forgetting they were on camera as they visited the bathroom or engaged in other private behaviors. I developed my own standards based on personal notions of politeness: that in a meeting I would have my camera on so that I could be seen as well as seeing. Because the technology turns the camera on the user as well as the other members of the meeting, one is acutely aware of one’s “seen-ness.” This is an interesting reification of the meta-cognition that occurs from time to time when we are aware of ourselves as participants.

Zoom turned the notion of public versus domestic spaces on its head. Suddenly we were “in” other peoples’ homes, meeting their partners, children, and pets. In the school setting having the camera on suddenly became a privacy-, security-, and equity issue. It is considered polite to have one’s camera on, however people who (for whatever reason) don’t want to be found, or don’t want their homes and belongings dissected, judged, or cased by burglars, or even have insufficient bandwidth, may be forced to make choices between social acceptance and personal safety.

15 That void was quickly filled: on April 18, 2021, a Google search for “zoom etiquette for students” yielded about 7,320,000 results. https://www.google.com/search?q=zoom+etiquette+for+students&rlz=1C1CHBD_enUS927US927&ei=2S NzYLiX8HrOtAA3iavoDQ&oq=zoom+etiquette&gs_lcp=Cgdnd3Mtd2l6EAEYADIHCAAQRxCwAzlHC AQRxCwAzlHCAAQRxCwAzlHCAAQRxCwAzlHCAAQRxCwAzlHCAAQRxCwAzlHCAAQRxCwAzlHCAAQRxCw AzlHCAAQRxCwAzlHCAAQRsAMQQzIHCAAQsAMQQ1AAWABgrRtoAXAeACAAAY4BiAGOAZl BAzuMZgBAKoBB2d3cy13aXrIAQrAAQE&sclient=gws-wiz, accessed April 18, 2021.
Ponos

Soon after the world went online, I began making paintings of my friends and colleagues with whom I “met” online (figs. 20 and 34-39). I call the series *Ponos* (“work” or “toil” in Odyssean Greek). My *prima facie* position is that, presuming participants have their cameras turned on, my gaze is socially acceptable because it is reciprocal. Moral tension arises when I, the artist, capture screen shots of other participants unawares, and then turn them into paintings. I feel a sense of transgression as I do this: taking the consent to be seen and taking it one step further into being recorded. I proceeded in spite of this moral dissonance, making the conscious decision to proceed until someone complained. On the contrary, once I started posting my paintings on social media, people asked me to paint their Zoom portraits, and I extrapolated from that either consent or passive acquiescence.

I seldom took random screen shots: rather I made them when I liked the composition of one or more of the participants. I made aesthetic choices in choosing which images to paint: composition, chiaroscuro, interesting facial expression. I deleted images where the face was distorted from blinking or speaking – I had no interest in making unflattering portraits – but other than that I chose images that were un-posed and natural.
I compare these portraits with Byron Kim’s in his ongoing (1991-present) *Synechdoche* series (fig. 21). In addition to certain formal and presentational similarities, I sense an emotional intimacy in common. Kim would have friends and strangers visit his studio, and with time and meticulous care, he would match his paint to the sitters’ skin tone. He would then paint a small panel with the mixed color. The resulting paintings, of a gorgeous range of flesh tones, are exhibited in grids of various sizes. These paintings evoke a sense of tenderness and intimacy in me as I imagine the attention and concentration, as well as the requisite physical proximity, between the artist and his model. My relationships with my portrait models are entirely different in their physicality, or, more accurately, lack of physicality: since they are screen-captures there
is no physical interaction whatever. I do, however, experience a sensation of connection and affection in the attention I pay to each person and their portrait. This closeness provides a sense of life-affirming connectedness during a time when physical presence is forbidden.


### 2.6 Proci

Reading my friend and colleague Melissa Huang’s thesis,¹⁶ I was struck by her descriptions of how young women present themselves to a digital audience. Girls and young women digitally alter, enhance, and augment their appearance that they present online, to conform to some standard of beauty. Huang writes: “[Girls use] image and video editing apps to create careful, but misleading, curations of how we want to be perceived. Throughout these online personae, two common desires are evident: to be looked at and to seem perfect in every way.”¹⁷

This phenomenon was foreign to me as an older woman, and I supposed that it was generational; I wondered if it was also gendered. I immediately began seeking parallel images from the world of older men. These were not to be found easily on Instagram, and

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¹⁶ Melissa Huang, “I’m Your Perfect Girl” (unpublished manuscript, 2021).
¹⁷ Ibid., 12.
although Facebook might have provided a good source, instead I turned to a pool specifically curated to the demographic I sought: the profiles men create for themselves on dating sites. The series Proci (figs. 22, 23, 24, 40, and 41) consists of paintings of profile pictures from the men that the dating company Plenty of Fish selected for me on October 12, 2020. Visually the series resembles Ponos, in scale and in that they’re portraits, mainly head shots. Conceptually they are also related, in that they refer to limitations on real-life social connections during the pandemic: to those of us who are unpartnered, or who otherwise live alone, our human connection (both romantic and platonic) is mediated by a screen. Where they differ is that the source photos are chosen with intention by the subjects themselves; they are not candid and captured by me. Conceptually, therefore, they resemble Huang’s “Perfect Girls” more than my colleagues in Ponos.

In contrast to the young women discussed in Huang’s paper, who augment or enhance their appearance and presentation, it seemed like many of the men were instead issuing a challenge to the female gaze by their often-unattractive presentations. I suppose there is something to be said for presenting the unvarnished truth, especially in a forum such as a dating site where you might be caught out. Nonetheless, I was aghast at how many of the men presented themselves in a clichéd, hackneyed, and ham-fisted manner. Other than one or two improbably smooth visages, I was unable to detect any digital enhancement undertaken by the men. There were a number of categories of presentation: men in cars; men with man-toys (motorcycles, trucks, sportscars, snowmobiles, boats); men with animals (mainly fish they had pulled out of the water, or dogs); men with beer (to be distinguished, I suppose, from men with wine); men in the bathroom mirror; men
with children, grandchildren, or a woman; wannabe rock stars; and men with emo names (w8ting4U, for example). I collected a number of images that I painted and grouped in my thesis exhibition in the categories described above. This act feels more transgressive to me than the Zoom portraits, even though the subjects themselves curated and presented their own images on a public forum, in contrast to my surreptitiously capturing screen shots of my colleagues. My sense of transgression is probably due to the fact that I did not seek permission for this use, and there is a potential for causing offense. I do not intend to caricature these faces, but there may be some discomfort ethically with my amassing, collating, and cataloguing them according to their chosen adherence to male stereotypes. I am playing with the sensation of voyeurism and transgression – the fine line between empathy and exploitation – to test its ethical limits for myself. Would it be okay if this series was exhibited in the city where these men live? What about a far-away city? Is it making the surveilled artwork or exhibiting it that is the potential affront? While it is true that I am poking fun at tropes of performative masculinity, I also strive for empathy: this is a lonely time.

It was while working on this series that my attention was drawn to the Odyssean analogy: in it, these men represent potential suitors, whom I keep at bay by the strategically repetitive tasks of my painting and stitching (fig. 22). If there is an Odysseus to my Penelope, it is art-making itself. I do not sit at a loom undoing and redoing my weaving, but I do dissemble and reassemble bits of cloth and yarn, and would rather spend my time doing so than entertaining suitors.
**Proci (The Suitors)**

While Odysseus was on his long journey, Penelope remained steadfast that her husband was alive and would return home. Believing him dead, scores of suitors pestered her for her hand. Instead of rejecting them outright, Penelope devised a scheme wherein she declared that she would choose a husband once she had finished weaving a shroud. She delayed this decision for years by weaving during the day, and unraveling her work again at night.

Figure 22. Diane Hiscox. Wall text accompanying *Proci*, thesis exhibition.
Figure 23. Diane Hiscox. Proci (detail). 2020.
Two conceptual artists, Sophie Calle and Natasha Caruana, explore ethical boundaries with results that, if not excruciating, are cringe-worthy, at least to this viewer. In Calle’s *Suite Venitienne* (fig. 25), the artist followed a stranger she had met at a party in Paris to Venice, where she disguised herself and photographed him as if she was a stalker or a private detective. In *The Hotel* (1981), Calle worked as a chambermaid at a Venice hotel, and for a year she documented all of the personal effects of the guests whose rooms she cleaned. Although the resulting photographs and texts of both works are mainly banal (as is most of life), the audacity of her breach of social etiquette is captivating: it makes us want to look, and renders the viewer complicit in the breach.

Figure 25. Sophie Calle. *Suite Vénitienne (detail).* 1983.
Caruana’s photographic series *Married Man* (fig. 26) is more closely associated, conceptually, with *Proci*. In the series, Caruana “dated” men through dating websites designed to help married men conduct extramarital affairs. She secretly photographed and recorded the encounters, which she then crafted into an exhibition. She did not photograph the men’s faces or other identifying images; rather the photographs show things like hands on battered table-tops, paying the bill or holding the artist’s hand. The moral *frisson* of betrayal is central to *Married Man*. Since the men in *Proci* are proffering themselves as unattached and available, this particular moral judgment is absent. I do, however, include the men’s faces. I don’t know whether community standards have evolved such that using a dating website is no longer a subject of embarrassment, but for me it still is. The potential ethical breach, therefore, is exposing others (as well as myself) in this activity.

![Image of Caruana's Married Man exhibition](image)

**Figure 26.** Natasha Caruana. *Married Man* (detail). 2016. International Centre for Photography (Project Space), New York.

Millenial artist Jiyeon Kim, in her *Tinder Project* (fig. 27), investigates many of the questions that arise for me in *Proci*. Kim gathered and painted images from a popular dating app.
She writes:

For the project […] I draw 100 profile images from Tinder, the most used dating app worldwide, in order to investigate the almost desperate wish of young humans for meaningful connection in a consuming environment of social interaction. In my view the dating app crystallizes the contradictions between the desire for lasting and meaningful human connection and the increasing share of non-connective interactions between human beings. How do we portray ourselves in order to not get swiped away in competitive environments?¹⁸

My interest in the men’s presentation in Proci speaks to how they position themselves in competition with others: what choices they are making with their props, monikers, and body language. The way the dating site is set up, the men are blind to their competition and must make these choices without the ability to compare their presentation with others. Less germane to me but still important is the element of longing for human connection, which is not only the frontier of young humans but of all humans: present always, but particularly acute during a pandemic.

Kim goes on to ponder the relevance of the painted portrait in a digital age:

Portrait art is an anachronism in the digital age: it is the observer who has to move, not the object, it cannot be “swiped away”, the portrait is unique; it is the ideal type of an analogue object. Bringing back images of human beings from the digital to painted portraits triggers these very contradicting emotions on imperfection and self-assertion and helps to understand us in a more profound way.¹⁹

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¹⁹ Ibid.
It goes without saying that the painted portrait has been anachronistic since long before the digital age, but there is still an appetite for the kind of depth, or interpretation, that paint can create where a photograph cannot.

Kim also addresses “the conflict between personal rights or copyright and artistic freedom […] Is it acceptable to publicly display Tinder portraits although the users do not know of the exhibition?” Like me, Kim does not offer answers.

3 ART AS THERAPY

3.1 My own story

Without my always realizing it, art-making has been a strategy that has helped me cope with difficult circumstances throughout my life. My family of origin was toxic. My mother was abusive: a domineering narcissist with a violent, sadistic streak. Not only were we punished both physically and emotionally for the most minor and unpredictable “offenses,” but my sisters and I were also kept isolated: we were not allowed to go to other children’s houses or have anyone over to ours. We were not outright forbidden but were discouraged strongly from playing with neighborhood children. It was a frightening environment in which to grow up.

My sisters and I developed survival strategies of varying degrees of adaptivity. Mine was to make myself small and invisible, and to engage in busy work. The work I chose, I now realize, was a form of self-soothing that I practiced instinctively. Before I had the motor skills necessary to sew or draw, I would spend hours sorting through a shoebox full of buttons; on a large tray I would sort them by size and color. As my skills developed, I was again drawn to the sewing closet where I would manipulate scraps of cloth, lace, and notions, with the intention of making clothes for my dolls. My ambition invariably exceeded my abilities, but the process itself, and the visual and tactile qualities of the materials, were an attraction and comfort. I found safety and comfort in tasks that kept me under the radar, absorbed my attention and also gave me sensory pleasures both haptic and visual, and even olfactory: even now, I can recall the pleasant smell of clean linen that emanated from the sewing closet.

Our only relative in Canada was my father’s Uncle George, who lived in the next town. He was the reason my parents chose to settle where they did when they immigrated, and he was the only individual allowed to visit our house. Uncle George was a designer by trade, and a very
decent painter. When he visited I would spend time with him, drawing on a roll of newsprint on the dining-room table. He was attentive and a tough critic, and even as a small child, took me seriously. I think that because of him, the activity of drawing was legitimized within my working-class family: I discovered quite early that if I was seen to be drawing, specifically, I would be left alone – even excused from chores. I believe that the activity of drawing created a bubble of safety around me: I could make myself small and invisible by engaging in work that would protect me from my mother’s cruel attentions. I can still call upon this impulse today.

As an adult I learned some of the science behind my experience: children who are exposed to ongoing trauma, fear, and anxiety as they grow up suffer permanent neurological effects. The brain is altered chemically by surges of cortisol (the stress hormone), which flood excessively the amygdala and hippocampus – parts of the brain where thoughts and emotions are formed. At the same time, the brain is deprived of hormones (estradiol, testosterone) which should occur from proper care, such as consistency and attachment, and which are the foundation for a child to develop a cognitive understanding of trust and security. Functionally, the child will develop strategies to cope, as illustrated by my button-sorting and textile-crafting practices.

As an adult I was diagnosed with complex post-traumatic stress disorder (complex PTSD), which is a typical outcome for children growing up under a lot of stress. Adult survivors of pediatric trauma may present with a wide range of problems, including hyper-arousal and emotional dysregulation.

Fast forward to 2010: Two weeks apart, I had two misadventures which complicated my pre-existing mental condition; I sustained mild traumatic brain injuries. Most people who suffer concussions recover within hours or days, but a small number (10 - 15%) continue having

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symptoms for over a year and in some cases permanently. This condition is called Post-Concussion Syndrome (PCS), and is marked by headaches, dizziness, decreased concentration, memory problems, irritability, fatigue, visual disturbances, sensitivity to noise, judgment problems, depression, and anxiety. I had all of these.

My most debilitating ongoing symptom was being unable to filter stimuli. It was as if every sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch was its own radio station, all turned up full-blast and playing simultaneously. If I was trying to have a conversation, for example, every other sensory signal would vie for my full attention. The sight of a leaf moving slightly on a branch (… the color of your shirt, a flash of light reflecting on a car window), the smell of washing detergent (… this morning’s coffee, the dog’s breath), the sound of a car passing (… the plumbing or air conditioner, voices of passers-by), the feel of the clothing tag scratching my neck (… the temperature and sensation of a breeze on my skin, a twinge of pain somewhere in my body): every one of these sensory stimuli was equivalent, and very very loud. It made even the most ordinary tasks – making a meal, driving a car – exhausting and overwhelming.

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The next most debilitating symptom was what I describe as the cognitive shuffle. If you picture my brain as a computer, it was like the files were all still there, but I couldn’t find them. Even after a year I sometimes had trouble following the plot of a simple television sit-com.

As I recovered, I struggled to find pastimes that would not overtax my healing brain. The first activity I found was knitting simple cleaning cloths. Following a pattern for more complex items was out of the question. I knitted countless cloths and gave them as gifts to my friends. I also found that I was able to draw in my sketchbook, and eventually to paint. I drew the views from my windows, and the contents of rooms, wherever I was sitting, including furniture, pets, and people, if any were present.

Art-making has provided comfort and direction in many instances of trauma throughout my life: by creating a safety bubble around myself, and in its calming and meditative qualities. In both cases it is the process and not the product that has helped me.

**3.2 Art-as-therapy**

I realized recently that some of the art practices I created for myself, both in childhood and as an adult, were forms of therapy. Art therapy in a general sense aims to externalize trauma through expression. Any expressive gestures, however, first require a degree of self-regulation: I am mainly interested in how certain art-making practices can aid in self-regulation, due to the conditions I experience related to my PTSD and head injuries. Self-regulation is defined as the capacity to control one’s impulses, and also to soothe and calm the body’s reactions to stress; the ability to modulate affective, sensory, and somatic responses that impact all functioning, including emotions, and cognition. The aroused state is the opposite of self-regulation: a jumble of sensory inputs, competing for attention.
A common method for soothing an aroused state is performing exercises in grounding. Breathing and yoga are examples, bringing the user’s consciousness into the body, and into awareness of the sensory stimuli around them. Ideally as many senses are activated as possible. The aim is to shift consciousness from a highly-aroused state to a grounded and mindful one, and the emphasis is on the process rather than the product. Knitting provides tactile and visual sensation as well as the comforting, repetitive click of the needles. Stitching and painting both engage the user visually; painting in oil adds olfactory sensation. Both provide tactile sensation, although the haptic experience of painting is modified by the brush. Stitching is a direct sensory engagement between hand, eye, and materials. Because of this, and also because I do not generally employ repetitive marks in my painting, stitching is my preferred method of self-soothing.

Quilting, embroidery, and other hand-sewn crafts have a rich history in social connectedness, culture, and politics, which is beyond the scope of this paper. They are languages of material and making that have the capacity to reveal identity and culture. I concentrate here on their capacity to heal the individual, usually in a solitary setting: stitching provides a reflective atmosphere in which to center one’s experience in the here and now. Even if an object is not intentionally expressive, it seems likely that an object created over time, with our hands, would end up with something of ourselves embedded in it (fig. 28).

Whether or not it is acknowledged by the artist, we can see mark-making gestures that may be read as therapeutic practices in the world of fine art. Agnes Martin never acknowledged her practice as being related to her struggles with schizophrenia, however it is impossible for me to look at her paintings – methodical, repetitive strokes – without assuming they served a self-soothing function (figs. 29 and 30). For Martin the object of the paintings does not seem to be about any specific imagery, or to be about communicating to any end-user. Her obsessively-lined and/or gridded canvasses were not painted with rigid formality; the marks and coloration are endlessly and subtly varied. They indicate a commitment to moment-to-moment being – a means
of grounding in the present.

Peter Schjedahl writes:

The relation of Martin’s mental illness to her art seems twofold, combining a need for concealment and for control—the grid as a screen and as a shield—with an urge to distill positive content from the oceanic states of mind that she couldn’t help experiencing. She knew herself profoundly, because she had to. In a marvelous 1973 essay, “On the Perfection Underlying Life,” she coolly contemplates the “panic of complete helplessness,” which “drives us to fantastic extremes.” But the problem produces its own answer. She concluded that “helplessness when fear and dread have run their course, as all passions do, is the most rewarding state of all.”

I have not read anything in psychological literature about artists using repeating motifs, but I posit that the same impulses that impel artists to employ repetitive marks or stitches in their works extends to the repetition of motifs. Peter Dreher, in his *Tag um Tag guter Tag* (translated variously as *Day by Day, Good Day, and Every Day is a Good Day*) project, painted the same water glass, on the same surface, in the same place, daily, from 1972 until his death in 2020 (figs. 31 and 32). Much like On Kawara’s *Today* series (fig. 16), these read like a diary, a chronicling of day-by-day experience. They place the artist and the viewer in immediacy and stillness. They reflect themes of time, and the subjectivity of visual experience. I posit that as
well as being an exploration of artistic conventions, these works represent a routine of coping and healing.

Dreher, who was German and born in 1939, lived through the bombing of his home as a small child. Remembering this traumatic event, together with the resulting traumatic experience of being made homeless as a child, Dreher said that painting the glass was the only thing that calmed his anxiety: “It’s very funny to say,” he said in an interview, “it’s the only place and the only hours in my life when I really feel quiet. Maybe I don’t make the impression of being unquiet, but I am.” To him, the obsessive rendering of a glass, a commonplace object with no emotional or other association, was an anchor that kept him tied to the here and now. To the viewer, the glass, rendered in dots and daubs of thick paint suggests a visceral sense of experience, how we muddle through the world with our senses.

Figure 31. Peter Dreher. *Tag um Tag gutter Tag* (series detail).

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I offer Martin and Dreher as examples of artists whose work seems therapeutic in its making and whose techniques I see at play in my own work: repetitive mark making, repetitive hand motions, and painting quotidian objects with closely observed details.
4 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Overview of the thesis project

This exhibition could only have taken the form it did because of the circumstances of the pandemic. Most of the work I completed during the first two years of my graduate studies has been large-scale, and I expect I would have continued painting large-scale if not for the exigencies of the year. The pandemic drove the scale way down, mostly due to the necessity and later the choice to work at home, but also due in part to the challenges to concentration. Unceasing low-level anxiety, a short attention span, and grinding, constant worry meant that much of the work produced in my final year captures small moments and somewhat scattered impressions. These pieces speak truthfully about the fractured nature of life at present and how difficult it is to concentrate and think deeply right now.

After the school re-opened the studios in the summer of 2020, I did a bit of work there, but after a short time the absolute quiet became a bit haunting, and I decided to work from home. At this point, the CDC directives were fluid as they learned about the virus, and with this information we had to individually assess our risk. By the summer many people had acclimatized to the risk and carried on or returned to normal functioning even as the infection- and death rate continued to climb. I chose to continue with the CDC-sanctioned protocol.

An earlier working title for the exhibition was Window / Screen, which describes the imagery by the source material I used: views from my window, and images captured from the computer screen. I displayed most of the work I made, culling some paintings that were too tangential conceptually, and some for space.

There are five installations in the exhibition, each made up of multiple individual works. Two of the installations (Ponos and Proci) are painted portraits, presented in grids, of images
gleaned from internet screen shots (figs. 34 and 40). The other three (Odysseus I and II, and Nostos) are montages of textile pieces and paintings, mainly of images created or observed personally from my apartment (figs. 33, 42, and 43).

Nostos

The exhibition is organized symmetrically. On entering the gallery, the viewer is faced with a wall which provided an overview of the setting from which I worked. The title of the exhibition, Nostos, floats above the montage (fig. 33). The central piece is a large textile on which I have painted and embroidered. It shows the Atlanta skyline as viewed from my window. On the left is a grid of nine small paintings, also of the Atlanta skyline, at different times of day and different weather conditions.

Another painting references this same view, but is from a viewpoint further inside the apartment: in the foreground is a tangle of bedclothes and an electronic device on which the roughly-sketched face of (then) President Trump (fig. 11). High in the arrangement floats a tiny painting of a helicopter in a night sky. Then-President Trump figured large in the news in the year in question. It was a choice to leave his figure in an unfinished state.
After considering the eastern wall, the viewer can turn in either direction; the northern and southern walls contain grids of portraits. There is an interplay between them as they face each other. Each of these two installations function as a single piece, but the small paintings within each grid could also be re-arranged, or broken down into individual units.

**Ponos**

*Ponos*, on the northern wall, is a series of eighty portraits of my colleagues, from screen shots taken during Zoom meetings over the period of April 2020 when online meetings became commonplace, to February 2021 when I had to wrap up production for this exhibition. I made no attempt to record the dates, topics of meetings, or veracity in groupings of people, in part
because when I started out I didn’t foresee the extent of the project. If I were to undertake this project again, I would gather this data in case I wanted to use it to add conceptual context in a finished piece.

There are five groupings of paintings, which are hung in grids of 16, in order to resemble their appearance on the computer screen (figs. 34 – 39). No attempt was made to group them in any particular order; the only rule I (mostly) followed is that the same person did not appear more than once in each grid.

Figure 34. Diane Hiscox. Ponos (thesis exhibition installation view). 2021.
Figure 35. Diane Hiscox. *Ponos* (detail). Craig, Jac, Soude, Andrew, Nathalia, Jess, Darya, Melissa, Mattie, R.J., me, Craig, Hannah, Jordan, Jess, Emma.
Figure 36. Diane Hiscox. *Ponos* (detail). Torie, me, Nick, Travis, Jess, Darya, Rosa, Hannah, Kennedy, Tim, Joe, Neil, Jill, Jiha, Coorain, Pam.
Figure 37. Diane Hiscox. *Ponos* (detail). Parker, Andrew, Karl, Bethany, Cynthia, Tim, Christina, Kylie, David, Lizzy, Serena, Nimer, Melissa, Kevin, Travis, Torie.
Figure 39. Diane Hiscox. *Ponos* (detail). Sergio, Jack, Kourtney, Nedda, Pam, Ruth, Albert, Christina, Stephanie, Eric, Nicole, me, Wesley, Susan, Jamaal, Mary.

### 4.2 Proci

*Proci* is a set of 100 painted portraits of men gleaned from images on the dating site *Plenty of Fish*, on a single day (October 12, 2020)(figs. 40 and 41). Penelope had 108 suitors in *The Odyssey*, but because of space limitations I culled my least favorite to fit the gallery wall. My search parameters were men aged 55-65, non-smoking, within 100 km of my home in Ottawa. Out of the hundreds of matches, I identified certain themes: men in cars, men with motorcycles or other toys, men with pets, men with fish or game, men with guitars, men taking their photos in bathroom mirrors. I chose to begin my painted series with groupings of men with
each of these props.

Interestingly, the overwhelming majority of the portraits I painted were of white men. In the sampling I took from the website there was in fact a preponderance of white men (consistent with the demographic in Ottawa-Gatineau), but there were also many Black men and other men of color. I discovered that at least in this small sample, it was almost exclusively only white men who used props in their profile pictures; Black men tended to post just nice pictures of themselves. It may be a stretch to conclude that white men approach dating from a position of lack? This may be an interesting source of socio-psychological study.

I chose to leave the men’s screen names intact, although I changed the color of the text box, for aesthetic reasons. Sometimes their chosen monikers offer clues to the identities they are trying to project (or are unwittingly projecting).

A large knitted cloth, resembling a net, hangs against the gallery wall as a backdrop to the portraits. The bottom of the cloth puddles, unravelling, onto the floor. The net-cloth signifies two things: first, it alludes to Penelope’s weaving of the shroud, which she unravels each night, and second, it references a fish net, tying it back to the name of the dating website (Plenty of Fish). I assume the men who chose to present themselves with fish were also making this allusion. The colors of the knitted piece (orange, pink, and white) were not significant except insofar as the yarn was acquired for next-to-nothing at a thrift store – this was consistent with the overall aesthetic of using what I had at hand. I knitted rather than wove the piece (as Penelope did) again because I was using the resources I had at hand. If I were to re-create this installation I would be more intentional with my choice of color, and the degree of finish of the textile element.
4.3 *Odysseus I and II*

The remaining wall is divided by the door, and on each of the two wall sections are textile- and painting montages: *Odysseus I* and *Odysseus II* (figs. 42 and 43). The central piece of *Odysseus I* is a textile piece: I stitched, appliquéd and embroidered on a piece of cloth I found in the studios (fig. 17). In broad strokes it is a map of the movements I make around my apartment. Surrounded by paintings of the street, the map speaks to an interiority which is central to my experience. A viewer could place herself in the central, soft womb of the home, and view the outside from that safety. Surrounding the central piece are six smaller paintings; all but two are views of the street from my window. Of the remaining two, one is a sky view of a helicopter.
through an upper window, and the other is the interior of an elevator, replete with Covid-spacing stickers on the floor.

![Figure 42. Diane Hiscox. *Odyssey I.* (Thesis exhibition installation view) 2021.](image)

*Odyssey II* also centers on a stitched, appliquéd, and embroidered map of my tracks around my apartment. Two small paintings, a helicopter and a surveillance camera, are placed on the textile. Four other paintings surround it: two street views, a surveillance camera, and an image of two policemen, one of them aiming some kind of weapon at the viewer. The latter image is taken from a news website. The image for the painting with the text “YOUR VOTE MATTERS” was taken by Jordan Gumm (although the site is across the street from me), and the other images are my own.
I believe the exhibition was successful. I was more satisfied with the two portrait installations than with the other three; the concepts or thoughts felt more cohesive and complete. Either one of these two installations could carry its own weight in an exhibition, whereas the collaged installations would require the context of each other to be complete. That said, the somewhat fractured nature of the collaged elements spoke perfectly to the state of mind I meant to impart. I believe each of the thoughts I worked on in the exhibition has reached practical completion; the only series I might continue is Proci (the suitors), as there are other iterations of the men’s presentations that I would like to explore. There are some elements I would like to carry forward: mapping holds an interest for me, as does the tactility of the textile work. In the latter I am undecided about whether I will pursue more traditional quilt-making protocol, or
abandon picture-making protocol entirely, as it relates to textile. For example, I might abandon
the rectangular shape, and consider other ways than the conventional presentation on the wall.

The *Nostos* exhibition was a specific moment (or more accurately, year) in time, which I
am ready to end with a full stop. As I reach the end of my time here, I am contemplating a true
*Nostos* – that is, I will soon be going home to Canada. As I am tying up loose ends in Atlanta, I
have already begun a new painting, with imagery from my Canadian home. I expect my next
body of work will reflect the next stage of my life, whatever that turns out to be.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


