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B I O

Katherine Wilson earned her BFA in Metals | Jewelry | CAD/CAM at Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia PA in 2012. She received her MFA in Metal from SUNY New Paltz in May of 2014. Katherine has worked as the Graduate Assistant in the Digital Fabrication Lab at SUNY New Paltz for the past two years and has worked on integrating 3D digital technology into her work and field. Katherine is dedicated to education within Metals and 3D design and has assisted in various classes and taught Nature of Metal at SUNY New Paltz. Her work has been shown in the U.S. and abroad, most recently in the show STARING at the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, Germany in 2014.

A R T I S T   S T A T E M E N T

My work revolves around the concept of memory, with a concentration in familial and collective memory. The objects I create have been affected by memory. The understanding of material choices, forms and construction have all been blurred and exaggerated to create objects with both familiar, grounded and distant, ethereal elements. In a similar manner as a photograph is a stagnant indication of memory, which is constantly re-written, the objects I have created are interpretations and reflections of these ever evolving collective memories. The use of technology is seen throughout my work as a constant thread in the creation of these memory objects.
As both individuals and a society, we have a past that is reflected in our history, culture, and ancestry. We cannot fully reconstruct or relive all that has come before. Often we are left with an incomplete picture, and instead have to rely upon a collection of ruins, artifacts, stories and texts to relate to our past. These elements are fragments, pieces to a puzzle that can never fully be put back together with certainty. In an attempt to put together the puzzle of my past, I have inferred and recreated many pieces that capture and encapsulate my memories, both real and imagined. To gather the pieces of the puzzle, I am guided by specific cultural histories, family stories and assumed forms. I recreate the artifacts of my familial past based on this information, filling the gaps with my own interpretations of objects lost and remembered. The objects that result from my investigation of these memories are emotive interpretations of facts. These interpolated forms all have a domestic relationship, making the viewer aware of the personal nature of the artifacts.

Being a first generation Cuban-American, I grew up listening to my abuela tell stories about life in Cuba, about the culture, the environment and the cultural icons. As I listened, I imagined the people, places and things my grandmother remembered; their size, colors, textures, touch and smell. I often felt as though I was there, that I had lived in that village, or on that farm, or worked in that bakery. This sensation is described by Paul Ricoeur in his text Memories and Images where he states, “Intermediary or mixed memory — namely, memory-image, halfway between ‘pure memory’ and memory reinscribed in perception, at the stage where recognition blossoms in the feeling of déjà-vu- corresponded to an intermediary form of
imagination, halfway between fiction and hallucination.” (70) In this way, my abuela’s memories became my own, and I in turn made a space for myself within them.

The political relationship between Cuba and the United States is such that an American citizen is strongly discouraged from visiting Cuba. While it is possible to travel there through another country, it is forbidden by my abuela who would say, “No nos vamos a regresar hasta que los Castros se calleén”; meaning, “We will not return until the Castro’s have lost power.” This governmental bloqueo is more than an economic embargo, but a physical and even moral one for many Cuban-Americans. Thus Cuba is my paradise lost. Even if I could return, visit that farm or work in that bakery, it would be nothing but a hollow shell of what it once was and what I have imagined it to be. Cuba is a collection of stories, faded photographs, and trinkets; the souvenirs of a distant Eden.

Our family left Cuba shortly after the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961. They were not allowed to bring any of their belongings with them, no matter how small. My mother remembers the Cuban officials confiscating all money, valuables and “unnecessary” objects that often held personal significance. I imagined piles of objects that were kept at the borders, boxes full of paintings, jewelry, religious figurines, toys, and clothing. All of these objects were held behind, imprisoned on the island while their owners slipped past the gates with nothing but the clothes they were wearing and a small monetary stipend. The stories of objects left behind have fed my imagination, allowing me to conjure my own designs of what they may have looked like and what may have become of them.

The desire to have a more concrete connection with this culture and history has led me to create objects similar to, and in reflection of, these lost mementos. All of these objects have been related to me via story or photograph, a starting point to build upon. As I render and construct them, I am aware that I cannot complete them as a perfect copy of the original. They
exist in ruin, simultaneously coming together and falling away, much like memory. Svetlana Boym, author of *The Future of Nostalgia*, considers this approach to the past as “reflective nostalgia,” which “lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time.” (41)

My series of buried objects, titled *Los Enterrados*, are a selection of vessel forms that are said to have been left behind in Cuba. Filled with American and Cuban coins, the vessels were buried in the back yard with the hope of being recovered when Cuba was once again free. My rendering of these objects are built up from a laser cut wooden skeleton and skinned with plaster in a manner similar to lath walls. The mass of white objects is huddled together, broken and disintegrating, exposing their hollow interiors where treasures once existed. The eroding and broken state express how these objects were forgotten, robbed, or destroyed.

Throughout my work I use the color white. White is often used to symbolize an analytical and sterile system at work. Museums, laboratories, hospitals and hotels use the color to signal particular behaviors and perceptions; white walls, coats, sheets. It is the color of non-use, purity, and cleanliness. Museums, when attempting to restore an object from antiquity, will often use a white material to fill in the blanks, to give the idea of what the object may have been, while not detracting from the actual fragments that are included in the reconstruction.

White is also the color of mourning in many cultures, it signifies absence and loss. My abuela lost her mother at a young age, and she has always expressed this sense of loss and mourning in the color white. It is a tradition in Cuba to wear a rose on Mother’s day to honor your mother. If she had passed you would wear a white one to express her absence in your life. I utilize white in a similar way, to signify the loss of the objects, their absence and distance to my history. I also use white as a link to memories having this “invisible” quality: imagined and
often ghost like. It is easier for a viewer to impose their own colors, textures and materials onto the color white to complete the image and interpretation of the object.

In an effort to recreate these objects that have become blurred with the passing of time, I employ technology such as computer-aided design (CAD) and computer-aided manufacturing (CAM). Processes such as 3D printing, milling, and laser cutting can produce objects that have a distant relationship to the past, constructing objects that appear stylistically historic and in their construction of a more modern time. *Culpa de dos Centavos*, a representation of a child’s purse, uses both traditional materials such as silver and cotton, with 3D printed nylon elements. In 1961, a purse like this one was confiscated from my then eight-year-old mother as she left Cuba, because it contained two American pennies. The 3D printed elements of the purse trail down and link with the tattered ends of the *Mantilla* (shawl) as the memories fade together.

The story of the mantilla and the purse have become linked in a similar manner. The mantilla belonged to my great aunt. It was a family heirloom and was worn during religious ceremonies and festivities. It was lent to a traveling band of actors who were putting on a performance for their small village. After the performance it was never seen again. The colors, textures and preciousness of this object seemed to have a similar emotional link and loss as that of my mother’s purse.

I also use CAD to digitally interpret data. A photograph, for example, is interpreted and understood by the computer in a way that can be broken down into minute detail and mathematically assigned parameters. It can be interpreted as a series of values that can control data points indicating depth and dimension, gradations of black to white or spectral colors. When a computer tries to interpret a photograph as a three dimensional representation it often abstracts the object: the dark elements of a photograph may be pushed back in space, the lighter ones brought forward. In my series of drawings, *Recuerdos*, these elements are laid out,
exposing how different layers of depth are read and understood by a computer, fading in and out much like memory. The drawings are interpretations of old photographs from family ruins in Spain and Cuba. I have sliced the images into layers and spread them out as an attempt to understand the original location, looking into each slice as an environment. The purely analytical nature of digital technology as applied to our analogue histories is a juxtaposition that is present throughout my work. While data is static, memory is constantly re-writing itself, constantly updating. As soon as data is saved it becomes a record of a moment, whereas memory will continue to adapt.

This analytical approach to understanding the past is becoming increasingly prevalent in our institutions, societies and daily lives. Institutions are constantly cataloging data, trying to organize systems of knowledge and memory into computerized databases and indexes. We rely less on physical images and shoe boxes full of objects and more on technology to organize and store our memories for us. In Oliver Dyens’ *The Sadness of the Machine*, he claims that “memory and memories are confused, as we are entrusting our memories, rather than our ability to remember, to our machines. But what will happen once memories, which endow us with conscience and existence, survive only in databases?” (77) In this vein I attempt to bring my own interpretation and memory to this abstract data, to give it meaning and value. The resulting object is a record of its making; it exists not only in a physical state but also in a digital one. The files are saved in various forms and databases; making these objects nearly impervious to degradation and capable of reincarnation.

The objects I have created are reflections of memory objects, they will never be able to actually represent what they attempt to mimic. Instead these objects are creative interpretations of objects. This is not an attempt to recreate lost objects but to create meaningful interpretations of their memories. The idea of strict observation and data in the
fields of science are limiting. By acting as artist-archeologist I impose my own emotions, experiences and memories onto this data, inserting myself into a culture and a past that is both familiar and distant to me.


1. INSTALLATION VIEW
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3. INSTALLATION VIEW

4. DATOS DE RECUERDOS | 6.5’x16” & 5’x1’ & 8’x14” | Ink on paper
5. RECUERDOS ESCONDIDOS | 6’x3.5’x3” | Plaster, Wood
6. RECUERDOS ESCONDIDOS | 6’x3.5’x3” | Plaster, Wood
7. MANTILLA | 5’x2.5’x.2” | SLS nylon
8. MANTILLA | 5’x2.5’x.2” | SLS nylon
9. CULPA DE DOS CENTAVOS | 6x4x.75” | SLS nylon, Silver, Muslin
10. CULPA DE DOS CENTAVOS | 6x4x.75” | SLS nylon, Silver, Muslin
11. LA MIRADA | 27x21x.5” | Plaster, Ply wood, Acrylic
12. LA MIRADA | 27x21x.5” | Plaster, Ply wood, Acrylic
13. FRASCO CHICO | 1x1.5x2” | Durus White, Silicone, Silver
14. FRASCO CHICO | 1x1.5x2” | Durus White, Silicone, Silver
15. LOS ENTERRADOS | 3x3x4” to 16x16x24” | Plaster, Ply wood, PLA
16. LOS ENTERRADOS | 3x3x4” to 16x16x24” | Plaster, Ply wood, PLA
17. LOS ENTERRADOS | 3x3x4” to 16x16x24” | Plaster, Ply wood, PLA
18. LOS ENTERRADOS | 3x3x4” to 16x16x24” | Plaster, Ply wood, PLA