There is No Home Like Me

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There is No Home Like Me explores of the anxieties that I carry with me, my need to be comforted and finding a home within myself. Each piece focuses on what I reach for to provide myself with a sense of security and cope with memories of my painful experiences. The embrace of a stuffed animal, the shelter of a bedroom, and the love for a pet provide safety from an overwhelming force of anxiety, which I represent as a swarm of wasps. Slowly, I am teaching myself how to be comfortable with being my own home.

I am contemplating what defines a home, if there are specific markers that indicate if something is a home. Is it a place? Can it be a person? Or do I only find my home through myself and become comfortable within my own body and that becomes enough? The title of this show comes from a poem by Rupi Kaur about accepting one’s body and taking care of it, because it is your home. I feel as though one day I can do the same as the lines in the poem state, to “look down at your body / whisper / there is no home like you”.

Materials:

My work is interdisciplinary, encompassing paintings and books containing drawing, painting, and printmaking techniques. In my paintings I layer molding paste with acrylic paint and chalk pastels. The molding paste enhances paint texture to stress the significance of touch with the comfort object (Figure 1). I use piled cotton bedsheets as a canvas to evoke comfort and to accompany the imagery of a transitional object that is associated with a bed and sleeping (Figure 2). Layers of paint are applied to the canvas; then chalk pastel is used over the top to obscure or define certain sections of the painting. I color match the chalk with the paint and rub it over the surface to create atmospheric, dreamlike effects. The chalk pastel complements the child-like quality of my paintings, like a child’s chalk drawings on pavement.
Comfort Objects:

Comfort objects, or transitional objects, are physical objects used to provide psychological comfort. They take the form of a security blanket, a stuffed animal, or some other toy that usually a child becomes attached to. In psychology, a child starts to transition from complete dependence to relative independence when the child separates the “me” from the “not-me.” The transitional object is one of the first “not-me” objects that belongs completely to the child, and is used at the time of sleep as a defense against anxiety as this transition can be a stressful period for a child. Typically, in child development, there is a stage where the child realizes that they no longer need their comfort object and are able to comfort themselves without a reliance on another thing (Robinson and Wilson 862). A not all unusual occurrence happens when the comfort object stays with a person though adulthood. It becomes less of an aid against understanding separation between self and other and more of a sentimental attachment. The idea of a comfort object can be expanded to include representations of one’s family or home. It represents a person’s emotional attachments. It is normal for people to have an attachment to their childhood and want to feel nostalgia for their past. In my paintings I depict the comfort objects that I own and use to soothe my anxiety. The dog is from my childhood, and her worn and faded fur show the years of love (Figure 1). The bear is a relatively new comfort object that was given to me and that I associated with that person so that when I missed them, I could hug the bear (Figure 2). Since the person is no longer in my life, the bear doesn’t have a connection to them anymore and is used for its soothing hold. Lastly, I see my (real) dog Maggie as a comfort object (Figure 3). She has been in my life for sixteen years and has seen me through every heartache and every happy moment in my life, giving her unconditional love and comfort (Figure 4).
Bookbinding:

To accompany my paintings, I have created artist books using various bookbinding techniques. I use the language of books to create greater personal engagement with my audience. It becomes a more intimate viewing experience when someone can feel the pages of the book, turn the pages themselves, and go through the book at their own pace. A book is meant to be held and taken care of, just as humans are. The wear of a book shows how much it was loved in its life, much as a security blanket or a stuffed animal wears with age the more it is loved. While with a painting the viewer takes in all of the information at once, content in a book is slowly revealed. The experience is not only a multi-dimensional but performative as well. With books I am able to have a different connection with my audience than I would with a painting; “[t]he book, as object, is intimate, it insists on a one-to-one confrontation: the bookmaker and viewer” (Smith 62). It is an object that invites physical interaction where the artist has more control over how the audience views it. The way a book is bound forces the viewer to move through the pages at a certain pace and in a specific way. There can be obstacles such as pockets and flaps, like in Homebody (Figure 5), or pieces falling out of the pages as in Swarm (Figure 6). Deliberate decisions are made when binding that can change the whole perception of the work if bound in a different way. Turning the pages “reveals the order of viewing […] placing] the book into time,” a much different experience from viewing a painting that is stagnant in time (Smith 63). The structure and physical boundaries of a book can both be limited and limitless. With my book The Fig Wasp Queen (Figure 7), I have created a digital component; each page may be viewed through a video recording of someone else turning the pages and experiencing the book.1 That

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1 With the COVID pandemic, utilizing a video component will allow people who are not able to travel to see the work in person to view it online. People who attend the exhibition in person will be able to safety view the work without handling the object.
digital form can exist forever, whereas the physical book is limited to how it can continue. The form of a book and how the pages are arranged “gives each book its unique identity” and each page in how it is sequenced will alter the time that the viewer spends with each page (Drucker 257).

In my book, *Homebody*, I have used the accordion fold technique to create a pop-up book of a dollhouse (Figure 8). When I was a child, I always played with toys that referenced the home. I had a dollhouse that I made furniture for and decorated the way I wanted my house to look when I grew up. I remember playing with a Victorian pop-up dollhouse book that I tied together to create a house. I invented many stories of the people that lived in that house. In *Homebody*, I am exploring whether a house makes a home, or if it is the comforts of a house that we work to organize and decorate, that make it a home for us. Feeling stuck between two places, the home I grew up in and the home I made for myself over the past few years, I am coming to terms with how it is not the exact location that is a home, it is the people I love that make a place a home. Wherever I am, I can make that place into a new home.

**Symbolism:**

In my work, I use the imagery of wasps to symbolize the anxiety that I suffer every day. In my apartment this past year, wasps kept finding their way in. I would wake up every morning to a new dead wasp somewhere in the apartment. It became a ritual of waking up, checking each room for new wasps, capturing the half dead wasps flying around trying to escape and releasing them out a window, and throwing away the dead ones that I would find on the floors and windowsills. To me, this routine became a direct parallel to managing my anxiety every day. The dead wasps piling up became a manifestation of my anxiety piling up within me. In *The Fig Wasp Queen*, the narrative of a fig wasp gives life to my anxiety and the constant cycle of death
and rebirth of my anxious thoughts (Figure 9). This is not necessarily evident to the viewers, especially without the accompanying *Swarm* book. I wanted it to be that way because all of my pieces have extremely personal meanings to me that someone else will not understand or be able to see. But they come up with their own connections and conclusions from my work. I am inspired by Louise Bourgeois and her work, especially her spider imagery. In her work, Bourgeois processes her childhood trauma and fear of abandonment; resulting in her compelling spider sculptures that she started creating in the 90s. She saw the spiders as being both a protector and a predator. They are partly a reference to her mother and their complex relationship, and also a reference to herself. As Bourgeois uses the spider imagery to symbolize her trauma, I use my wasp imagery to symbolize my mental illness.

The book *Swarm* showcases how overwhelming my anxiety can be through the imagery of wasps. Each page has been dipped beeswax which turns the kitakata paper transparent, giving viewers a hazy view of the next page. The wax also preserves the images of the wasps. I used the printmaking technique of paper lithography to easily duplicate the wasps. For this, I drew two wasps, one dead and one living. I then scanned and printed them out to arrange and duplicate them to how I wanted each page to look. The paper was inked up with pigment sticks and run under a press to transfer the image to the kitakata paper. The book as a whole brings together the senses: feeling the wax texture, the sound of the crinkling of pages as you move through the book, and the smell of beeswax. The book becomes a sensory experience. The strands of string falling out of each page tangle together, just like how anxious thoughts get wrapped up and are difficult to separate from reality (Figure 10). I used transparent Asian paper (Unryu) for the book *The Fig Wasp Queen*, to convey a similar experience with the waxed pages. With the delicate paper, the viewer is able to get a blurred glimpse of the following page of drawing and text. In
my experience with anxiety, I feel the need to be able to plan and know what is coming next to have some sense of control over my experiences and to prepare myself for whatever is coming my way. It is the same with what I am conveying with my books in that the viewer has some sense of what is coming next. The transparency of the pages in both books allows for the imagery to create different compositions on either side of the book spread. In doing this, “the imagery builds up on the left-hand side as it breaks down on the right” (Smith 64). The book format is integral to this work as I would not be able to achieve this same kind of effect with painting.

The process of creating this body of work has allowed me to investigate my emotions and how I come to terms with them. I understand the external sources I look to for comfort when I feel I am unable to find peace within myself. The work forms connections with how the concept of home is perceived, how nostalgia is represented and how we are able to cope with our own minds on a personal and intimate level. I’ve been continually working on trying to find coping mechanisms that work for me, since my anxiety can be fairly debilitating at times, and this body of work showcases my process on how I am able to manage my mental illness.
Bibliography:


Figure 1: when we are loved, we become Real, 2021, acrylic, molding paste, chalk pastel, and oil pastel on canvas, 24”x36”
Figure 2: *And you keep on dreaming until Spring is here*, 2021, acrylic and chalk pastel on cotton bedsheets, 48”x48”, 2021
Figure 3: Maggie’s Throne, 2021, acrylic and chalk pastel on canvas, 24”x36”, 2021
Figure 4: Maggie’s Throne (detail)
Figure 5: *Homebody*, 2021, gouache and ink on rosapina paper, 5”x7”, 2021
Figure 6: *Swarm*, 2021, paper lithography on kitakata, beeswax, and thread, 7” diameter, 2021
Figure 7: *The Fig Wasp Queen*, 2021, graphite, ink, and interference paint on unryu paper, 12”x16” with clamshell box, 2021
Figure 8: *Homebody* (detail)
Figure 9: The Fig Wasp Queen (detail)
Figure 10: *Swarm* (detail)