

Revival

Memory and Nostalgia in Contemporary Art

By

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## ABSTRACT

Many contemporary artists have turned to the past in order to negotiate and make sense of their relationship with the present. Similarly, museums have begun to look back in order to push forward and through a revisionist lens they scrutinize their collections and reveal ignored object histories. A prominent method some museums implement is allowing contemporary artists to comb through the vaults and present new relationships between their objects to their visitors. Through a psychological analysis of memory, and theorists' dissection of nostalgia, object agency, and contemporaneity, I argue that artists Spencer Finch, Do Ho Suh, Newsha Tavakolian, Solmaz Daryani, Malekeh Nayiny, Mitra Tabrizian, Mark Dion, Fred Wilson, and Gala Porras-Kim function as revivalists – or artists whose works use memory and nostalgia to bring the past back to life. By attempting to retrieve memories, create nostalgic experiences, and question histories, they make their works tools for remembrance, reconciliation, and renegotiation with the past and present. The concerns these artists bring to the surface through their works build an understanding of how memory and nostalgia function as devices for personal meaning-making, trauma processing, and human-object relationship building.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Many contemporary artists have turned to the past in order to negotiate and make sense of their relationship with the present. Similarly, museums have begun to look back in order to push forward and through a revisionist lens they scrutinize their collections and reveal ignored object histories. A prominent method some museums implement is allowing contemporary artists to comb through the vaults and present new relationships between their objects to their visitors. Through a psychological analysis of memory, and theorists' dissection of nostalgia, object agency, and contemporaneity, I argue that artists Spencer Finch, Do Ho Suh, a selection of contemporary Iranian photographers, Mark Dion, Fred Wilson, and Gala Porras-Kim function as revivalists – or artists whose works use memory and nostalgia to bring the past back to life. By attempting to retrieve memories, create nostalgic experiences, and question histories, they make their works tools for remembrance, reconciliation, and renegotiation with the past and present. The concerns these artists bring build an understanding of how memory and nostalgia function as devices for personal meaning-making, trauma processing, and human-object relationship building.

The artists highlighted within this thesis are grouped categorically into three chapters. Chapter Two, “Past,” includes an overview of how memories are stored and retrieved. This is expanded upon through four works by two contemporary artists Do Ho Suh (b. 1962), a South Korean artist living and working in London, and Spencer Finch (b. 1962), an American artist, living in New York. Chapter Three, “Present,” is an analysis of some philosophies behind nostalgia and its use as a coping mechanism for four



contemporary Iranian photographers – Newsha Tavakolian (b. 1981), Solmaz Daryani (b. 1989), Malekeh Nayiny (b. 1955), and Mitra Tabrizian (b. 1954) – whose concepts of home are complex and uneasy. Tavakolian and Daryani continue to live and work in Iran, while Nayiny and Tabrizian live and work in the United States and United Kingdom, respectively. In Chapter Three I focus exclusively on Iranian artists as a microcosm of those who deal with diaspora and nostalgia in their works.<sup>1</sup> However, the philosophers and theorists whom I use to expound upon this group of Iranian artists increase the diversity within this chapter. In Chapter Four, “Future,” I highlight American artists Mark Dion (b. 1961) and Fred Wilson (b. 1954),<sup>2</sup> and Colombia-born Gala Porras-Kim (b. 1984) who explore how object meaning is made and how relationships are formed between old and new objects in museum spaces. I discuss their works through the lens of collecting practices, object agency, and institutional critique.

There are several texts which discuss memory and nostalgia in art, many of which are found in the bibliography of this thesis. I aim to approach the topic differently by pairing these artists with the underlying neuropsychological methodology and theories

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<sup>1</sup> I would be remiss if I did not offer a few examples of other Middle Eastern artists expressing nostalgia in their works as there are many. Mona Hatoum, a Palestinian artist living in London, often explores concepts of home and displacement through her violently altered, often oversized installations of domestic objects such as a kitchen grater. Egyptian artist Yousef Nabil reminisces on a time he did not live through with hyper-colored, hand-tinted prints of belly dancers. Manal Al Dowayan, a Saudi artist, grapples with identity through the often-forgotten names of older generations of women by writing them on oversized prayer beads. The list goes on as artists from the Middle East use concepts of nostalgia in order to grapple with their loss, displacement, and longing.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson describes himself as “African, Native American, European and Amerindian.”

which are present within their work. Additionally, while some of these artists such as Do Ho Suh are discussed in art and memory focused texts like Joan Gibbons' *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance*, many of the other artists in this thesis have not been written about critically within the context of art and memory. The artists who are the focus of this thesis were selected based on a variety of criteria, including race, gender, age, and media. When selecting artists and works, I wanted to ensure that the range of these principles would be displayed through the diverse demographics of the artists. It should be noted that while Chapter Three focuses specifically on Iranian artists as a microcosm of diaspora and nostalgia in photography, the philosophers and theorists I use to explain their work increases the diversity of perspectives within this chapter.

The cognitive psychologists and neuropsychologists used to support the arguments surrounding the works of the artists presented were carefully selected to be both foundational – having laid the groundwork for memory studies – and reflective of the current understanding of memory neuropsychology. While many of the cognitive psychologists and neuropsychologists used in this thesis performed their research in the 1960s and 1970s, much of their research is still relevant and in use or referenced today. Through an analysis of contemporary psychological studies and other text resources, the foundational and contemporary memory studies are the most up to date at this time. I note where past research was later expanded for clarity or found inaccurate along with present findings. Memory is a vast and highly complex neurological process. My thesis is by no means exhaustive in its effort to explain all of the elements and intricacies; however, I

seek to present an overview and a comprehensive current understanding of the neuropsychological inner workings of human memory.

Likewise, the primary theorists used are contemporary. Claire Bishop is a British art historian and critic, living and working in New York, and Svetlana Boym, a Russian theorist whose 2001 text is still widely in use today. Both Bishop and Boym build on the works of many sociologists, psychologists, philosophers, writers, and art historians. Bishop and Boym's texts provide both contemporary frameworks and relate to contemporary issues. I also briefly reference contemporary British anthropologist and museologist, Sharon MacDonald, who is still working today, and contemporary theorist David Cozens Hoy, who bases his research on foundations set by philosophers such as Henri Bergson. Finally, social anthropologist Alfred Gell is also mentioned heavily as his text *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, is still widely referenced today. There are many other art historians who analyze memory in art – Aby Warburg, Georges Didi-Huberman, Frances Haskell – to name a few. Like the aforementioned neuropsychologist, my thesis is by no means exhaustive or making any attempt to cover all the art historians who have studied memory and its implications within art or art history. Instead, my thesis attempts to pair contemporary artists with contemporary theorists and expose object memory as an artists' tool for meaning making and institutional critique.

## CHAPTER 2

### PAST: MEMORY, NEUROPSYCHOLOGY, AND CONTEMPORARY ART

Do Ho Suh leans carefully into the fireplace mantle of what was once his Chelsea apartment, the first and last place he lived in New York, his second home in the states after Los Angeles. The entirety of the tiny space is covered with a thin layer of white paper, every wall, doorknob, and light switch – even the old air conditioner in the window, the radiator in corner, and the electrical box on the wall. Suh holds a large blue-colored pencil softly in his hand and gently rubs the corner of the paper-covered mantle. A dark line of blue pigment transfers to the paper and Suh moves his way to the top of the surface, smoothly applying pressure producing a thin wash of light blue. His pencil meets the 90-degree angle where the mantle and wall come together, and another dark indentation of color follows. Suh pauses briefly, assessing the strokes, and runs a finger tenderly along the seam before moving on to the bricks just above.<sup>3</sup>

The laborious but gentle process Suh used to create *Rubbing/Loving* (2016; Figure 1) gave Suh a way to commit a space he once called home to memory. Not just as “348 West 22nd Street, Apartment 1” but as visceral textures that provoke reminiscence and sentiment.<sup>4</sup> Each pass over the light switches reminds him of times they were turned on in the evening to work late; a soft stroke over the textured walls reveals that small dent – a

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<sup>3</sup> "Rubbing/Loving" Do Ho Suh, Filmed December 9, 2016, <https://art21.org/watch/extended-play/do-ho-suh-rubbing-loving-short/>.

<sup>4</sup> Julie L. Belcove, “Artist Do Ho Suh's Houses of Memory,” Last modified January 26, 2017. <https://www.ft.com/content/a187c15e-e287-11e6-9645-c9357a75844a>chapter.

casualty from a table when moving in eighteen years ago; and the dark coloration over the details of the stove's knobs is a nod to their constant use, showing what Suh calls "the layers of time."<sup>5</sup> Suh's act of devotion is further illustrated in the title *Rubbing/Loving*, which Suh explains that when translated into Korean, the word "rubbing" could be translated as "loving" because there is no distinction between R and L in the Korean alphabet.<sup>6</sup> This play on words highlights the inherent affection within Suh's rubbing of each surface as well as why someone would undertake the arduous and painstaking process of coloring an entire apartment.

In 1968, cognitive psychologists Richard Atkinson and Richard Shiffrin proposed that human memory has three distinct components, the first being a sensory register which functions as a landing zone for all the external events and sensory input of a moment.<sup>7</sup> In Suh's case, this would include all the sensorial experiences of his old apartment – the texture of the walls, the smells from cooking, the feeling of the air conditioning kicking on during a hot summer's day. Those sensorial experiences which are deemed valuable are then encoded and converted into Atkinson and Shiffrin's second memory component, working/short-term storage.<sup>8</sup> Atkinson and Shiffrin's analysis of

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<sup>5</sup> *"Rubbing/Loving" Do Ho Suh.*

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> *How We Make Memories: Crash Course Psychology #13*, By Kathleen Yale, Consultant, Dr. Ranjit Bhagwat, Directed by Nick Jenkins, Performed by Hank Green, CrashCourse, Filmed May 5, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSyCdIx-C48>, 2:58.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 2:58.

short-term memory has since been updated in recent years to include the more intricate process of working memory, which includes the encoding of information rather than merely an area for brief preservation.<sup>9</sup> The terms “short-term memory” and “working memory” are often used interchangeably, but some psychologists and theorists use the former to denote brief preservation and the latter to denote manipulation specifically. Working memory can only hold about four to seven pieces of information for roughly thirty seconds before the information begins to decay.<sup>10</sup> If the information is then encoded again, through a process of repetition, for example, or by rubbing the entire surface of an apartment, then the information is moved into Atkinson and Shiffrin’s third memory component: long-term memory storage.<sup>11</sup>

There are two distinct types of long-term memory: individual and collective. Individual memory, discussed in this thesis, is personal and divided further into two subsections. The first subsection is implicit – or memories which are involuntary – they are remembered without conscious recollection. There are several different types of implicit memory, such as procedural memory, which is evident in tasks such a bike riding, where one does not consciously think about those activities but recalls and performs them. Another type is perceptual memories, which are evident in classical

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<sup>9</sup> *How We Make Memories: Crash Course Psychology #13*, By Kathleen Yale, 4:31.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:02.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:58.

conditioning experiments such as Pavlov’s dog.<sup>12</sup> These exist when a past event alters behavior at a present event, such as when a previously painful dental procedure produces involuntary anxiety while one is quietly sitting in the waiting room for a routine cleaning.

Explicit memory is perhaps what one might more commonly associate with the phrase “long-term memory.” Sometimes referred to as declarative memory, explicit memory is the “conscious, intentional recollection of factual information, previous experiences, and concepts.”<sup>13</sup> In 1972, cognitive neuroscientist and experimental psychologist, Endel Tulving wrote *Organization of Memory* which posited that there are two different types of explicit long-term memory: semantic and episodic.<sup>14</sup> Semantic involves the storage of facts and data, while episodic – explored in this thesis – is the storage of personal events and experiences.<sup>15</sup> Tulving further expanded his theories on episodic memory in his 1983 text, *Elements of Episodic Memory* in which he paid particular attention to his “encoding specificity principle”<sup>16</sup> which postulated that episodic memories are conjured in the brain via retrieval cues – or stimuli which are often

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<sup>12</sup> “Pavlov’s dog” refers to the experiment conducted by Ivan Pavlov wherein he conditioned a dog to respond by salivating to the ring of bell by continuously associating the bell’s ring with food until it became an engrained response.

<sup>13</sup> D.C. Demetre, “What Is Declarative Memory?” ScienceBeta, Last modified June 26, 2018, <https://sciencebeta.com/declarative-memory/>.

<sup>14</sup> Catherine Collin, Nigel Benson, Joannah Ginsburg, Voula Grand, Merrin Lazyan, and Marcus Weeks, *The Psychology Book* (New York: DK Pub., 2012): 188.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Endel Tulving, *Elements of Episodic Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 171-172.

sensorial – which then prompts the retrieval of personal memories.<sup>17</sup> Episodic memories are encoded and stored via the environment in which they first took place. When the sensorial elements associated with episodic memory are recreated – such as a particular smell, the feeling of the air, the presence of certain physical elements, the emotions associated with the event – the experience can be recollected more readily.<sup>18</sup> Cognitive psychologists, neuroscientists, and recent neuroimaging experiments have continuously corroborated Tulving’s theories and research, and his work continues to be relevant to contemporary psychology and memory studies.

Tulving’s research also distinguishes the difference between memories which are “available” or readily recalled and those that are “accessible” or forgotten but still able to be retrieved.<sup>19</sup> The brain stores a vast amount of memories, much like a library with a massive collection of books. It can be difficult or even impossible to find the book one needs without the aid of an identifier, be it an ISBN, a genre tag, or an author’s name. Once that element is introduced, the book can be found quickly. Accessible memories work in much the same way; they are filed accordingly, but a specific memory can rarely be found by merely perusing the stacks. Instead, they require an identifier – or strong retrieval cue – to be accessed effectively and accurately.

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<sup>17</sup> Tulving, *Elements of Episodic Memory*, 174.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>19</sup> Collins et al., *The Psychology Book*, 191.



Suh uses his artistic practice to create and implant retrieval cues by focusing on seemingly diminutive details and recording them in his works. The act of logging the details of the apartment, each edge, and ripple, stores those experiences in Suh's explicit episodic memory and gives Suh a way to not only remember the space but also to memorialize it.<sup>20</sup> After every wall, baseboard, brick, and doorknob are rubbed, the paper is carefully peeled away, allowing Suh to keep not only the drawing of the apartment but also a shell of the space. He states that while the peeling is challenging, he appreciates that it also peels off small layers of paint, dust, and dirt with it – quite literally taking the apartment along for a new journey.<sup>21</sup> Suh notes that the “layers aren't only physical – there's an emotional connection to a place, an accumulation of memories.”<sup>22</sup> He considers architecture and clothing somewhat interchangeable, feeling that “clothing is the smallest, most intimate inhabitable space that you can actually carry... and architecture is an expansion of that.”<sup>23</sup> For Suh, the small Chelsea apartment became an outer shell of protection or “a kind of skin,”<sup>24</sup> implying the dissolution of the barrier between the space and the artist's physical self. The act of *Rubbing/Loving* further

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<sup>20</sup> “Rubbing/Loving,” *Art21*, 6:16.

<sup>21</sup> Belcove, “Artist Do Ho Suh's Houses of Memory.”

<sup>22</sup> Julian Rose and Do Ho Suh. “Do Ho Suh Discusses Rubbing/Loving,” Last modified January 19, 2017. <https://www.artforum.com/interviews/do-ho-suh-discusses-rubbing-loving-66014>.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

cemented the connection between Suh and the walls that surrounded him for eighteen years.

*Rubbing/Loving* is a departure from Suh's traditional installations, which typically involve meticulously recreating architectural structures in translucent silk. These gauzy delicate fabric reconstructions often depict places Suh once considered home, such as his childhood house, which is recreated in *Seoul Home/L.A. Home/New York Home/Baltimore Home/Seattle Home* (1999; Figure 2).<sup>25</sup> Suh's "suitcase homes" are nearly perfect recreations of the spaces.<sup>26</sup> Yet, their small imperfections and translucent materiality point to the limits of an artistic recreation of "home" – a fundamentally ineffable, indefinable, and deeply personal space. While visitors can physically inhabit Suh's installations, the gossamer ceiling provides little protection, carefully stitched together shelves droop from the walls like a fever dream, and the walls flutter as visitors walk past. What Suh creates is a ghostly space that dissolves into the existing architecture of the gallery while providing a blueprint of a once cherished and beloved house.

Suh's preoccupation with home began when he moved to Los Angeles from South Korea. Coping with feelings of displacement, homesickness, loss of identity, and bereavement, the nearly perfect silk replica of his traditional childhood house in South Korea placated his homesickness after arriving in the states. Suh stated that the creation

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<sup>25</sup> Created in 1999, the work's original title *Seoul Home/L.A. Home* gained an additional location with each trip to a new institution for exhibition.

<sup>26</sup> Kim, Sarah. "Do Ho Suh Stitches Time, Identity and Memory in The Perfect Home II at the Brooklyn Museum," Last modified May 6, 2019. <https://www.theartblog.org/2019/05/do-ho-suh-stitches-time-identity-and-memory-in-the-perfect-home-ii-at-the-brooklyn-museum/>.

arose out of his desire for a way to carry his home with him “all the time, like a snail.”<sup>27</sup> Leaving South Korea pushed Suh to think about the notion of home and its meaning. The artist then made the trek back to South Korea to measure, photograph, and diligently record every detail of the space so that his silk recreation of the house could be as accurate a recreation as possible. While meticulously measuring the space, Suh stated that he recalled several long-forgotten childhood memories. He recalls that his father built the Traditional Korean *hanok* in the 1960s – a time when South Korea was surging into the world of modern architecture – and that the home felt like a time capsule. Suh felt as though he were “living in this bubble, or secret garden... every day when I went to school, I had to open this door and enter this other world. You go out that door, it’s a completely different reality.”<sup>28</sup> This recollection marks the exterior door as a retrieval cue for a memory that otherwise might not have been accessed or recalled without that tangible aid. Several other external stimuli can contribute to inducing memories, and the more external stimuli in the present which are in line with the conditions within the origin memory, then the more likely that memory is to arise. This action is also known as priming. Neuropsychologists have discovered that memories prompted with primed retrieval cues are context and state-dependent as well as mood-congruent.<sup>29</sup> Take the

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<sup>27</sup> Do Ho Suh, “Stories,” *Art21*, Last modified September 9, 2003, <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s2/stories/>, 13:01.

<sup>28</sup> Belcove, “Artist Do Ho Suh's Houses of Memory.”

<sup>29</sup> *Remembering and Forgetting: Crash Course Psychology #14*, By Kathleen Yale, Consultant, Dr. Ranjit Bhagwat, Directed by Nick Jenkins, Performed by Hank Green,

memory young Suh had of feeling as if he were leaving a secret garden on the way to school; perhaps that day was rainy, his father was playing a familiar song on the record player inside, and Suh stubbed his toe on the way out the door to school. Then, if on the day adult Suh measured the door jamb of his childhood home it was raining, the radio was playing a similar song, and Suh had hit his head measuring a shelf moments ago then all of these factors would contribute to the recollection of that same memory since the context, state, and mood of the two moments are relatively similar. The more retrieval cues one encodes along the way, the clearer the memory becomes, and the easier one can backtrack to find the memory accurately, much like a trail of breadcrumbs or in Suh's case, the blueprint of a home.

Unfortunately, as humans, our memories are not always accurate and are often unreliable, so the memory Suh had of leaving his home on the way to school and feeling as though he were leaving a secret garden could have been twisted or wholly fabricated. To illustrate the fallibility of memory further, I turn to American artist Spencer Finch who uses his work to attempt to restore missing memories. Though his practice often falls short of the "perfect recollection," this is Finch's intended purpose – to show the limits and inaccuracies present. Finch sits in his studio, thinking intently about the day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. On one hundred individual sheets of 9" by 11" paper Finch roughly smudges a pastel oval in the center; each oval is a different shade of pink. These obsessive iterations of the color pink are each of Finch's

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CrashCourse, Filmed May 12, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWWbrNls-Kw>, 3:35.

attempts to recall the exact shade of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy's pillbox hat the day her husband was assassinated. Finch's 1994 work *Trying to Remember the Color of Jackie Kennedy's Pillbox Hat* (Figure 3), strives to recall a chaotic and traumatic event so accurately that this one minute and largely insignificant detail can be extracted.<sup>30</sup> The hat she wore has long since gone missing, the 1960s photos' colors are inaccurate; Finch's only opportunity for revival of "the pink" lies in his memory.

Memory distribution is neither constant nor linear. Psychologists in recent years have charted what is referred to as a lifespan retrieval curve, which indicates the number of memories encoded at various ages during the average 70-year old's life time.<sup>31</sup> Encoded episodic memories in the recent past – over the last year of life – have the highest retention rate at about 30%.<sup>32</sup> This figure drops off steeply during the last ten years of life bottoming out between 12% and 10% at age 60.<sup>33</sup> Memories between age 60 and 40 float within or below this range.<sup>34</sup> There are no episodic memories encoded until

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<sup>30</sup> Spencer Finch, Susan Cross, Daniel Birnbaum, and Suzanne Perling Hudson, *What Time Is It On The Sun?* ed. Susan Cross (North Adams, MA: MASS MoCA, 2007), 11.

<sup>31</sup> David C. Rubin and Matthew D. Schulkind, "The Distribution of Autobiographical Memories across the Lifespan," *Memory & Cognition* 25, no. 6 (1997): 859.

<sup>32</sup> David C. Rubin "Autobiographical Memory across the Lifespan." Essay. In *Lifespan Development of Human Memory*, 159–84 (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1986): 162.

<sup>33</sup> Rubin, "Autobiographical Memory across the Lifespan," 162.

<sup>34</sup> *The Mind, Explained: Memory*, Performed by Elizabeth Phelps, Donna Addis, Netflix/The Mind Explained, Filmed 2019, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/81062188?trackId=14277281&tctx=0%2C0%2C229d13f9-2f24-478b-bcea-c14e1b1e4252-39441515%2C%2C%2C>, 6:34.

the age of three, where their accumulation increases steadily until the early teens.<sup>35</sup> Between the early-teens and late-20s, there is a significant bump in the number of memories encoded – known as the “reminiscence bump”<sup>36</sup> – which reflects the tendency for adults to have “a period of increased remembering covering 10 to 30 years of age.”<sup>37</sup> The reminiscence bump is likely due to the number of momentous occasions that take place during that time. Such “change moments” are memories that are self-defining and help form one’s individual identity.<sup>38</sup> For many baby boomers, JFK’s assassination is a marked “change moment,” or a time when most claim they can recall where they were, what they were doing, and other specific details because not only was it a widespread traumatic event but it also occurred during what would become their reminiscence bump.

Finch’s attempts to restore the ineffable often fall short of their intention, as evidenced by the 99 other shades of pink. Instead, his work points towards the limits of memory and reveals that one’s perceptions and recollections are rarely accurate. It is unlikely that two individuals would walk through Finch’s installation and select the same shade of pink as “the correct pink.” Many viewers may believe none of the pinks are correct; and many more still might not even recall the color of the hat at all as it was

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<sup>35</sup> Rubin, “Autobiographical Memory across the Lifespan,” 162.

<sup>36</sup> *The Mind, Explained: Memory*, 6:45.

<sup>37</sup> Martin A. Conway and Shamsul Haque, “Overshadowing the Reminiscence Bump: Memories of a Struggle for Independence,” *Journal of Adult Development* 6, no. 1 (1999): 35.

<sup>38</sup> *The Mind, Explained: Memory*, 6:53.

hardly the most crucial detail of November 23, 1963. After all, the artist himself would have been only one year old – not even old enough to encode an episodic memory – so it is unlikely any of the pinks he chose are “correct.”

In 2012, researchers at Northwestern University found that when one retrieves memories, that person recalls the last time they remembered that moment rather than the first time when the moment occurred and was encoded.<sup>39</sup> In elementary school, many children play “telephone” where everyone sits in a circle and a child begins by whispering a secret phrase in the next child’s ear. As the phrase moves around the circle it becomes further distorted until it barely resembles the original. Memory retrieval functions much more like a child’s game of telephone – becoming distorted with each memory – rather than a perfect snapshot of a time since passed. What Finch’s brain recalls with each iteration of pink is the last time he thought about that pillbox hat in order to smudge another pink oval, not the original moment in 1963 when he was but one year old and, as mentioned before, too young to encode and retain a memory. Human memories are recreated in the present via various portions of the brain. Like telephone, each additional recollection can further distort the original memory. When the brain reconstructs an episodic memory, present stimuli can find their way into the memory and encode themselves within that moment.

Many people tend to believe that they have a clear memory of an emotional or traumatic event such as the JFK assassination or the World Trade Center bombing in

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<sup>39</sup> D. J. Bridge and K. A. Paller, "Neural Correlates of Reactivation and Retrieval-Induced Distortion," *Journal of Neuroscience* 32, no. 35 (2012): 12144.

2001. They remember where they were sitting – “I was in school” – what they were doing – “I was gardening” – and what they saw – “I saw smoke out my window.” However, memories almost always deteriorate at the same rate regardless of the emotional or traumatic level of the event.<sup>40</sup> The memory is not any more accurate than what one might have had for lunch that day; however people’s convictions in the accuracy of their memories are far higher in traumatic and emotional states when in all likelihood, it would be no clearer than any other episodic memory from twenty, forty, or sixty years ago. The brain still reconstructs the memory in the present, therefore, allowing all the present and past stimuli from each recollection to distort the memory further.

Finch plays on this in his 2014 piece for the National September 11 Memorial & Museum entitled *Trying to Remember the Color of the Sky on that September Morning* (Figure 4), which contains 2,983 different shades of blue in watercolors on 10.5” x 10.5” sheets, clothes-pinned to a 40-foot-high grid.<sup>41</sup> There is a shade of blue for each person who died that day. Finch’s poignant piece aims to recall the “severe clear” blue skies the day of the tragedy. For Finch, portraying something as evanescent as the sky color, allowed him to explore “that human quality of remembering, how it’s so fuzzy in some ways, and in other ways so clear.”<sup>42</sup> In a *New York Times* interview about the installation, Finch recalls an experience he had while installing the work with a construction worker

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<sup>40</sup> *The Mind, Explained: Memory*, 13:55.

<sup>41</sup> Finch, *Spencer Finch*, 203.

<sup>42</sup> Randy Kennedy, “The Searing Blues of the 9/11 Sky,” *The New York Times*, Last modified May 14, 2014.



who did not initially understand the piece. After Finch explained, the worker walked up and down the installation for some time, finally stopping and pointing to one square. ““This is the color.”” The worker stated definitively, ““This is what the sky looked like that day.””<sup>43</sup> In reality, the sky could have been any of those shades of blue and was likely a multitude of different hues throughout the day. Additionally, any present external stimuli could contribute to the metamorphosis of that memory during its recollection within the viewer – photos later seen of the towers, news highlights, even the present color of the sky when viewing the piece.

Finch and Suh’s works often involve meditations on diminutive details in order to achieve a seemingly perfect recreation of memory and they repeatedly strive to record or reconstruct personal or historical events. Many elements are proven to aid in recollection, such as emotion, place, and story.<sup>44</sup> Finch and Suh tap into several of these in their artistic practice. Emotion aids in memory likely due to the amygdala’s – or emotional center of the brain – close proximity to the hippocampus – the part of the brain most responsible for learning and memory.<sup>45</sup> For example, Finch taps into the emotional response one might have experienced upon watching the news reel of Jackie reaching for the shattered skull of her husband. Place aids in memory likely due to particular cells in

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Remembering and Forgetting: Crash Course Psychology #14, By Kathleen Yale, 3:29.

<sup>45</sup> *The Mind, Explained: Memory*, 7:51.

the hippocampus, which seem to be specifically related to time and place.<sup>46</sup> These “place cells” respond to location – Suh’s would likely fire when the artist stands within the silk reconstruction of his childhood home, triggering a wave of memories associated with that place. Story aids in memory as humans appear to pay closer attention to details when they sit within a narrative due to the creation of structure which aids in recollection.

The high level of detail in both Suh and Finch’s works display that sense of narrative by telling a story to their viewers. Dissected through neuropsychological studies and cognitive psychologists, Suh and Finch’s pieces highlight the brain processes manipulated in viewers and artists alike. What these neuropsychological studies and cognitive psychologists emphasize is the mutable nature of memory and its lack of consistency and truthfulness. What they fail to recognize is the poetic personalization of memory and how one’s past greatly informs one’s present sense of self – but this is what Finch and Suh tenderly capture in their works.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 8:26.

## CHAPTER 3

### PRESENT: PHILOSOPHY OF NOSTALGIA, HOME, AND IRANIAN

#### PHOTOGRAPHY

New York Times correspondent Thomas Erdbrink recently created a documentary series with *Frontline*, entitled “Our Man in Tehran,” attempting to give the rest of the world a glimpse into life for Iranians. Married to Iranian photojournalist and photographer Newsha Tavakolian, Erdbrink has been living with his wife in Iran as an expatriate since 2002, which places him in a unique position to document the intricacies of Iranians’ lives from the standpoint of someone both within the community and outside of it. The following dialogue is between Romina, Erdbrink’s teenage niece who has been living in California since she was nine years old, and her mother (Erdbrink’s sister-in-law), Azadeh who moved with her family to America in 2008:

Romina: “I’ll still miss Iran. I’ll still be working here in a hospital, and I’ll still be missing my country.”

Azadeh: “What do you have in Iran that you don’t have here?”

R: “Feeling like I’m home.”

A: “So, here is not your home?”

R: “I mean, yes, because I live here...But, it’s that moment when you walk off the plane...the scarf comes out...”

A: “I just don’t get it.”<sup>47</sup>

Romina, a headstrong Iranian-America teenager, longs for a home she never had, and utopianizes the place she was born. Through rose-colored lenses and a tattoo of Iran on her ribcage, she yearns for the excitement she experienced overseas on holiday;

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<sup>47</sup> Roel Van Broekhoven, director, "Our Man in Tehran," in *Frontline*, PBS, August 18, 2018, accessed April 22, 2019, <https://www.pbs.org/video/our-man-in-tehran-part-two-7elm5x/>, 1:08:03.

idealizing the danger she felt running from the police as “feeling like [she’s] living.”<sup>48</sup> Her mother stares at her, snickering under her breath at her daughter’s ill-informed perspective, demanding, “it’s better for you here.”<sup>49</sup>

In the next scene, Erdbrink speaks to Goorgon Zargarian, an older Iranian man who runs a transmission shop in Los Angeles. When prompted with the question, “Do you feel more Iranian or more American?”<sup>50</sup> Zargarian states that he “still feels like a stranger here.”<sup>51</sup> Although he left Iran over thirty years ago, America is still not home, rather it is where he lives, works, and where his family resides. Despite Romina’s naivete, she and many Iranians who are living away from their birthplace struggle to reconcile their displacement. Though Zargarian’s feelings are filled less with teenage-angst than Romina’s, both of their statements elucidate a question posed by contemporary Russian theorist Svetlana Boym: “How can one be homesick for a home that one never had?”<sup>52</sup> Boym’s answer is nostalgia.

Nostalgia is the poetic and sentimental term associated with accessible memories, which are often spontaneously recalled via randomly encountered sensory combinations. Nostalgia, from the Greek *nostos*, meaning “return home,” and *algia*, meaning “longing,”

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<sup>48</sup> Van Broekhoven, "Our Man in Tehran," 1:08:52.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 1:07:52.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 1:12:40.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 1:12:45.

<sup>52</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, , 2016), xiii.

came into standard nomenclature in the seventeenth century.<sup>53</sup> Nostalgia began as a diagnosis for Swiss mercenaries, who were experiencing homesickness whilst serving in armies in France or Italy. The cure for the common “homesickness” was “opium, leeches, and a journey to the Swiss Alps.”<sup>54</sup> A distinct utopian attitude marked the mid-20th century for many countries and Iran was no different. By the twentieth century, the curable disease had transformed into an incurable ache. Often characterized as “bittersweet,” nostalgia became transformed into idealized memories which, when revived, can often leave one with feelings of pain and loss.

Boym would describe both Romina and Zargarian’s feelings as nostalgic, though in different capacities of the term. She defines the contemporary notion of nostalgia in her book *The Future of Nostalgia* as two having to distinct definitions, the first being “a longing for a home that no longer exists,”<sup>55</sup> or “restorative,” which indicates a desire to reconstruct the past and relive those experiences.<sup>56</sup> The second definition is longing for a home that “never existed,”<sup>57</sup> which Boym calls “reflective,” and encapsulates the idealized longing associated with nostalgia, the look backward through rose-colored

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<sup>53</sup> Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

lenses.<sup>58</sup> She states further that nostalgia does not always point toward the past but is also evident in idealized versions of the present and the future. Zargarian represents restorative nostalgia the home that “no longer exists.”<sup>59</sup> If he were to return to Iran, he would likely feel a disconnect between himself and the changed landscape as well as feelings of disappointment and loss. Contrarily, Romina longs for a home that “never existed.” Through reflective nostalgia she creates an imagined utopia pieced together from a variety of experiences and ill-informed by her youthful ignorance.<sup>60</sup> Boym’s theories highlight nostalgic longing, diaspora, and identity, which those who have been uprooted from home – especially those who cannot ever return due to war or exile – often experience.

Iranian photographers Newsha Tavakolian, Solmaz Daryani, Malekeh Nayiny, and Mitra Tabrizian wrestle with issues of nostalgic longing, diaspora, and identity in their works and attempt to reconcile those issues by occupying a space that Boym would describe as neither past nor present: “nostalgia itself has a utopian dimension; only it is no longer directed toward the future. Sometimes nostalgia is not directed toward the past either, but rather sideways.”<sup>61</sup> For Boym, Nostalgia then functions outside of the conventional realms of time and space.

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<sup>58</sup> Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xviii.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

Photojournalist Newsha Tavakolian's photographic series *Look* (2010) highlights a generation of Iranians who were promised a better Iran that has never been realized and who reside in what Boym describes as the "sideways" dimension of nostalgia. Through subtle body language, Tavakolian captures her sitters lost in their thoughts, mid-activity, "battling with themselves, their isolated conformed society, their lack of hope for the future, and each of their individual stories."<sup>62</sup> Tavakolian turned from photojournalism to artistic photography in 2009 after her press card was revoked, and she could no longer work as a news photographer.<sup>63</sup> The transition to artist and storyteller gave her the artistic ground to create work without the fear of direct censorship.

In one image from the series (Figure 5), a female sitter slumps in her chair, arms heavy on her legs, mouth agape, hair disheveled, staring towards the viewer blankly. She is tired, apparent not only in her posture but also in her face, which is vacant with exhaustion. On the table in front of the woman sits a birthday cake with nine lit candles cemented in a photographic spell, never to be blown out. Nine is the age when a woman must begin to wear a hijab in public, but the sitter's hair is frazzled, drawing attention to itself and her lack of covering. To the side of the cake lays a knife, clean, not having touched the cake but ringing with the unenacted potential, not unlike the unfulfilled promises imparted on that generation. Tavakolian's series captures the disappointment of

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<sup>62</sup> Newsha Tavakolian, "Look," Newsha Tavakolian Photography, accessed April 22, 2019, <https://www.newshatavakolian.com/look>.

<sup>63</sup> Nathan Thornburgh and Newsha Tavakolian. "Still Life in Tehran: Q&A with Newsha Tavakolian," Last modified January 4, 2013, <https://roadsandkingdoms.com/2013/newsha-tavakolians-still-life-in-tehran/>.

a generation, or what Boym would deem “a double exposure,” the sideways dimension that promised hope and was never realized.<sup>64</sup>

In another photo from the same series (Figure 6), Somayah, her husband’s personal assistant, sits at a table. She wears all black, and her hajib melts into her clothing, mimicking a chador – a more modest black, cloak-like garment for Iranian women. She glares side-eyed, confronting the camera. A cup of water – half empty or half full depending on one’s perspective – sits on the table in front of her along with rows of tarot cards. The cards are positioned in what is referred to as an “Upright Pyramid,” which is meant to provide an overview of the querent’s current situation. However, the cards are not situated in order to tell Somayah’s fortune, but instead, they are positioned toward the empty space on the right side of the photo. Fortune telling is a widespread practice in the Middle East, particularly in Iran. In “Our Man in Tehran,” Erdbrink stumbles upon a street fortune teller while walking past a shrine to Hafez, a famous Persian poet. The seer uses a bird perched atop folded lines of poetry to select and interpret divinations of the future. Tarot cards and palm readers are also popular in Iran and indicate a widespread necessity to look for a brighter future for themselves and generations to come.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xiv.

<sup>65</sup> Van Broekhoven, "Our Man in Tehran," 49:18.



Tavakolian describes the sideways space she photographs as “an airport lounge, waiting for a plane that will never come.”<sup>66</sup> Behind all of her sitters in *Look* are a set of windows exposing the foreboding grey concrete buildings of Iranian high-rises, which Tavakolian describes as omnipresent in Tehran.<sup>67</sup> The sinister environment is Tavakolian’s own Tehran apartment – a view she stared at in a depressive state for six months after she was banned from taking press photos of the election. She took all the photos in *Look* at eight o’clock in the evening when the lighting indicated neither day nor night, which contributes to the feeling of limbo within the photos.<sup>68</sup> The space Tavakolian captures is a vacuum, a never-ending corridor, an empty waiting room. She states that:

I am from the generation that, so many times, was promised change, progress and a better future. We were full of hope and optimism but those promises were never kept. So I don’t want to go through that again because emotionally it was very heavy on us. What I want to say to the government is “prove it to me”.<sup>69</sup>

Tavakolian’s photographic series captures the nostalgic longing of an entire generation for a time that will likely never exist, and the disappointment imprinted on the faces of her sitters, waiting for a plane that will never arrive.

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<sup>66</sup> Van Broekhoven, "Our Man in Tehran," 39:20.

<sup>67</sup> Thornburgh and Tavakolian. “Still Life in Tehran: Q&A with Newsha Tavakolian.” <https://roadsandkingdoms.com/2013/newsha-tavakolians-still-life-in-tehran/>.

<sup>68</sup> Newsha Tavakolian, "Look," Newsha Tavakolian Photography, <https://www.newshatavakolian.com/look>.

<sup>69</sup> Rachel Spence, “Newsha Tavakolian: 'I Consider Myself a Storyteller',” Last modified March 18, 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/355167c2-e9d8-11e5-bb79-2303682345c8>.

Boym asserts that nostalgia is not always longing for a place, but also “is a yearning for a different time – the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams.”<sup>70</sup> Place is not always implicit in nostalgic longing, as often those times of innocence and leisure perhaps have more pull than that of a place. Newsha Tavakolian’s series *The Day I Became A Woman* (2009) explores a time of childhood. When young girls are nine years of age, they go through *jashn-e taklif*, a coming of age ceremony. From this point forward, they are required to wear a *hajib*; no longer children, they have transformed into women overnight.<sup>71</sup> Romina, Tavakolian’s niece, sat for two of these photos. In the first (Figure 7), she is not yet a woman. She leans against a wall on a plush floral surface – perhaps a bed or blanket – legs crossed outwards, holding a doll in her hand. A pink boa sits atop her head, and she wears a pink, sleeveless dress with a tulle skirt. Romina stares confrontationally at the camera, though she does not seem particularly unhappy – perhaps just desiring to return to playing. In the second photo (Figure 8), Romina stands against a white wall wearing a plaid, long sleeve uniform, and a white head covering. Her arms are crossed across her chest, defiantly; she is now a woman, whether she likes it or not.

These two photos of Romina represent the transition between the innocence of childhood and the oftentimes harsh reality of womanhood for female Iranians. Her

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<sup>70</sup> Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xv.

<sup>71</sup> Tina Barouti, "Entering the Public: Representations of Women in the Work of Newsha Tavakolian," Last modified August 12, 2013, <https://lacma.wordpress.com/2013/08/12/entering-the-public-representations-of-women-in-the-work-of-newsha-tavakolian/>.

demeanor in the second photo changes. With her glare, one can feel her longing to be back in her ballerina dress, freedom, and youthfulness restored. Through this transition in mood, the viewer is exposed to Romina's desire to return to the youth taken from her in just one day. What hangs poignantly around these photographs is that for the rest of an Iranian girl's life, she must dress according to the government's dress code for women. Once she dons her first *hajib* at the age of nine, she will never be able to return to the comforts of childhood. As Boym states, "nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress."<sup>72</sup> Through photography the character of Romina resists time as she is forever a little girl in a pink ballerina dress; however, one knows that she ages despite these photographs, becoming the ornery teenager desiring to return to a place she deems home the very same place that will force her to wear the *hajib* she protests as a nine-year-old.

Boym's definition of nostalgia is articulated by nineteenth-century French novelist Marcel Proust in his novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* or "In Search of Lost Time." While Proust is neither a theorist, psychologist, or philosopher, his "Episode of the Madeleine" is frequently cited as emblematic of the disappointment and ache that accompanies an involuntary memory experience which is conjured unexpectedly via a retrieval cue. In "The Madeleine Episode," Proust's narrator has tea with his mother during a visit home. He dips a plump petite madeleine cake into his cup of tea. When he brings the moist cake and tea mixture to his mouth, the concoction invades his senses.

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<sup>72</sup> Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xv.

Through this experience, he is taken back to a Combray when he was young and used to visit his Aunt Leonie. He would run to wish her a good morning in bed, and she would dip a *petite madeleine* into her lime-blossom tea and offer him a taste.<sup>73</sup> After sitting with the memory, he begins to unfold the peripheries of the scene long since passed – the grey home, the square he would play in before lunch, the streets on which he would run errands, the gardens and country roads and the townspeople – all these images, emotions, and events “sprang into being, town and gardens alike, from [his] cup of tea.”<sup>74</sup> Here the *petite madeleine* acts much like a retrieval cue in Tulving’s studies. However, as the narrator continues to drink, he finds less joy and more disappointment with each mouthful. Proust’s narrator states that “the potion is losing its magic,”<sup>75</sup> as each attempt to revive the memory falls short of the elation that accompanied the previous recollection.

Proust’s narrator describes several experiences with involuntary memory, “which, uninvited, call up an assemblage of sensation and emotion that is beyond the reach of the intellect and voluntary memory.”<sup>76</sup> Through the taste of the tea cookie, the narrator is swept back to his childhood, his mother, and his home, although only metaphorically.<sup>77</sup> With each additional taste, there comes the bittersweet realization that his childhood

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<sup>73</sup> Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, trans. Lydia Davis (New York: Penguin Group, 2002) 47.

<sup>74</sup> Proust, *Swann's Way*, 48.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>76</sup> Joan Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2007), 3.

<sup>77</sup> Proust, *Swann's Way*, 45-48.

cannot be recreated. He is older, his aunt has passed away, and the home he once lived in is gone.<sup>78</sup> Eventually, he comes to terms with the fact that those moments no longer exist and that the *petite madeleines* conjured through the “tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.”<sup>79</sup> The moments illustrated by Proust are often referred to as “Proustian memories” or “madeleine moments” and are defined by their vividness, brevity, and involuntary nature.<sup>80</sup> Proust asserts that “remembrance of things past is not necessarily the remembrance of things as they were.”<sup>81</sup> Humans often idealize and utopianize the past remaking it completely in their present selves, like Zaragrian’s perception of an Iran he left so long ago; its actuality would not live up to the present expectations imparted upon it.

Photojournalist Solmaz Daryani (b. 1989) combines an idealized past and a disheartening present in her photographic series *The Eyes of Earth* (2014-ongoing). Daryani photographs the now receding Lake Urmia where she spent most of her childhood and where much of her family stills lives today. Though her work carries a strong message regarding climate change and its effect on Iran, it also recalls a sentimentality linked with a place from the artist’s past. In order to create the series, the artist journeyed home, a place to which she recalls “people used to flock ... on the

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<sup>78</sup> Proust, *Swann's Way*, 69-73.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Jonah Lehrer, *Proust Was a Neuroscientist* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2012), 95.

weekends.”<sup>82</sup> However, due to climate change, the lake is now mostly sand. For Daryani, the area “now it seems deserted”; businesses have closed, people moved away, and what was once a popular vacation stop is now a wasteland.<sup>83</sup>

In order to reconcile the change in the now unrecognizable place that was once her home, Daryani photographs not only her family but also others whose lives were dependent on the lake.<sup>84</sup> Daryani’s photographs create those randomly encountered tastes, mentioned by Proust, thus eliciting recollection through representation. In one such photograph from her series *The Eyes of Earth* (Figure 9), she captures Seyed Agha, her grandfather and a local business owner, sitting on the side of a landbound rusty swan paddleboat. Her grandfather rests, his head downturned much like the swan, disappointment hanging on his weary face. Daryani’s caption explains that he once owned a “motel near the coast, where he made his living renting rooms, and swan boat rides to tourists.”<sup>85</sup> When the lake began to dry up, the tourists began coming less and less, and one by one, each swan was retired. The rust began to accumulate as they sat on dry land, now a signifier of their lack of use. However, their continued presence is a mark of remembrance. Daryani’s photograph captures a bittersweet memorial of paddleboat rides that were once taken but are now no longer possible.

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<sup>82</sup> *Focus Iran (Iran Paradox)*, 42:45.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Focus Iran (Iran Paradox)*, 44:08.

<sup>85</sup> Solmaz Daryani, "The Eyes of Earth (Lake Urmia)," Solmaz Daryani, <http://www.solmazdaryani.com/lake-urmia-iran-watercrisis>.

Daryani's structure of recollection surges through the lake itself. She states, "when I look at the lake, I see myself, a look back into myself, my memories, my past."<sup>86</sup> However, the lake is now dry, and she cannot return to the place as it exists in her memory. Through the act of photographing, Daryani attempts to memorialize the lake before it and the community that relied upon it are gone forever. Photo series like *The Eyes of Earth* act "as a 'memory-object' or a memory-work that intervenes and forms a connection...between the work and a number of minds."<sup>87</sup> Daryani's photographs function in much the same way as Proust's *madeleine*, as a bridge between a prosperous time now gone and a bittersweet present still dripping with reminders of a full lake.

In contrast to Daryani's mournful photo series, Malekeh Nayiny's work, *Updating a Family Album* (1997-1998, Figure 10), contains an assortment of old family photos, brightly colorized by the artist through digital manipulation. Unlike many colorized vintage photos that are soft and almost pastel in their tones, Nayiny's works shout at the viewer in technicolor. Her photos are playfully updated with bright tones and mod, repetitive patterns, each family member an anachronism within their new environment. Additionally, she inserts modern additions to the photos – a parrot on her grandfather's shoulder, barbies in the sand next to young kids – recontextualizing her family members. These updated photos become joyful time machines uniting her with her family. Nayiny is not only remembering her family but also recreating them. She revives her family in an

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<sup>86</sup> *Focus Iran (Iran Paradox)*, 43:11.

<sup>87</sup> Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory*, 6.

anachronistic space that is both modern but also historical, one which both she and her ancestors can inhabit.

In theorist David Couzens Hoy's book, *The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality*, he dissects Proust through the lens of Derrida who states that "'memory for Proust, far from being total and continuous, is intermittent and discontinuous...we remember only what our memories, acting on their own, happen to think is worthwhile to save.'"<sup>88</sup> In essence, human minds do not save everything. Hoy also points out that:

Proust's '*temps retrouvé*' is a literary effort to reconcile us to the inevitability of time becoming lost and the power of reminiscence in retrieving it. 'Reminiscence' is possible on a Bergsonian premise that the past coexists with the present.<sup>89</sup>

Nayiny's work illustrates a process of reminiscing that allows the past to coexist with the present. Hoy cites Henri Bergson, a 20th-century French philosopher whose *Matter and Memory* "defined memory as the intersection of mind and matter."<sup>90</sup> For Bergson, memory "retains the past in the form of image, images that carry the mark of the unique moment in which they were lived."<sup>91</sup> Nayiny's work intends to recall those images and update them via colorization and the addition of patterns and other small modern details.

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<sup>88</sup> David Couzens Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality* (London: MIT Press, 2009), ProQuest Ebook Central, Accessed April 22, 2019, 110.

<sup>89</sup> Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives*, 110.

<sup>90</sup> Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory*, 6.

<sup>91</sup> Suzanne Guerlac, *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 127.



Ultimately, Nayiny's photographs "reproduce an event that has completely faded out."<sup>92</sup> Through their recontextualization, Nayiny reproduces both members of her family who have passed away and memories which have long since faded.

A final aspect of Boym's dissection of nostalgia is that "outbreaks of nostalgia often follow revolutions."<sup>93</sup> She references the French Revolution of 1789 and the Russian Revolution; the Middle East seems to be no exception to this supposition as social and political unrest causes many artists working within and outside of their homelands to turn to nostalgia in their works. Boym states further that "in some respect, the revolution produced the ancient regime, giving it shape, a sense of closure and a gilded aura."<sup>94</sup> The streets of Iran are filled with propaganda murals depicting martyrs from the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. These murals reinforce the idea that soldiers died valiant deaths and honored their families and lives. However, they also point to a nostalgia cultivated by a government and perpetuated by its people of what Boym refers to as a "phantom homeland, for the sake of which one is ready to die or kill."<sup>95</sup>

Photographer Mitra Tabrizian (b. 1954) meditates on the social and political situation in Iran through her 2006 work entitled *Tehran* (Figure 11). Taken on the edge of the city, *Tehran 2006* depicts a massive concrete apartment complex – not unlike those

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<sup>92</sup> Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives*, 101.

<sup>93</sup> Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xvi.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

seen in the background of Tavakolian's *Look* series. In front of the complex are several people, all looking off aimlessly, lost, no one person recognizing another. To the side of the complex is a massive propaganda mural of Ayatollah Khomeini and Supreme Leader Khamenei, the text above reads in Persian: "we will continue on the path of imam and the revolution."<sup>96</sup> The Supreme Leaders, omnipresent, stare down upon their wandering flock. However, the Supreme Leaders are sanctimonious, providing no guidance for those adrift on this disconnected edge of civilization. Tabrizian depicts "a phantom homeland" as described by Boym, one which was created by revolutions, political upheaval, and social unrest. The billboard in *Tehran* points to a time of promise, when one should die for their country's cause. However, like those single figures in Tavakolian's work realize, those promises are unfulfilled, leaving Iranians with a longing for a home that never existed except in propaganda stories. As Boym states, "the danger of nostalgia is that it tends to confuse the actual home and the imaginary one."<sup>97</sup>

It should be noted that all of the artists just discussed are photographers. Those unfamiliar with the medium might perceive it as inherently truth-telling as it is regularly used to capture specific moments in one's life. However, photographs are often illusory – not just through photo manipulation techniques and staging – but because they habitually entomb a moment and place to which one cannot return. Landscapes change, people pass

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<sup>96</sup> Linda Komaroff, "New Acquisition: Mitra Tabrizian, Tehran 2006," *Unframed*, May 2, 2014, accessed April 22, 2019, <https://unframed.lacma.org/2014/05/02/new-acquisition-mitra-tabrizian-tehran-2006>.

<sup>97</sup> Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xvi.

on, and yet the photograph remains the same, leaving a breadcrumb trail back to a time long since passed. As Boym states, “to unearth the fragments of nostalgia one needs a dual archeology of memory and of place, and a dual history of illusions and of actual practice.”<sup>98</sup> Photography operates outside of the conventional realms of memory and place, granting the viewer a glimpse of the past in the present moment. The artists discussed here not only explore their home, displacement, and nostalgia but also their chosen medium serves as a bank for memories and a tool for recollection. Additionally, for many Iranian photojournalists, photography became a tool for the revolution. When uprisings began in 2009 due to the suspected fraudulent Presidential elections, photojournalists documented the protests and riots. However, once mass censorship cracked down again, many photojournalists lost their press access and in order to avoid being censored by the government had to transition into artists and find creative ways to tell the stories of their home.<sup>99</sup> While it is possible for fine art photographers to be censored as well, it is much easier to hide behind the guise of “artist” than “photojournalist.” In the realm of government that suppresses journalists, photography functions well as a truth telling media by revealing the reality of the country and its people but also covering it with a protective veil of “art.”

This chapter has been made up of a *mélange* of voices: contemporary Iranian artists, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century French novelist, a contemporary Russian theorist, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-

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<sup>98</sup> Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xvi.

<sup>99</sup> Thornburgh and Tavakolian. “Still Life in Tehran: Q&A with Newsha Tavakolian.”

century philosophers, and my own voice as an American graduate student. What this hodgepodge points to is the range of nostalgic experiences and how a sense of “home” is created or reconciled. In the aforementioned *Frontline* documentary, Erdrink interviews his assistant, featured in Tavakolian’s *Look* series, Somayah several times. The first time, she expresses her eagerness to leave after a particularly frustrating run-in with Iran’s modesty police. She tells Erdrink, “Things seem frozen here. Things do not change that much...I’m burning with the last flicker of hope I have left in me...I’m not staying.”<sup>100</sup> Erdrink catches up with her in New York after she leaves Iran for Columbia University to study journalism. They sit on a bench catching up, and she tells him of her strange experiences in the states: the small shared New York City room, a cavalier roommate who frequently had male visitors, and her discomfort with a country where anything seems socially acceptable. Erdrink suddenly asks about the beret she is wearing with her hair stuffed inside. Somayah tells him she is still following the rules of Iran, not because she believes in them, but because she wants to be able to return home and work as a journalist.<sup>101</sup> It is clear that Somayah idealized America as a place of freedom but culture shock and homesickness set in quickly upon her arrival. For myself, and perhaps other Westerners, it can sometimes be challenging to understand why a young girl like Romina or someone who was as frustrated as Somayah desire to return to a place which seems in many ways to be unsafe, without American notions of freedom, and full of political and social unrest. In one of the final scenes of the documentary, Erdrink shows an older man

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<sup>100</sup> Van Broekhoven, "Our Man in Tehran," 44:04.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

he came across at night in an alley who assumed he did not speak Persian and began to sing him a song. It was in this scene that I began to understand the feeling of displacement and a longing to return. As Erdbrink, removed from his original home for seventeen years, states: "I feel at home here, in spite of everything."<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Van Broekhoven, "Our Man in Tehran," 1:51:00.

## CHAPTER 4

### FUTURE: COLLECTING, OBJECT AGENCY, AND INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE

Museum collections are unique entities and collecting is one of the major tenets of most museums. Their goal is often to obtain and retain objects, keeping them safe, and presenting them to the public in exhibitions. Through the act of acquisition, objects are then often considered genuine, worthy of a higher status than other “everyday” objects, and deemed monetarily valuable. The items which museums acquire are generally regarded as aesthetically, culturally, or historically meaningful. However, the determination of “value” is what anthropologists, sociologists, and material culture theorists tend to argue about. British anthropologist and museologist, Sharon MacDonald, defines collecting as a “set of distinctive – though also variable and changing – practices that not only produce knowledge about objects but also configure particular ways of knowing and perceiving.”<sup>103</sup> And that it is “fundamentally museological, whether the museum is directly involved or not.”<sup>104</sup> French sociologist, philosopher, and cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard wrote extensively on object value in *System of Objects*. However, for brevity, I will mention only one of his most salient points, which is that “it is inevitably oneself that one collects.”<sup>105</sup> Professor of Museum Studies at University of Leicester, Sandra H. Dudley, states that the “the museum is about information and that

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<sup>103</sup> Macdonald, Sharon. *A Companion to Museum Studies* Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, 94-95.

<sup>104</sup> Macdonald, *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 95.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

the object is just a part...of that informational culture.”<sup>106</sup> These three varying definitions of collections and the meanings within them illustrate the considerable differences in the perception of what museum objects are, why they might be obtained, and how meaning and value are ascribed.

The idea of meaning and value being intrinsic to an object is explored by artist Mark Dion in his work *Tate Thames Dig* (1999, Figure 12). Dion’s process involved scouring the shore of the Thames River in front of the Tate Britain and Tate Modern for refuse.<sup>107</sup> The banks of the river were combed using a crew of volunteers over the course of several days. The items found widely varied: bones, shot glasses, textiles, plastic happy meal toys, pens, credit cards, batteries, electrical cables, shards of glass and mirror, pipes, bricks, pulleys, bottles of alcohol – empty and full – shards of ceramic bowls. Old Motorola cell phones and bones alike were meticulously cleaned and handled with extreme care in the “field centre,” a location not unlike one found at a dig site near an Egyptian pyramid.<sup>108</sup> The items were then sorted, classified, grouped together, and stored in protective bags, vessels, or cases as an archeologist would do with artifacts or

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<sup>106</sup> Sandra Dudley, *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 3.

<sup>107</sup> Tina Fiske and Giorgia Bottinelli, "'Tate Thames Dig', Mark Dion, 1999," Tate, Last modified February 2002, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/dion-tate-thames-dig-t07669>.

<sup>108</sup> "Digging the Thames with Mark Dion – Look Closer," Tate, Last modified 2002, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/dion-tate-thames-dig-t07669/digging-thames-mark-dion>.

specimens. The items were then loaded into a traditional-style mahogany wood cabinet with glass doors on the top and a variety of drawers and storage areas below.

Dion's work exposes the value systems imposed on objects. Macdonald states that reconfiguring collections of objects – as seen in Dion's work – makes the object itself meaningful rather than merely an illustration of the meaning and that “by undercutting the rationale of the chronology or taxonomy, objects themselves come to the fore.”<sup>109</sup>

Dion's modern cabinet of curiosities allows for a variety of interpretations between the objects presented but ultimately lifts all the objects to the same value level through his collecting process, categorizations, and display of the objects. Macdonald further states that the constant among most personal and institutional collecting practices is “the notion that objects are meaningful and that collecting and organizing them can be a means of making sense and gaining knowledge of the world.”<sup>110</sup> Collecting is a mercurial practice, and meanings that surround objects change constantly, value fluctuates, and what one person or institution might deem worthy of collecting another might find worthless. *Tate Thames Dig* reveals these issues, but Dion offers no conclusive clarity on the question of what is and is not valuable inside his cabinet. Rather, his installation draws attention to the museum's position in determining value, as the items carefully packaged behind the glass doors and sitting in velvet-lined drawers would likely never be found on their own

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<sup>109</sup> Macdonald, *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 93.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.



within the vaults of the Tate Modern. Instead, they would likely still be detritus on the shore of the Thames, eroding with the tides.

Dion works heavily with the past and revives those objects in the present. Other artists in this chapter as well as Dion deal with multiple temporalities and, in some cases, work to create alternative presents. Art historian and critic Claire Bishop, in her book *Radical Museology*, points out that periodization is a common practice in art history but that the answer to “What is contemporary?” is often hazy. Many art historians categorize contemporary as post-1989, after the fall of communism in the west.<sup>111</sup> However, much like other art history practices, this view of “the contemporary” resides in a primarily Western perspective and cannot accommodate global art practices.<sup>112</sup> Bishop notes that contemporaneity engaged by many theorists falls in two differing categories: it either “denotes stasis or it reflects a break with postmodernism” often through the work’s plural or anachronistic relationship to the present.<sup>113</sup> Instead of falling into either camp, she argues for a dialectical view of the contemporary, which “seeks to navigate multiple temporalities...motivated by a desire to understand our present condition and how to change it.”<sup>114</sup> Bishop argues that all art, regardless of period, functions anachronistically, and she quotes Georges Didi-Huberman to support her argument: “in each historical

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<sup>111</sup> Claire Bishop, *Radical Museology: or, What’s Contemporary in Museums of Contemporary Art?* (London: König, 2014), 17.

<sup>112</sup> Bishop, *Radical Museology*, 18.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>114</sup> Bishop, *Radical Museology*, 23.

object, all-time encounter one another, collide, or base themselves plastically on one another, bifurcate, or even become entangled with each other.”<sup>115</sup> The position shared by Bishop and Didi-Huberman is not unprecedented. German art historian Aby Warburg (1866-1929) asserted “that works of art are temporal knots, a mixture of past and present; they reveal what persists or ‘survives’ from earlier periods, in the form of a symptom in the current era.”<sup>116</sup> Bishop’s argument for a dialectical contemporaneity is supported through her dissection of three institutions – The Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven, Netherlands), the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (Madrid, Spain), and the Muzej sodobne umetnosti Metelkova (Ljubljana, Slovenia) – who mined their permanent collections and re-presented the objects and object histories to the public.<sup>117</sup>

Claire Bishop contends that “museums with a historical collection have become the most fruitful testing ground for a non-presentist, multi-temporal contemporaneity.”<sup>118</sup> While well supported by museums in her book, Bishop’s assessment does not address contemporary artists whose works accomplish a similar task as these museums. This artistic practice, known as institutional critique, arose in the late 1960s and early 1970s when artists began to create works critiquing the practices of museums and galleries within which they were exhibiting and selling their work. Born from 1960s Minimalism,

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>117</sup> It should be noted

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 23.

institutional critique not only pushes the general boundaries of formal art history, art criticism, language, and authorship but also reflects those critiques on the practices of the art world infrastructure within which artists operate. Institutional critique artists tend to make pieces which highlight a social or political problem such as whitewashing histories in museums or donor funding relations. The museum that exhibits the work is then positioned as both the problem and the solution. One of the most well-known early works of institutional critique is German artist Hans Haacke's *MoMA Poll* (1970). Composed of two transparent ballot boxes with the question "Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon's Indochina policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November" above, visitors were asked to place a slip of paper into the box corresponding with their answer "yes" or "no." The polarizing question targeted Nelson Rockefeller, governor of New York and a MoMA board of trustee member. Institutional critique continued through the 1980s with removed walls, parody tours of museums, and meals in galleries, ultimately demonstrating that artists can question elements of the art world and still show within it.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> This references several works of institutional critique. The first being Michael Asher's 1974 work which removed the wall between the office area and the visitor's space at Claire S. Copley Gallery in Los Angeles, exposing the business operations to the public as the artwork. The second being a tour of the Philadelphia Art Museum by artist Andrea Fraser in which she posed as a museum docent and toured guests around the galleries offering an exhaustive history of the acquisition of the museum's collection coupled with inane highlights of the water fountains and bathrooms through pedantic descriptions parodying docents. The third being Rirkrit Tiravanija's 1990 entitled *Pad Thai* at the Paula Allen Gallery in New York where cooked pad thai for the visitors to the gallery, turning institutional critique into a convivial conversation between artist and visitor over a hot meal.

In 1992, African-American artist Fred Wilson, created one of his most notable works entitled *Mining the Museum* which dug through the collections of the Maryland History Society and pulled out objects which represented minority groups and persons whose histories were largely excluded from the canonical representation of history in American institutions. Wilson selected the museum's objects strategically by considering their histories, materiality, social contexts, cultural frameworks, and their aesthetic values. Carefully enmeshing them with those commonly on display in the museum, Wilson exposed the repression of Native American and African American cultures as well as the biased value systems and feigned neutrality of museums as institutions.<sup>120</sup>Recontextualizing the pieces differently from a "conventional" exhibit display resulted in a conversation between mute inanimate objects.

One of Wilson's installations entitled *Metalwork* (Figure 13) included several pieces of silver serving wear from the early 1800s whose ornate decorations contrasted with slave shackles from the same period.<sup>121</sup> Wilson's jarring comparison illustrates the eclipse of African American culture and history by objects deemed "aesthetically pleasing" by the museum. *Truth Trophy and Pedestals* (Figure 14) displays the museum's busts of several white historical figures along with several empty pedestals inscribed with names of African American figures such as Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass who

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<sup>120</sup> Fred Wilson and Howard Halle, "Mining the Museum," *Grand Street* 44 (1993): 151-72. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25007622>.

<sup>121</sup> Wilson and Halle, "Mining the Museum," 157.

lacked representation in the institution.<sup>122</sup> *Mining the Museum* calls attention to the latent histories of objects and the museum's role in presenting a story through the objects they choose to display.

Wilson's careful selection of objects imbued them with a previously hidden agency. Social anthropologist Alfred Gell defines an agent as "one who has the capacity to initiate causal events in his/her vicinity, which cannot be ascribed to the current state of the physical cosmos, but only to a special category of mental states; that is, intentions." For Gell, social agency is "human agency...exercised within the material world."<sup>123</sup> The material world – or in this specific case the art world – is made up of what Gell deems "indexes," which are the objects themselves, and necessitates a need "to be seen in relation to some specific reception and that this reception may be active or passive and is likely to be diverse."<sup>124</sup> Indexes act as mirrors for their owner's agency – or the agency of other humans. Gell argues that humans impose their agency on the art pieces, thus making them useful, and he points out that the objectification of indexes "in artefact-form is how social agency manifests and realizes itself, via the proliferation of fragments of 'primary' intentional agents in their 'secondary artefactual forms.'<sup>125</sup> Wilson's piece – and even the Historical Society more broadly – is part of what Gell would deem a

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<sup>122</sup> Wilson and Halle, "Mining the Museum," 153.

<sup>123</sup> Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency an Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2013) 338.

<sup>124</sup> Gell, *Art and Agency an Anthropological Theory*, 342.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

“vicarious abduction of its original, or intended reception.”<sup>126</sup> The art object easily lends itself to several diverse receptions dependent on context, interpreter, location, and other criteria. Wilson’s *Mining the Museum* removes artifacts from their original makers and recontextualizes them through their placement with other art objects and – still implicit with their social, historical, and cultural contexts – transforms them so they might act accordingly as agents in a discussion about the representation of marginalized peoples in museums.

Emerging contemporary artist Gala Porras-Kim’s untitled installation (Figure 15) at the Hammer Museum, *Made in L.A. 2016: a, the, though, only*, weaves together the most significant parts of both Dion and Wilson’s works. Much like Wilson, Porras-Kim mines the collection of the Fowler Museum, an anthropological institution on UCLA’s campus, and moves these items into the realm of contemporary art at the Hammer. By selecting artifacts which lack provenance information, artists, makers, and other key details Porras-Kim re-collects objects for her installation.<sup>127</sup> Missing critical pieces of information makes the objects selected largely unexhibitable in a museum context. They are therefore often passed over in favor of those with more complete object histories. However, Porras-Kim sees value in them and brushes the metaphorical dust from their surfaces to give them a new life through a recontextualization process similar to Dion. Through meticulous sketches and careful research, she takes on the role of a conservator

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>127</sup> Gala Porras-Kim, “Made in L.A. 2016: Gala Porras-Kim,” Hammer Museum, Filmed 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r79agtknbJk>.

and researcher, finding out as much as she can about the object and its history. In some cases, there is information to discover. As provenance research continues to grow and more information is easily accessible through simple internet searches, some artifacts get their histories back. However, in other cases, Porrás-Kim fabricates histories and taxonomies for the objects, much as Dion did.<sup>128</sup> After researching, Porrás-Kim meticulously sketches some artifacts focusing on the tiniest of details in order to create the most exact recreation via graphite. These drawings are then new art pieces which are reintroduced into the museum via her own curated installation along with their original counterpart as joint items of value.<sup>129</sup>

Porrás-Kim's work questions the museum's position of power by mining its forgotten contents and giving voices to artifacts from the peripheries of the art historical canon whose objects have suffered from appropriation or erasure, and those objects saved but often ignored in favor of others considered more beautiful, educational, or complete. She pays particular attention to artifacts which come from South and Central America because they are often left out of the art historical canon. Through her work, she aims "to carve pathways of understanding towards long-gone peoples that perhaps exceed the

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<sup>128</sup> Gretchen, Giles, "Gala Porrás-Kim's 'Ancient Technologies' Wants to See What Happens," Last modified July 12, 2018, <https://www.kqed.org/arts/13836948/gala-porrás-kims-ancient-technologies-at-headlands-wants-to-see-what-happens>.

<sup>129</sup> Alexandra Pechman, "The Irresistible, Transcontinental Art of Gala Porrás-Kim," Art Basel, last modified 2018, <https://www.artbasel.com/news/gala-porrás-kim-artist-los-angeles>.

ability of mere language to parse.”<sup>130</sup> Porras-Kim’s installations function within the dialectical view of the contemporary, for which Bishop argues. Through installations she can “navigate multiple temporalities...motivated by a desire to understand our present condition and how to change it.”<sup>131</sup> Porras-Kim offers a “temporal knot, a mixture of past and present; they reveal what persists or ‘survives’ from earlier periods, in the form of a symptom in the current era.”<sup>132</sup> Ultimately what Porras-Kim’s work achieves through her re-collecting and re-centering is that objects begin to be “understood as curiosity, rather than as exemplars of an underlying system...and draw attention to questions of their selection...and to their possible multiple meanings and associations.”<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Giles, “Gala Porras-Kim’s ‘Ancient Technologies’ Wants to See What Happens.”

<sup>131</sup> Bishop, *Radical Museology*, 23.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>133</sup> Macdonald, *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 92.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Artists Spencer Finch and Do Ho Suh implant and resurrect the past in their works. Iranian photographers use their artistic practice as a way to reconcile their trauma and loss of home through nostalgic longing and skewed recreations of the past and present. Mark Dion, Fred Wilson, and Gala Porras-Kim expose the limits of museums as institutions and revive forgotten historical collection objects with new histories and value. Through retrieved memories, fabricated nostalgic experiences, and an interrogated history, these artists bring the past into the present and use their works as tools to negotiate object-human relationships, reconcile memories and trauma, and remember the past within the present.

The media by which the artists discussed in this thesis practice is diverse, indicating the multiple approaches by which one can explore memory and nostalgia. However, despite the breadth of media, each artist explores different layers of temporality, entangling past, present, and future within their works. Additionally, each artist ruminates and highlights details within their artistic process. From the light switches stitched together by Do Ho Suh and the tarot cards on the table in front of Tavakolian's sitter to the thorough drawings by Porras-Kim and her fabricated object histories, these artists deal in the iconography of details. The obsessive creations point to the necessity for specifics in the recollection and recreation of memories, moments, and histories.

In this thesis, I argue that memories are often inaccurate and, therefore, unreliable. If this is true, then why do so many artists find it necessary to create work using

undependable brain functions, and what purpose might that serve for humans to even have such a consistently poor and error-prone memory system? Researchers in Cognitive Neuroscience at the University of Auckland – Aleea L. Devitt, Donna Rose Addis, and Daniel L. Schacter – might have uncovered an answer. Using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), they asked participants to remember an episodic memory as well as imagine a future scenario. The same areas of the brain illuminated in both instances.<sup>134</sup> Remembering and imagining use the same areas of the brain and are intimately related to one another, a relationship that according to Addis “allows us to troubleshoot upcoming experiences, to think through the ways in which events might unfold, potential obstacles that might come up, and the ways in which we might deal with those obstacles,”<sup>135</sup> and perhaps, create art. The imperfect nature of memory then serves as a tool for humans to not only survive but also to thrive. Proust wrote, “what we call reality is a relation between those sensations and those memories which simultaneously encircle.”<sup>136</sup> The human mind weaves together a silk home we carry with us that full of present sensorial experiences, past memories, and thoughts of the future, all making up our sense of self.

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<sup>134</sup> Aleea L. Devitt, Donna Rose Addis, and Daniel L. Schacter, "Episodic and Semantic Content of Memory and Imagination: A Multilevel Analysis," *Memory & Cognition* 45, no. 7 (2017): 1078.

<sup>135</sup> *The Mind, Explained: Memory*, 19:15.

<sup>136</sup> Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, Translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Sydney Schiff, Vol. 1-7 (Centaur Editions, 2016, Kindle) loc 50481 of 52899.

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