America(n)

Stefanie J. Liles-Ray
Georgia State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/art_design_theses

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/art_design_theses/130

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Art and Design Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.
AMERICA(N)

by

STEFANIE LILES-RAY

Under the Direction of Joseph Peragine

ABSTRACT

*AMERICA(N)* is the exploration of entities that compose my life as an American artist that grew up in a middle-class suburban environment, and the idea of America which encompasses the great American Dream. This existential examination consists of the collecting, documenting and categorizing of information, including photographs of the houses I lived in, portraits of the dogs I have owned, as well as select lists and correspondences from the last few years. Through the accumulation of these items, I seek to analyze and derive meaning and connections amongst all of these things, which exist simultaneously with one another within a close context to my own contemporary existence. The resulting exhibition consists of photo-based paintings, prints, concrete pickets, Astroturf and found objects.

INDEX WORDS: America, American Dream, Archive, Documentary, Dogs, Everyday, Existentialism, Heteronormative, Home, Identity, Middle-class, Otherness, Photography, Still life, Stream-of-consciousness, Suburbia
AMERICA(N)

by

STEFANIE LILES-RAY

Committee Chair: Joseph Peragine

Committee: Anthony Craig Drennen
Matthew Sugarman

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
May 2013
For my wife, Sonia Ray.

For my father, John A. Liles.

For my mother, Mary Liles.

For my sister, Jessica Liles.

And for my nanny, Jessie Kendrick.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the support and guidance of all the artists, professors and peers who have encouraged and challenged me along the way.

Special thanks to Joe Peragine, Matthew Sugarman, Craig Drennen for serving on my thesis committee and also Craig Dongoski, Pam Longobardi, Tim Flowers, Susan Richmond, Nancy Floyd, Constance Thalken and Liz Throop for your time and contributions to my graduate school experience and education.

Lastly, a world of thanks goes out to my graduate peers and friends: Andrew Boatright, Chris Walter, InKyoung Chun, Myrna Pronchuk, James O’Donnell, Bethany Collins, Candice Greathouse, Christina Price Washington, Curtis Ames, Megan Van Deusen, Namwon Choi, Kojo Griffin, Mark Errol, Randall Moody, Ashley Maxwell, Paul Benjamin, Lauren Peterson, Wesley Terpstra, Lane Ketner, Nicholas Adams, Faith McClure, Leigh Peacock, Karen Cleveland and every other person with which I have had the pleasure of sharing my time at Georgia State.
# Table of Contents

LIST OF FIGURES .......................................................................................................................... vii

1 ARTIST STATEMENT / INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................... 1

2 CONTEXT/CONTENT: DEFINING AN IDEA ABOUT AMERICA ..................................................... 2

The American Dream and the Middle Class .................................................................................. 2

The Suburbs .................................................................................................................................... 3

Otherness ....................................................................................................................................... 6

3 OBSERVING THE EVERYDAY REALM / THE ARCHIVE .............................................................. 8

Photography ..................................................................................................................................... 10

Homes ............................................................................................................................................. 11

Dogs ................................................................................................................................................ 12

Correspondences ............................................................................................................................ 14

The Still Life ..................................................................................................................................... 14

4 CONCLUSION ................................................................................................................................. 15

ITEMIZED LIST FOR AMERICA(N), AN EXHIBITION ..................................................................... 16

AMERICA(N) WORKS AND ARTIST REFERENCES ........................................................................... 17

REFERENCES ...................................................................................................................................... 32
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. AMERICA(N) exhibition view ................................................................. 17
Figure 2. Suburban Landscape ........................................................................... 17
Figure 3. Suburban Landscape, AMERICA(N) exhibition view ....................... 18
Figure 4. Untitled (Concrete Pickets), AMERICA(N) exhibition view .............. 19
Figure 5. Untitled (Concrete Pickets), AMERICA(N) exhibition view .............. 19
Figure 6. Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Untitled (Perfect Lovers) ............................ 20
Figure 7. Gerhard Richter, Atlas sheet 5 .......................................................... 21
Figure 8. Ed Ruscha, Bob’s Service, Los Angeles, California from Twenty-six Gasoline Stations. ................. 22
Figure 9. Home I ............................................................................................... 23
Figure 10. Home II ............................................................................................. 23
Figure 11. Home III ........................................................................................... 23
Figure 12. Home III (charcoal) ......................................................................... 24
Figure 13. Home III (charcoal), AMERICA(N) installation view ...................... 24
Figure 14. Missy & Penny .................................................................................. 25
Figure 15. Lola ................................................................................................... 25
Figure 16. Bear ................................................................................................... 25
Figure 17. Untitled (Dog Archive) ..................................................................... 26
Figure 18. Untitled (Dog Archive) ..................................................................... 26
Figure 19. David Hockney, Dog Wall No 4 ....................................................... 27
Figure 20. Gerhard Richter, Jockel ................................................................... 28
Figure 21. Figure 21. Turkey Directions ............................................................. 29
Figure 22. AMERICA(N) exhibition view .......................................................... 30
Figure 23. David Hockney, Cacti on Terrace .................................................... 31
Figure 24. AMERICA(N) exhibition view .......................................................... 31
1 ARTIST STATEMENT / INTRODUCTION

As an American artist who grew up in a suburban community in the South, I became interested in my own relationship to American suburban culture. For my thesis project, I began to collect and evaluate artifacts and documents from my everyday life, and make work reflecting the relationship between my own American life and the canonized notion of “America.” The resulting exhibition includes photo-based paintings, prints, concrete pickets, Astroturf and found objects.

I approach my work as an evaluation of everyday space, both physically and conceptually. My artistic practice involves collecting, documenting and categorizing information: photographs of the houses I lived in, portraits of dogs I have owned, lists and correspondences. I seek to analyze and derive meaning and connections amongst all of these things, which exist simultaneously with one another within a close context to my own contemporary existence. Inside this exploration of the everyday realm, the work is a representation of the facts from my own American life and the mythology of the American Dream and where they coincide.

This consciousness of the everyday is set around discovering deeper parts of my identity in connection with a larger cultural picture, an identity that overhangs what I believe to be a majority of Americans. The motivation and personal impetus for this thesis has been the result of some very significant life experiences taking place over the last few years. I began graduate school and the development of my thesis work after moving to the city of Atlanta, separating myself from an environment I had been a part of for 23 years. While pursuing graduate study at Georgia State University, I suddenly lost my father. A ten year relationship also led to engagement and marriage. These events represent a coalescence of dynamics: past dreams of leaving my hometown, fears stemming from the onset of adulthood and the loss of my father, as well as desires for a specific kind of life in the future. These events have greatly influenced my perspective and represent a point of change and growth in the way I approach my work.
After leaving my hometown, I found that I longed for certain aspects of it, bringing it and the concept of suburbia to the forefront of my artistic endeavors. After losing my father, works that I had begun to create surrounding my childhood homes became more compelling to examine. As a newly married adult, trying to look at these pieces outside of their nostalgic significance, they represented my parent’s American life, and the planning for my own life.

2 CONTEXT/CONTENT: DEFINING AN IDEA ABOUT AMERICA

The work I created and exhibited in AMERICA(N) is a contrasting and connecting dialogue between my real observations of American life and a canonized idea of America. In order to better clarify the American canon, what follows is an examination of some of the facts and historical myth surrounding America.

The American Dream and the Middle Class

My middle-class background is not uncommon or unique; roughly 90% of Americans also identify themselves as middle-class.¹ What does it mean to be “middle class” and how does one define it?

Definitions of class are hard to come by—so much so that the U.S. Department of Commerce, on behalf of Vice President Joe Biden’s White House Task Force on the Middle Class, emphasized descriptive language rather than statistics, finding that “middle-class families are defined by their aspirations more than their income [We assume] that middle-class families aspire to homeownership, a car, college education for their children, health and retirement security and occasional family vacations.”²

These aspirations are the American Dream. The lower and middle-classes possess the greatest capacity for the American Dream. The highest echelon of American society are beyond the American Dream


² Ibid.
because they have already procured a life consisting of these things and more. James Truslow Adams was a popular historian who wrote *The Epic of America* in 1931; it was in this book that the term “American Dream” was popularized. The American dream is a sense of hopefulness, that tomorrow can be better than today, about living “better, richer and happier lives.”

The Suburbs

I grew up in the American South, in a middle-class suburb outside of Birmingham, Alabama. For at least the second half of the twentieth century, the American middle-class and suburbia have been charted territory inside the artworld. From Richard Hamilton in the 1950s to Dan Graham in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s to Mike Kelley in the ‘80s and ‘90s onward, many artists have dealt with suburbia and its culture as subject matter. Into the twenty-first century, suburbia continues to be a prevalent segment of America with over half of the country residing there. Despite its knack for evoking structural and philosophical criticism, suburban communities continue to grow throughout America. Many Americans born in the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries have called it home at some point in their lives. As suburban culture continues to grow and evolve and new generations occupy this part of America, it seems clear that its capacity to provide content to artists is not exhausted.

For me, the suburbs represent a big part of the picture of “America.” Suburbs are communities, usually planned, residing outside the city. To further an understanding of what I consider to be the canonized idea of America, I would like to give you some background information. One of America’s first suburbs, was Levittown, Long Island. A 2007 article from *American History* magazine titled “For Sale: The American Dream,” describes Levittown as “the most famous American postwar suburban development.” Levittown came to fruition “on the eve of the baby boom and just before the 1948 Housing Bill liberalized lending, allowing anyone to buy a home with 5 percent down and extending mortgage terms

---

3 John Meacham, "Making of America: Keeping the Dream Alive."
to 30 years....Housing starts were down during the Depression and World War II. Returning vets armed with their GI Bill of Rights and guaranteed Veterans Administration low-interest loans wanted to move into places of their own. “

This promotion of Levittown sets the scene, a “golden era” of American domestic culture, “...a young ex-GI and his family smile broadly in front of their new home, a Chevy sedan in their driveway...inside the front door, Tupperware parties and paint-by-number kits...out the backdoor, a new power mower, pitcher of lemonade and a smoky backyard barbecue.” This type of depiction is the marketing of the great American dream. These new suburban communities represented a significant change in American culture for the middle-class. Home no longer had to be a small city apartment or the farm in the country.

When the last nail was driven in 1951, 17,447 houses stood in Levittown. But Levittown was about more than just the houses. As the largest and most influential housing development of its time, it became a postwar poster child for everything right (affordability, better standard of living) and wrong (architectural monotony, poor planning, racism) with suburbia.

The marketing and selling of these communities furthered economic capitalism by expanding the consumer market. The families moving into these houses would buy an assortment of products and appliances in order to achieve the propagandized lifestyle. Levitt, the developer of Levittown called this domestic push for capitalism the “natural order of things, even patriotic. No man who has a house and lot can be a Communist...He has too much to, and apparently, too much to buy.”

This article, telling the story of one of the significant developments in American culture, ends in a sort of familiarity. “Driving through Levittown today on its miracle mile Hempstead Turnpike, you’d be forgiven for missing history's mark. Passing the big-box retailers and local operations like the TriCounty Flea Market, which claims to hold ‘the largest selection of jewelry anywhere,’ you feel in fact you could

6 Ibid.
7 Ibid, 47.
be anywhere.” Largely, this is my experience of the suburbs, an experience of non-unique structures and commercial establishments like McDonalds, the Gap, and Home Depot. Suburbia is perhaps too easy to hate, and being a part of it, I have at times hated it. However, a part of me marvels at the modernity of it and wants to embrace pieces of it. The Postmodernist era is filled with commentary on this kind of middle-class culture, from Pop artists like Andy Warhol addressing consumerism in his artwork to later more contemporary artists portraying dark dystopic happenings set behind closed doors in suburban neighborhoods akin to David Lynch’s unsettling films which are sometimes set in middle-class small town environments. Is there nothing beautiful about the universalism of this kind of suburban environment? Across the country, people are all able to share in similar experiences, from the clothes they wear to the food they eat and products they choose to consume. Despite, Levitt’s remarks on how capitalistically patriotic the suburbs are, there seem to be some socialistic undertones imbedded within the Modern utopian concept of it.

My parents were born in the middle of the 1950s, where the Modernist movement was still a significant force. Modernism, like the American Dream and the development of the suburbs, is hopeful. It was during my parents’ lifetime that the suburban environment really developed and became so relevant. By the time I was born in 1986, suburbia had reached a fuller maturation. Although, it is my experience growing up in the suburbs that drives me to this subject matter, it is undeniable that it is my parents’ generation that chose more readily to occupy and sustain these type of communities. This aspect of America and the American Dream is more theirs than mine. It is the houses they bought, that I chose to revisit, photograph, paint, and contemplate. Still in the present, I am left pondering the significance of the American Dream for my own generation. Does the American Dream continue to exist, because we as a society commonly continue to share the same aspirations generation after generation?

As I was developing the piece, Suburban Landscape (Figure 1, 2, 3), it was the Modernistic ideal of simplicity and universalism that compelled me more so than the typical Postmodern inclination

---

towards criticism of the banality, although both are inherently present with in it. The work is a 3’ x 5’ panel, the size is particularly selected to relate to the concept of a photograph snapshot size but enlarged to the scale of painting. The panel is covered in Astroturf, perfectly green, never-dying grass. Attached to this panel are three white houses, composed of wood cut into simple geometric-based shapes and configured back together and layered. The three white houses are simple renderings from photo-documentation of my childhood homes. These same houses reappear in slight variation throughout the exhibition. The panel is then framed with a premium pine board. The selection of the pine is meant to evoke the aesthetics of construction framework. In the exhibition, this piece hangs on a wall in the center of the gallery space in the exhibition (Figure 1), the entire wall on which it hangs is also covered in Astroturf surrounding the piece. The Astroturf is a nod to the preoccupation of suburban homeowners with their lawns, a mark of accomplishment and sign of pride in one’s land and home.

Around the perimeter of the gallery in the AMERICA(N) exhibition, there are undulating rows of concrete pickets (Figure 4, 5). The pickets made of concrete are symbolic in two regards. One, picket fences are a symbol for the American dream. Two, the concrete material is representative of a shift from the suburban American Dream to a wider context that includes more urban environments.

**Otherness**

While cities may be seen as diverse and sometimes perceived as liberal, suburbs are often seen as homogenous and conservative. It may have been true once that suburbs were conservative havens filled with white, middle-class people, but that isn’t the case any longer. Over 50% of America lives in the suburbs and one-third of those suburbanites across the country are racial and ethnic minorities. As the gap between the rich and the poor widens in America, more and more of the nation’s poor are also residing in the suburbs. In fact, currently one-third of the nation’s poor reside our nation’s suburbs.9

---

For a long time, the suburbs have been portrayed or exaggerated as home to “traditional” families, typically Christian heteronormative families and predominately white. This is probably because a history of blatant discrimination exists in some of these communities. This history is the story of white havens attempting to preserve what they consider to be “traditional” homes from outsiders. These outsiders have included non-Protestants, African Americans, Native Americans, and homosexuals.

In regards to race, this discrimination was even codified in some neighborhood charters, preventing homes from being sold to families of color; these racial covenants were not specifically criminalized until the Civil Rights’ Fair Housing Act of 1968.10

When Martin Luther King Jr. Rose to address the March on Washington in August 1963, he described his dream of an integrated America as “deeply rooted in the American Dream.” He was asking only for black Americans’ rightful share of the life that most white Americans had come to take for granted: a life in which whites were judged by the “content of their character.”11

The history of exclusion from certain aspects of American life and opportunities under the guise of preserving tradition is a real one. Many groups of people have fought long and hard to get the same sort of life as that possessed by a privileged majority. As this is being written, there are two cases before the Supreme Court that will determine the extent to which Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) Americans can participate in pursuing the kind of life most people take for granted. Currently, same-sex couples across the nation are denied marriage in the majority of American states and denied over a thousand federal benefits. In a smaller context, it continues to be a fight for LGBT people to do the same basic things that others in their community take for granted such as joining a church, the boy scouts, or attending high school prom. As a member of this sector of American society, it is impossible not to be affected by these circumstances.


11 Meacham, "Making of America: Keeping the Dream Alive."
In September of 2012, I got married in Washington D.C. The District of Columbia was the closest place to where we live in Georgia with legally recognized same-sex marriage. It is not that I wish to make art that is specifically politically motivated, it is more the fact that I am making art about American existence and this just so happens to be a significant part of mine. Since I am not able to fully immerse myself in the same sort of life that my parents and many of my friends have already made for themselves, my interests lie heavily in this domain that I once occupied as a child and the rest of my family continue to occupy. My artistic endeavors are partially fueled by this desire to have the option to occupy this space again.

America and my life are both present in my work, but my work remains empty of the type of specificity inclusion of the human figure would give. The houses, the objects and even the animals are visually present but it is vacant of the people that normally occupy this space. While what I have chosen to depict is a reflection of personal experience, the work is left open and space is given for the viewer to occupy. Here, it is worth noting Felix Gonzalez-Torres, an artist for which I have a great affection. Felix Gonzalez-Torres was a gay, Cuban artist. Some of his works touched on the experience of relationships often without the explicit use of the figure. In his piece, Untitled (Perfect Lovers) (Figure 6), he uses two clocks synced to the same time to convey this relationship of lovers.

3 OBSERVING THE EVERYDAY REALM / THE ARCHIVE

In addition to exploring the overarching theme of America, there is also the personal exploration of my own American life. How does one begin to explore such a vast subject, when life is cluttered with the experience of so many entities? I began this exploration through the gathering of all sorts of information; I have been collecting, documenting and extracting seemingly random things from different corners of my life. It is from this collection that my photo-based paintings were created. I consider this collection of both obtained and created items to be my own personal archive. An archive is a “repository
or ordered system of documents and records, both verbal and visual."\textsuperscript{12} Out of this archive of varying items comes the ability to select, arrange and create meaning through juxtaposition. The arrangement of these items is not at all permanently fixed, just as something natural grows and changes, the archive is constantly accumulating and being rearranged.

Many of the artists that I have looked to for inspiration and insight in recent years, have also created unique archives, specifically John Baldessari and Gerhard Richter. Both notable artists of the twentieth century rising to the public's awareness in the 1960s, these artists have large archives that they use as material and selection for their work. The subject matter for their work is also of a great variety due to their expansive collections of photographs and other various materials.

Baldessari’s archive is a large collection of found photography. Most of Baldessari’s famous works are those in which he has used parts and pieces of this appropriated material. Baldessari describes how he amassed such a collection:

A friend of mine worked in San Diego with the police department. He had a catalogue of police photography, as well as photographs of houses taken by real estate companies, or photos of accidents or cars or anything that was not meant to be art. I would go to dumps to look for photographs that had been thrown away, and I found this place that sold uncatalogued stills from movies. That’s how I started collecting movie photographs...and they were mixed in with a lot of newspaper photographs. So if I had a free day I would go out there and rummage through huge bins of photographs until my eyes hurt, with the idea that somehow these might be material I could use. Then I began cataloguing them…but then I encountered the problem that many photographs were about more than one thing, so they become nomadic, migrating from one file to another.\textsuperscript{13}

The artist, Gerhard Richter has been actively developing his archive since the beginning of the 1960s; the archive, which is a work of art in itself, is called Atlas. Atlas consists of photographs ranging in subject matter from family photos to shots of disasters and accidents to pornographic images. The depth and variety of his collection is also a reflection on the large of array of subject matter encompassed within Richter’s body of work. Some of these images from Atlas have been the source


material for Richter’s photorealistic oil paintings. *Atlas* also includes notes and sketches. The collection is arranged and exhibited on 20.4” x 26.25” white card stock (Figure 7).

**Photography**

While the content of my archive varies, photography has both a significant presence and has had a profound impact on the development of the works created for the archive. In the mid 1930s, Walter Benjamin wrote *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, which discussed the impact of technology on the artworld. In the passage below, Benjamin discusses the camera and how it has the ability to transform the way we perceive the world.

> By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring common place milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film...extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives...The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject...Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye – if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man. Even if one has a general knowledge of the way people walk, one knows nothing of a person’s posture during the fractional second of a stride. The act of reaching for a lighter or a spoon is familiar routine, yet we hardly know what really goes on between hand and metal, not to mention how this fluctuates with our moods. Here the camera intervenes with the resources of its lowerings and liftings, its interruptions and isolations, its extensions and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions. The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses.¹⁴

In my own work, photography has enabled me to observe and contemplate an array of subject matter from houses to dogs in greater detail and for a greater length of time.

Ed Ruscha, another prominent 1960s artist using photography produced sixteen books from the early 1960s to the late 1970s. These books explored and isolated banal subject matter, including palm trees, parking lots, swimming pools, and gas stations all observations from Ruscha’s Los Angeles environment (Figure 8). The way Ruscha approaches photography in these books has been deemed to

be “deadpan”. Deadpan is literally defined as a flat or emotionless face. In regards to photography, deadpan is a style that is neutral, emotionally detached, and matter-of-fact. Ruscha claimed that he was after photographs that resulted in a “collection of facts” **15** In my own art process, and the development of my archive, I am also seeking to create this kind of collection of facts through the use of simple photography meant to document everyday entities.

**Homes**

As I began collecting, and documenting my life, I tried to evaluate what the most significant parts of it were. It occurred to me that places that I occupied for long periods of my life had to be significant. So, I revisited and documented every place that I had lived in Alabama. For the longest period of my life, my childhood, this consisted of three different types of houses. The first house was a small one-story house on the very edge of the city. The second house was a town-home much further away from the city, out in the suburbs. The third house, my parents built from the foundation up in the same suburb as the town-home, but across the railroad tracks on the other side of town.

In addition to these houses, where I had resided from birth to 18 years of age, I also photographed the four apartments I had lived in while in college. This college town was located out in the country about 30 minutes from where I grew up in the suburbs. These were much shorter periods of occupation. While the apartment documentation remains in the archive, they have not yet been examined to the extent that the houses have.

The documentation of the houses presented themselves as my first struggle to translate these photographic snapshots into what I had initially hoped would be more articulated works of art. While photographing these houses, I had no particular intention of capturing them aesthetically. I travelled to

---

the places by car, pausing only briefly to snap a picture of the current state of the place with my smart phone’s camera.

Eventually, I decided to print out the photos of the houses. I chose to print them in black and white in order to detach them from any sort of specific meaning that color would give them. For example, color may have implied a certain time of day or season. Most of the other work I was making was also achromatic. I wanted to strip the photos down to basic properties representing the house. To achieve this further, I blacked out any information that would date the picture such as cars or toys in the driveway. I used different shades of grey paint, created by mixing white and black gesso, to highlight the shapes in the structure of the house and the setting. As the painting progressed, I aspired for the houses to become less and less mine and possibly more and more like an icon for that particular kind of house: a one story house, a town-home, and a larger, traditional two-story house. After finishing a smaller set of 11” x 14” house photo-paintings (Figure 22), I went on to create a slightly more abstract larger set on panels (Figure 9, 10, 11). Ultimately leading to an even larger and more concentrated charcoal drawing of the last house, Home III (Figure 12, 13), which I occupied for the longest period of my life.

**Dogs**

In addition to the houses in the archive, I also gathered and began taking photographs of the dogs that I had for pets growing up and that I currently have now. Dogs have always been an important part of my life from my childhood into adulthood. When I was a young child my mother decided that she no longer wanted to work in an office environment and decided to study professional dog grooming, which eventually led to her opening her own business. Due to our position in the suburbs, most of the animals that my mom groomed were common house pets. As a result of my mother’s profession, my family and I were always surrounded by a variety of these animals.
According to a 2011-12 National Pet Owners Survey, 39% of U.S. households own at least one dog and 33% of households own at least one cat.\textsuperscript{16} I ventured into making works surrounding this family pet. The first dog paintings I made were meant to be more formal portraits and were created using a reductive monotype method. There are three of these achromatic paintings, two individual portraits and one featuring two dogs (Figures 14, 15, 16).

After creating these more formal likenesses portraying all of the dogs I have owned, I continued to focus on observing the dogs that I currently share a home with. I photographed them from different angles, and sought to capture more abstract parts of them. I printed these snapshots of the dogs using a large digital printer and then painted back into them.

Through critiques and other viewer commentary, I found that the dog paintings were problematic, and although I had specific, less sentimental intentions for capturing these dogs, they were constantly either loved or hated for their subject matter. Another artist whose work I follow, David Hockney, created a whole series of paintings, drawings, and prints from observing his dogs. Perhaps, also realizing that dogs are problematic subject matter, David Hockney said the following on creating work featuring his two dachshunds:

I make no apologies for the apparent subject matter. These two dear little creatures are my friends. They are intelligent, loving, comical and often bored. They watch me work; I notice the warm shapes they make together, their sadness and their delights. And, being Hollywood dogs, they somehow seem to know that a picture is being made.\textsuperscript{17}

It is my intention to capture the fact of the dogs existence in relation to my own existence. In regards to the exhibition, the dogs are catalogued like the houses are catalogued. These dogs have shared the same sort of space as I have in these American residences. In the exhibition they share the same space again.


\textsuperscript{17} David Hockney, \textit{David Hockney's Dog Days}, (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 1998), 6.
Correspondences

In addition to the above mentioned visual sources in the archive, I also began to collect written and verbal information, about myself and through the act of surveying others. I wrote 50 short text pieces and then had them printed on business cards. I surveyed people, asking them how they like their coffee. One of my more successful interactions, came when I revisited an elementary game called M.A.S.H, short for Mansion, Apartment, Shack, House. This game in its own structure gleans information off a participant in order to predict that participant’s future residency, car, spouse, profession, salary, etc.

In my exhibition AMERICA(N), I included instructions on how to cook a turkey that my mother hand wrote and mailed to me. Recipes are philosophically intriguing to me because of my background in printmaking. Recipes produce multiples like a print matrix may produce multiples. The matrix can be just as significant as the image impression. The recipe can be as important or significant as the product. The process can be more important than the object itself.

The Still Life

In art and the everyday, life is constantly experienced through a series of arrangements and objects from which we discern meaning or neglect to discern meaning. The installation of AMERICA(N) was arranged in a way that I feel alludes to a still life. Alongside the photo-paintings in the gallery, also sat an arrangement of cacti and a folding lawn chair suggestive of a small outdoor space at home (Figure 16). In the center of the gallery, a shelf hangs on the wall, amidst small framed photo-paintings of homes. On this shelf are five small Hot Wheels cars, all American models, covered in white paint. Pinned to the wall above, are directions on how to cook a turkey (Figure 21), the fixture for the American holiday of Thanksgiving. While referring to the everyday space it makes sense to me to include objects
of this sort. I prefer the experience of the combination of art objects that I have created alongside objects that I co-exist with.

4 CONCLUSION

As a graduate student in the Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design, I have had the time to further contemplate and develop my artistic practices. Through these developments, I have forged the beginning of my own archive. The archive is an accumulation of bits and pieces of the everyday. Currently, these bits and pieces include houses, dogs, recipes and more. These pieces represent facts, events and the artistic renderings of these experiences.

The works included in AMERICA(N), my Master of Fine Arts thesis exhibition, both gathered and created, are a reflection of my real American existence and stand in relation to a broader idea of America. This idea encompasses the American Dream, the American middle-class and suburbia. The exhibition is the visual display of where these two things connect. The idea of America is implicit in my own collecting and creations based on my personal life experiences. It is my hope that while my life is the impetus, the work’s open, abstracted nature encompasses more than just myself and gives the viewer space to occupy.
ITEMIZED LIST FOR AMERICA(N), AN EXHIBITION

- APPROXIMATELY 40 CONCRETE PICKETS
- APPROXIMATELY 13' x 9' OF ASTROTURF
- 3' x 5' SUBURBAN LANDSCAPE, CONSISTING OF ASTROTURF, PINE WOOD, AND WHITE HOUSES
- 3 SMALL FRAMED PHOTO-PAINTINGS OF HOMES
- 3 MEDIUM PHOTO-PAINTINGS OF HOMES ON PANELS
- 1 LARGE CHARCOAL DRAWING OF “HOME III”
- 3 FRAMED ACHROMATIC DOG PORTRAITS, DEPICTING 4 DOGS
- 1 PAGE FROM A LEGAL PAD CONTAINING DIRECTIONS ON HOW TO COOK A TURKEY FOR THANKSGIVING
- 1 SHELF HOLDING 5 HOT WHEELS (AMERICAN)
- 1 FOLDING LAWN CHAIR
- 2 PHOTO-PAINTINGS OF SNAPSHOTS OF DOG FEET CLOSE-UP
- 1 LARGE PAD CACTUS
- 2 SMALL CACTI (PAD + BARREL)
Figure 1. AMERICA(N) exhibition view.

Figure 2. Suburban Landscape, 2012, mixed media, 3’ x 5’.
Figure 3. Suburban Landscape, AMERICA(N) exhibition view, Photograph: Christina Price Washington.
Figure 4, Figure 5. (Untitled) Concrete Pickets, *AMERICA(N)* exhibition view.
Figure 6. Felix Gonzalez-Torres. “Untitled” (Perfect Lovers), 1991, Clocks, paint on wall.
Figure 7. Gerhard Richter, *Atlas* sheet 5, 1962, 20.4” x 26.25”
Figure 8. Ed Ruscha, *Bob’s Service, Los Angeles, California*, from *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations*, 1962, Offset lithograph on paper with glassine dust jacket, 6.9” x 5.5”
Clockwise:

Figure 9. *Home I*, 2013, digital print and gesso.

Figure 10. *Home II*, 2013, digital print and gesso.

Figure 11. *Home III*, 2013, digital print and gesso.
Figure 12. Home III, 2013, charcoal.

Figure 13. Home III, AMERICA(N) installation view.
Figure 14. *Missy & Penny*, 2011, monotype, 18” x 24”.

Figure 15. *Lola*, 2011, monotype, 18” x 24”.

Figure 16. *Bear*, 2011, monotype, 18” x 24”.
Figure 17. *Untitled (Dog Archive)*, 2013.

Figure 18. *Untitled (Dog Archive)*, 2013.
Figure 19. David Hockney, *Dog Wall No 4*, 1998, etching, 18.2” x 25.5”. 
Figure 20. Gerhard Richter, *Jockel*, 1967, oil on canvas, 19.7” x 19.7”.


Turkey

1 large bird 16 to 22 lbs.
1/2 Sticks of butter
1 20 in. Roasting baking bag

Wash Turkey Well
Salt to taste - Sprinkle all over the Turkey
Clean all insides out of Turkey
Butter the Turkey all over
1 Stick of butter on the inside of Turkey
Put Turkey in Bag

Butter Ball Turkey’s come with cooking time - usually by the lb.
Cook until done about 4 to 5 hours
Slow. Carve Turkey and enjoy.

Figure 21. Turkey Directions, 2012, handwritten by Mary Liles on legal pad paper.
Figure 22. AMERICA(N) exhibition view
Figure 23. David Hockney, *Cacti on Terrace*, aquatint, 37.2” x 34.5”.

Figure 24. *AMERICA(N)* exhibition view
REFERENCES

"Artnet Galleries: Cacti on Terrace by David Hockney from Nikola Rukaj Gallery."
Fine Art, Decorative Art, and Design - The Art World Online: Artnet.
(accessed April 9, 2013).


Benjamin, Walter. The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, Marxists.org 1936,
http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm
(accessed 3.20.2013).


http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2117662_2117682,00.html
(accessed April 12, 2013).


(accessed April 12, 2013).


