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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE

A Written Accompaniment to the Thesis Exhibition
by

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development of the thesis exhibition, All that has Happened Since, in which the challenge of communicating the past experiences of the artist to the viewer is undertaken.

Drawing upon critical theory from literary, artistic, psychological and sociological aspects of memory, a comparison of theory surrounding history and memory leads to a possible compromise: the concept of heritage.

Fading memories are revitalized through the selection and retention of personal effects. Social responses to the photographic medium, the evocative nature of ruins, and the habitual display of souvenirs and collections play integral roles in the content and presentation of this work.

Reproductions and remains, originating in the past, exert their influence on the present-tense construct of memory. Reconstructed memory remains an evolving process, sustained by both the material relics of a lost time and by our tendency to update, reorganize and reposition our contemporaneous beliefs about the past.

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You don't look back along time, but down through it, like water.
Sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes
nothing. Nothing goes away.

Margaret Atwood, Cat's Eye.

The closest we come to knowing the location of what's unknown is
when it melts through the map like a watermark, a stain transparent
as a drop of rain. On the map of history, perhaps the water stain is
memory.

Anne Michaels. Fugitive Pieces

I. INTRODUCTION

i. The Beginning

This series of work began in Barbados in the summer of 2000 when I paid what I thought would be an incidental visit to the site of my former school, St. Gabriel's Primary. Upon my arrival it was clear to me that the institution, once endearing for its constant state of minor disrepair (and its incredible trees), was in a far different physical state now than I once knew it to be – one no longer inhabitable. At some point since my last departure, the school ceased its public role, and the climate took very little time indeed to reduce the vacant buildings to ruins. The impact of the climate seemed enormous given the relatively short period of time that had passed since I had last seen these buildings. Rain punched holes through the corrugated iron rooftops, and veins of rust now branched out across the peeling blue paint. Windows had long since blown out, evidenced by sprays of dirty glass covering the overturned chairs, which the vines had also discovered. Termites transformed the heavy wood of the plantation era stairwells into a powder that hung heavy in the air. There is nothing left of use.

Strangely enough, despite such change, some things were exactly as I had left them. The grass in the playing field still crunched underfoot, even with the almost daily rain. Tuberous tree roots, polished by the constant wear of generations of little shoes, still pushed upwards and cracked the concrete. Flamboyant petals and tamarind pods still blanketed the ground in the shade - the way it had always been.

Shocked by the changes, I retraced my familiar paths and photographed the areas that I had once frequented. I was overwhelmed by my own recollections of this school that had once imposed a strict colonial British system and was now rapidly being reclaimed by the tropical foliage. As neatly uniformed students at St. Gabriel's, we used to have to *imagine* disorder. Upon my return, the reverse was now true.

ii. The Work

My experience of the decay of St. Gabriel's, along with the flood of past memories that accompanied the experience, has caused me to consider at great length new possibilities for revealing memory and its effects in visual form. The result of this research is a series of new paintings entitled All that has Happened Since.

This series is comprised of numerous paintings on masonite panels, each a standard height of four feet and ranging in width from one to four feet. Each individual panel portrays either a scene based upon my many photographs of the school, or a supplementary image or diagram appropriated from a variety of souvenirs of that time. Occasionally, I work with these elements in combination. In addition, handwritten texts find their way into the paintings – excerpted from my own writing, or that of persons close to me. I have used nearly monochromatic palettes, in a style that allows the painting process to emulate physical deterioration. Finally, the paintings are sealed with layers of tinted varnish, a technique that unifies the underlying paintings, as well as references the original photographic sources through their glossy, reflective surfaces.

This paper presents the research that has informed and influenced the content and techniques of this series of paintings, as well as its overall presentation to the viewer. It is a process of discovery that has led me to question the selectivity of memory, its departure from what we regard as historical accuracy, its haphazard chronology, and the often unpredictable ways that it can be evoked. This paper also examines my own unwavering reliance upon personal effects such as photographs, souvenirs and written correspondence to reshape and guide my memories, constructing a new version of the past that incorporates the present.

A variety of sources have contributed to the research and articulation of this paper – from published journal articles that further the continuous debate between history and memory, narrative theory and the communicative potential of photographs – to respected works of Canadian literature, poetry and art. In terms of my research interests, the intuitive response conveyed through poetry is, to me, as convincing a source as the most rigidly prescribed theory on my subject. It is with this belief in mind that I relate certain ideas about my work through selected passages of poetry, providing an additional method of illustrating certain ties of language to visual art. It is my hope that the range of sources contributing to the formation of this paper will encourage an overall awareness of the complex flood of information that has continued to inspire my work.

II. HISTORY, MEMORY AND THE COMPROMISE OF HERITAGE

Given this brief introduction to the work, one might easily pigeonhole the series as an exercise in documentation, resulting in a straightforward historical account of my visit to the site. As soon as the concept of memory is introduced, however, the entire function of the imagery within the works, and the work as a whole, changes. The intervention of personal details, of memories, can either enhance or detract from the historical version, depending upon one's point of view.

In the pursuit of a 'true' version of the past, a hierarchy has been established between history and memory, with history placed comfortably in the seat of power. Documentation that conforms to the notion of history is seen as authoritative and academic, as objective, with facts and evidence serving as its foundation. In general, accounts based upon memory are seen as less academic and more subjective, with a more casual or colloquial approach to past events. In terms of authenticity, the dominance of history over memory has remained virtually unchallenged until recent years. Upon careful consideration of the narrow area of overlap where history ends and memory begins, the place of personal or autobiographical information within history becomes a contentious issue.

The intent in my paintings is to move beyond an objective documentary format, taking the form of a visual memoir – an approach that might be viewed to lessen the integrity of the paintings as historical documents.

Setting aside my own views on the issue of integrity, it became essential for me to familiarize myself with current debates between the personal and the collective with regard to history and memory in order to locate a niche for my work. Consequently, a review of theory surrounding history and memory has helped me to understand my own departure from the act of strict documentation. I am led to a position of compromise between history and memory that permits my gradual move toward reconstructing memory.

i. History vs. Memory

Historians have focused a scholarly gaze on virtually every practice where nonhistorians invoke, narrate, or display representations of the past.

Seixas, Stearns and Wineburg, "History, Memory, Research and the Schools".

In looking at history and memory as two rather polarized notions, historian Susan Crane describes history's ambiguity as a general referral to "both 'what happened' as it was experienced in a former time and what has been thought and said about 'what happened' ever since" (Crane "(Not) Writing History"). In her view, most historians aspire to depict past events within an objective framework, striving to efface any evidence that they were involved in the writing process (Crane "(Not) Writing History"), and avoiding any conscious personal reference to themselves in their writing. She suggests that history and memory are regarded as polemic, forming categories that are "private and public, opinion and fact, individual and collective (Crane "(Not) Writing History"). Historians work within a hierarchy that positions history above memory. However, perhaps

surprisingly, Crane offers a point of view that is sympathetic to the importance of memory and personal history as a form of representation, stating that “the personal memory acquired from studying, thinking and learning is ultimately as much a ‘source’ of historical writing as the official sources...” (Crane “(Not) Writing History”). As a historian, Crane is seemingly a minority in her field, an apologist for the conventions that prevent “modern professional historians” (Crane “(Not) Writing History”) from referring to personal or private subject matter within their writing, conventions that she herself is trapped within. Despite her personal extension of an olive branch to memory by acknowledging history's flaws and elitist perspective, she confesses that attitudes denying the value of memory still dominate her field. Most of her contemporaries would agree that memory, or ‘the personal’, is still widely deemed an unofficial method of recording events, one that is flawed in its subjectivity, and “connotes idiosyncrasy, trivia, lack of relevance and, above all, the juicy details so suitable for biography...” (Crane “(Not) Writing History”).

Daniel Abramson, for example, concurs with the hierarchical view of ‘the personal’ among historians, claiming “memory’s repetitive fixations and self-centeredness... preclude engagement, agency and progressive change” (1) whereas “history...surpasses memory when it comes to making the past matter, in the present and the future”. (1) Abramson pinpoints the irreconcilable rift between personal memory and collective history, but his meditation on the value of both as separate entities is compelling nonetheless:

[...] against the apparent biases of history, memory stirs. Memory privileges the private and the emotional, the subjective and the bodily. Against history's rationality, the reveries of memory rebel. Against history's officialism, memory recalls hidden pasts, the lived and the local, the ordinary and the everyday. Against history's totality, memory's pluralism blooms [...] Against the century's dislocations, memory anchors the self [...] Against the century's traumatic horrors, memory authenticates redemptive witnessing. Against the century's rootlessness, memory valorizes the aura of place. In a forgetful century, memory resists. In an age of archives, memory yearns [...] Memory can be neither dispossessed nor interrogated. Personal or collective, memory cannot be dictated. It is sacral, innocent, and immediate. It works freely by evocation, similarity, metaphor. Memory dreams in fragments, gaps and dissipation. It is multiple and promiscuous. Rejecting objectivity and factualism, memory values representation and the rememberer. (2)

I cannot subscribe to Abramson's position that memory and history are as separate as he claims they are, and find his description of memory above to be contradictory. In his effort to separate the two, Abramson bestows memory with many traits that I would argue most certainly advocate "agency and progressive change". Even if the two sides are fundamentally different, his description of memory's traits cannot justify a perpetual undermining of memory's value, the reason this hierarchy exists. It is unfortunate that Abramson's differentiation between history and memory remains powerful and absolute, leaving no

possibility of a form in which the two can be integrated. To embrace a historical point of view comes entirely at the expense of memory, and vice versa – there can never be a middle ground.

Abramson's ideas are echoed in the concerns of David Lowenthal, whose recent contribution to the journal History and Memory clearly assigns history certain standards: to promote truth through fact, to discourage bias of any kind, and to encourage a complete representation. Lowenthal's perspective departs from that of Abramson, however, in his distinct move to outline a compromise for the inclusion of the personal while maintaining the original prestige of the historical. In this way, Lowenthal moves closer to answering the following question: if history is too absolute, fact until proven fiction, and if memory, or biography, is biased and unreliable, then how does one attempt to form a bridge between the two? Lowenthal's solution is the concept of heritage.

ii Heritage: Historical Memory

In place of the dominance of flawed memory over history, some critics and historians propose instead a relationship of mutual interdependence in which "memory is the raw material of history," and "the discipline of history nourishes memory in turn".

Daniel Abramson "Make History, Not Memory"

Lowenthal's essay "Fabricating Heritage" invokes the possibility of a new form of historically-minded documentation that is not considered to be a strict proponent of either side. In his view: "Heritage uses historical traces and tells historical tales. But these tales and traces are stitched into fables closed to critical scrutiny. Heritage is immune to criticism because it is not erudition but catechism" (Lowenthal "Fabricating Heritage"). By maintaining a desired

historical structure, then departing from that structure and allowing the influence of memory, heritage walks a fine line: it loses its rigid academic structure, yet avoids forfeiting its credibility. One accepts the perspectives of heritage tacitly, acknowledging the possibility that through the inclusion of certain personal details, other aspects may have been forgotten or omitted.

Lowenthal addresses bias as a defining feature of heritage, remarking: "Heritage diverges from history not in being biased but in its view of bias. Historians aim to reduce bias; heritage sanctions and strengthens it". (Lowenthal "Fabricating Heritage") This is not to say that by acknowledging bias, the makers of heritage necessarily celebrate it. Rather, the issue is that trying to discredit heritage for its bias is an exercise in futility. Again, Lowenthal clarifies that where history would perish from the revelation of bias and error, heritage conforms and adapts, rarely missing a beat: "historians' revisions must conform with accepted tenets of evidence. Heritage is more flexibly emended. Historians ignore at professional peril the whole corpus of past knowledge that heritage can airily transgress" (Lowenthal "Fabricating Heritage").

The rigid dichotomy between history and memory may, in this light, be brought together by certain concessions from both sides. The resultant product is a sort of historical collective memory, which can be called heritage.

In hindsight, it also seems that the subject matter of my paintings is an appropriate and serendipitous choice to focus upon, as educational institutions are powerful sustainers of heritage. Peter Seixas argued in "History, Memory, Research and the Schools" that "schools are *the* major site of construction of

collective memory in contemporary society" (Seixas, Stearns and Wineburg), as children are given a compulsory presentation of history during their formative years.

This connotation of heritage as historical collective memory plays an important role in the communication and reinforcement of our identities in a much different way than history can, by virtue of its flexible nature. By "celebrating some bits and forgetting others, heritage reshapes a past made easy to embrace" (Lowenthal "Fabricating Heritage"). For this reason, the subjective values of heritage may be passed along in some form or another by most everyone. It is this position of heritage – neither strictly history nor memory, but heavily indebted to both – that I feel comes closest to framing my own work. In terms of art historical and literary movements, it also aligns with a broad connotation of postmodernism.

iii. Parallel to Postmodernism

Today everyone is his or her own historian.

John R. Gillis "Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship".

We demand of heritage an imagined, not an actual, past.

David Lowenthal "Fabricating Heritage"

Postmodernism, in its present incarnation, embraces a dynamic mixture of multiple voices, texts, versions, biases, and perceived chronologies. University of Toronto art historian Mark Cheetham has written extensively on the subject of postmodernism, with particular emphasis on the influence of memory. Though Cheetham makes the claim that "memory is history in postmodern culture" (7),

some of his art historical examples support the overlap of both history and memory: "History as a communally shared past cannot exist without memory, and memory cannot function without the selectivity allowed by forgetting" (Cheetham 10). Sheila Ayearst for example, a contemporary Canadian painter whose work Cheetham discusses in Remembering Postmodernism, appropriates images from the paintings of other artists, creating work that calls upon her own memories as well as the memories of others. Her paintings juxtapose images and text borrowed from other sources along with her own additions - the resulting images subvert the original purpose or intent of the appropriated material. Her work "engages with both processes of memory and *forgetting*" (Cheetham 8). Cheetham expands the definition of forgetting beyond the mere opposite of recollection. Forgetting is an editing process, playing as vital a part in memory as remembering does, which leads me to conclude that both contribute equally to the creation of a flexible version of the past.

In examining both heritage and postmodernism, I have identified a key issue that satisfies my need to merge the personal and the historical in an ongoing construction and simultaneous reconstruction of memory. I am able to acknowledge both the historical roots of my research and the means by which my memory takes over, perpetuating some stories while silencing others. As Cheetham relates: "The issue is not whether or not aspects of the past are remembered or forgotten, but rather *which* aspects are retained or erased, by whom, and for what ends" (10). It is this phenomenon that has continued to guide the structure of my present work, and the following chapters will investigate

specific means by which we aim to record our facts, and then reframe, reposition and reinvent our ideas into memories.

III. PHOTOGRAPHS: FRAMES OF REPRESENTATION

Many of my paintings are based upon and retain the impression of photographic snapshots. This trait appears to make a distinct impression on the viewer, where the interpretation of the paintings draws from existing intuitions about certain types of photograph. I began to investigate the communicative potential of the photographic still image in an attempt to evaluate its role in my painting beyond its initial function as image source. The photograph is an important stage in my paintings' development, and is in turn referenced later in the process, as each is completed.

i. Photographic Stills and 'Truth'

The cliché "the camera never lies" reveals the view that photographs are traditionally trusted as factual historical records. According to art critic Andy Grundberg "We intuit... that a photograph tells us the truth about an instant in time and a fragment in space, flash-freezing for posterity" (13). Grundberg's use of the word "intuit", however, indicates that the way things appear are not always as they seem in photographs, and that our trust in their general accuracy is frequently misplaced. In his introduction to the work of New York photographers Mike and Doug Starn, Grundberg outlines this widespread acceptance, then goes on to describe some of the ways that these particular artists subvert conventions of the photographic medium to achieve rather startling results. Their

work would not succeed if it were not built upon the pre-existing perceptions of truth in photography that we hold dear.

Certain aspects of perfection in photography have long been thought to correspond with accuracy, while 'flawed' imagery, a factor often associated with the snapshot, is dismissed as a mistake. The photograph that Michael Ondaatje describes in his poem "The Gate in his Head" could be considered to be one of these mistakes, yet still it is valued for its peculiar narrative power:

Then from Gibson's your letter
with a blurred
photograph of a gull.
Caught vision. The stunning white bird
an unclear stir. (19-23)

Contrary to the aura of perfection ascribed to controlled or staged photographs, the imperfections commonly found in snapshots have in some recent theory actually been interpreted as *more* truthful. As I consider the majority of the photographs that I use as references in my work to be snapshots, my concerns lie primarily in the readings these snapshots lend themselves to. Is the designation of 'snapshot' a barrier to narrative interpretation? Or does it actually facilitate a narrative connection for the contemporary viewer in a way that a more polished, arguably more distanced, photograph cannot?

Art historian E.H. Gombrich contends that the standards by which we interpret 'truth' in a photograph are learned rather than innate (Gombrich, qtd. in Mitchell The Language of Images 6). As all things learned may be in turn

revised, so too may our subjective impressions of truth from “arrested images” (Gombrich 214) be changed. According to Gombrich, our interpretation of truth in photographs comes from prior emotional experience:

...but whether or not we are used to taking snapshots ourselves, we have seen so many that we can classify them and understand them. We have adjusted to the peculiarities of the arrested image and accept it as “true” for its evocative rather than its informative qualities...Our tolerance is due to an understanding of the situation in which the picture was presumably taken. (Gombrich 214)

Gombrich goes on to explain that it is this understanding of the context of a snapshot that allows us to imagine in detail a truth far more meaningful than a highly-detailed textbook illustration might (214). Context is equally important to sociologist Erving Goffman, and his 1976 description of the narrative potential of candid photography (or “caught pictures”), suggests a viewer’s propensity toward a narrative reading of these pictures. In Goffman’s words:

Caught pictures can provide valid documents or records, allowing the viewer to make relatively reliable inferences as to what had led up to the activity represented and what is likely to have followed, in the same way, if to a lesser extent, as can an actual viewer of a live scene infer what is going on at the moment of viewing. It is in this way that caught pictures can be used as strong evidence concerning the existence of a state of affairs or the occurrence of an event. (Goffman 14)

It seems apparent that snapshots may indeed be interpreted as truth, provided that the viewer is able to furnish the experience with their own idea of context. It also seems clear that context is, in this interpretation, rarely contained within the image, and so it must be supplied elsewhere. Display of a candid image must, therefore, be an exercise in trust, as the presenter must expect that viewers carry with them an individual set of memories or experiences that will inform their understanding of the image. Presumably, the sender of the photo in Ondaatje's poem trusted that its recipient would possess this same understanding.

ii. Inclusion/Exclusion of the Photographic Frame

To this point, I have considered the viewer's ability to provide emotional context to a snapshot based on its pictorial content alone, independent of any structural considerations. This leads me to the question: can the physical frame of a photograph, its edge, also provide a context? Are photographs able to make the viewer imagine circumstances that lie beyond the boundary of the photograph's edges, by virtue of the fact that a boundary exists?

The boundary, and what it excludes from the photograph, brought Austin Fraser's mother to hate and mistrust cameras in Jane Urquhart's The Underpainter:

We owned a Kodak Brownie Camera... but my mother forbade its use.
 'They stop things', she would announce whenever the subject of cameras arose. 'They interrupt the normal flow of events. Furthermore, they eliminate things. If I take a photograph of this', she would say, ... 'I

obliterate this and this'. Even now I can see the way she gestured as she spoke, her arms sweeping back and forth, conjuring the rest of the world, the world that a photograph might have obliterated. (21)

This passage alters readers' perceptions of images, forcing them consequently to question the information that is omitted from, rather than included within, the frame imposed by the photographer. Photographs then appear to eliminate more than they encompass, an effect that I propose is vaguely present in our minds when we search for meaning in unfamiliar snapshots. The acknowledged limitations of the frame become an invitation to search beyond it. This may play a significant role in our narrative interpretation of sequential photographic work, where the limits of the frames provide the stimulus to our interpretation.

Canadian artist Arnaud Maggs' sequential photographs function as both historical records and as puzzles for the viewer to decipher. According to curator Karyn Allen, Maggs' own desire to preserve both the physical and emotional properties of the past in his photographs, by showcasing "the way the world was" (10) indicates a strong historical dimension. Yet Maggs does not offer a sense of completion as his portrait compositions are sparse, and offer little contextual information. Allen's belief is that "he offers parts of history and invites – although challenges is probably a better word – the viewer to fill in the blanks" (10).

The projection of one's own emotional response on an image as well as one's intuitive search for meaning outside the image's borders are concepts that I apply to my own snapshot-based paintings. I have created these panels under

the assumption that the pictorial content will provoke memories (or at minimum, impressions) in the viewer. I have coupled this tactic with the deliberate cropping of certain images, to force the viewer to look outside the painting's border for additional information, which may or may not be found in neighbouring panels.

iii. Other Formal References to 'Pastness' in Photography

Just as the viewer makes certain inferences based upon the amount of information included or excluded by the frame, so do they also interpret other physical attributes of the photograph itself. We know from everyday experience that a few distinct properties of photographs are associated with age.

Monochromatic images in muted sepia or blue tones, for example, are instantly recognized to predate colour photography, at once instilling a timeframe of at least a generation or two in the viewer's mind. Photographs that are faded, bleached out, or noticeably deteriorated carry with them certain assumptions of the passage of time, in that they may have been stored for a long time, or exposed to damaging factors. Aged photographs are enticing to their viewer, possibly because there exists a distance between their chronology and that of the modern viewer. As such, the emotional responses Gombrich speaks of may no longer be easily accessible to the modern viewer, heightening the intrigue of the image. Canadian writer Timothy Findley often employs our fascination with old photographs as a structural device in his writing. You Went Away and The Wars both begin with a vivid description of a few old sepia photographs from a lost era, and lead to the gradual construction of the stories behind these

photographs. Eventually, the limited characters in the photographs are given names, families, history and meaning.

The pictures that Findley describes possess visual signals of pastness – leading us to the conclusion that stories of history *must be* built into their structure by virtue of their age. Visual cues of this sort reinforce effectively our belief that we are gazing upon something that is now lost – a world far removed from our own that is at present only accessible through the portal of a photograph. It is a window into time that seems as fresh as the moment that it was captured, a perception acknowledged by photographer and historian Faith Moosang. Through her work in an archive, Moosang was introduced to the work of Chinese Canadian photographer C.D. Hoy, an immigrant to Canada during the early 1900s. After her journey into the volumes of his archived photos, Moosang describes the uncanny power of old photographs to bridge the passage of time: "It was then that I first laid eyes on a whole new world, so beautifully rendered and so profoundly silent. I had not known of these people. I could not hear them. Their silence, which was a characteristic of their invisibility to me (until that moment) is what drew me into them" (Moosang 108). This last characteristic of old photographs, in which any viewer may become engaged by their content through the experience of the 'portal', is one of several reasons why I converted my modern photographic source material to a monochromatic palette.

Mike and Doug Starn, mentioned previously, regularly subvert viewers' expectations and interpretations of their photographic work, due largely to a thorough knowledge of methods that can alter perceived timeframes. Andy

Grundberg describes their mischievous play with chronology in his description of the Starns' photograph of a Greek bronze sculpture of a horse's head:

[...] the literal premises of such a factual document were thoroughly undermined by the strange way in which it was mutilated, recomposed, veiled by extended exposure, or even tinted in the colours of old-fashioned photographs – smoky sepias, otherworldly blues, bleaching yellows.

Already transformed into wisps of memory that both congeal and evaporate [it] was later to be reincarnated as a detail of a late classical sculpture, a bronze actually observed on a visit to Greece, but one that now looks like a petrified, yet once living version of its modern kin. The boundaries between these two animals, one preserved by the lens of a camera, the other by the hand of an ancient sculptor, were melted by the Starns in a terrain of photographic phantoms where time could be as fluid as the difference between sentient beings and lifeless matter.

(Grundberg 14)

The photographic properties touched upon here are not fixed, and expand as our collective perceptions of age in photography change and adapt over time. Artists may also imitate these clues to 'pastness', in order to achieve the appearance of age with modern subject matter and materials.

IV. PLACES IN RUINS

If one no longer has land but has the memory of land, then one can make a map.

Anne Michaels Fugitive Pieces

i. How does a 'Space' Become a 'Place'?

I will now approach the actual subject of my photographs: the abandoned buildings of St. Gabriel's School. I will start by questioning our attachment of significance to old and deteriorated sites, elevating their status from *spaces* to *places*.

Richard Etlin's thoughtful essay "Space Stone and Spirit: The Meaning of Place" addresses a variety of ways in which personal or collective significance is bestowed upon certain sites. Etlin suggests that certain factors such as character, identity and past events influence our perception of significant sites as places. I will focus my attention on one of his points: the acquisition of a sense of place through past events.

Etlin explains that the past events we associate with a site do not necessarily have to be exceptional in order to achieve a sense of place: "it is enough for a place to seem rich with the history of past habitation" (314). He goes on to explain that a sense of being connected to history or past habitation is reason enough for one to desire to live in old, historic neighbourhoods, as it becomes easier for one to feel like they are maintaining contact with previous generations (Etlin 314). Etlin's rationale seems plausible, but what about old buildings that are in such a state of dilapidation that they are no longer inhabitable, or have only a few select pieces left to mark their boundaries? Our

reverence for these places does not seem to diminish because they can no longer be used, so something else, something perhaps more deeply ingrained, must draw us to them:

Ruins signal simultaneously an absence and a presence; they show, they *are*, an intersection of the visible and the invisible. Fragmented, decayed structures, which no longer serve their original purpose, point to an absence – a lost, invisible whole. But their visible presence also points to durability, even if that which *is* is no longer what it once was. (Settis vii)

So described by Salvatore Settis in the exhibition catalogue Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed, ruins are able to communicate a simultaneous mix of absence and presence to their viewer. This intersection between past and present could be thought of as a physical form of language to the viewer, where these tangible remains possess a symbolic value much greater than their material value. “Just as the archive preserves the past through the graphic witness of original records, the ruin, too, constitutes a form of writing in which historical consciousness is expressed through the material witness of fragments” (Lyons 79). It is necessary that the viewer make connections to the past in order to appreciate the structure of ruins, an association that is possible, but certainly not as crucial, with more ‘complete’ buildings. Interpretation of this sort is an active rather than a passive response, and therefore requires the site to engage the viewer.

The buildings of St. Gabriel’s, which had been the site of much of my daily activity, would have held personal significance to me through their past events

regardless of whether they were in ruin or not. The fact that they are ruins, however, does in fact alter my perception of the site. It causes me to augment my effort to search back into time to find meaning, and to solidify some of my more capricious memories of the place. Probably the most notable discovery in this search was my realization that its wealth of stories is now finite, and only those persons who have experienced this place in the past will still possess the power to reconstitute its memories through depiction.

ii. Photographs of Sites: Claiming the View

Although the same question may be asked of any subject, why do we take pictures of ruins or sites of reverence when we visit them? It is easy to sympathize with a desire to capture and preserve the reflective feelings that ruins provoke, especially if the site is far removed from one's present location. The answer could stem from a particular need to form self-controlled records of places, as Claire Lyons, curator at the Getty Research Institute and Irresistible Decay contributor, claims:

... travelers could recreate their own idealized landscapes in the form of photograph albums. The power of such images to frame the historical study of ruins in aesthetic terms, while appearing to present objective documentation, constitutes a "virtual discourse" that continues to shape the understanding and interpretation of these monuments. (Lyons 93)

In this sense, photography is a way to reduce the dimensions of the original experience, condensing it into a form that we can organize, understand,

and later, rearrange. Etlin describes this process as one of “concentrated essence” (318) whereby the bigger picture is compressed into a smaller form, increasing the strength or potency of the smaller image (318). This is perhaps especially poignant for persons who are making a journey to either a long lost place of origin, or to a place they have never known, but was home to their ancestors.

Such is the case with photographer Marian Penner Bancroft, who for a recent exhibition at Presentation House Gallery, documented her journeys to the separate countries of origin of her parents. Her photographs are the sole visual product of this journey. They reflect her personal reference points from which she will create memory, but also reveal information about herself. They are the photographs of a tourist, snapshots that indicate her position of privilege (Henry, By Land and Sea), her ability to travel freely to these sites, to revisit the locales of her family’s history without risk of persecution or refusal of entry. I am aware that the snapshots that inspired my paintings also invoke a similar ‘touristic’ impression that my photographic gaze is that of a tourist. I am not physically represented in any of the paintings – instead my position is that of the viewer, gazing at the accumulation of imagery from my own experience. The Barbadian children, colonial architecture and tropical flora appear exotic to a Canadian audience. However, from my point of view these people were friends, the buildings were my classrooms, and we trod on those beautiful plants regularly! Though far removed from my present realm of experience, these images resurface in my work today because of the meaningful lived experiences they

represent. I include these images in my work for their relevance to my expanding concept of home, not for their exoticism or beauty.

A broader interpretation of a photograph than its pictorial content is again possible: it begins to reflect the stories of its creator. In fact, the intersection of the photographer's personal life with the photograph is a very important stage in its path to becoming a souvenir. When a photograph is taken of a ruin, the overall significance of the both the ruin and its corresponding image is increased to the viewer, and the photograph's role as a souvenir begins.

In her book On Longing, Susan Stewart discusses the symbolism that becomes attached to subjects ranging from souvenirs to collections, and connects this increased significance to the onset of narrative. In her words, "the photograph as souvenir is a logical extension of the pressed flower, the preservation of an instant in time through a reduction in physical dimensions and a corresponding increase in significance supplied by means of narrative" (Stewart 138). If narrative is able to attach itself to most any item that one designates, there is a corresponding increase in the object's or photograph's role as a souvenir.

V. SYMBOLIC STRUCTURES

i. Souvenirs:

I could easily imagine carrying a favoured item to the ends of the earth, if only to help me believe I'd see its beloved owner again.

Anne Michaels Fugitive Pieces

Souvenirs are symbolic items, frequently of humble origin, that have acquired a personal significance beyond their original function or intention. Souvenirs

perform in ways similar to photographs, as they transform the exterior into the interior, concentrating the essence of the experience into a palpable and compact form. The souvenir, in Stewart's opinion, is not simply a relic surviving from a past time in the present tense, but is an item that is able to "envelop the present within the past" (157). The souvenir displaces the point of authenticity of the original experience, itself becoming the point of generation for narrative, and as such, the item loses its original meaning, reflecting instead the narrative of its owner (136-7). This may help to explain our fear of losing or breaking a souvenir. Despite our knowledge that it is simply an object, we fear the loss of touch with both the original experience, and the new 'essence' of that experience presently embodied in the souvenir.

The symbolic power of the souvenir, by necessity, begins when the experience to which it is attached is lost to the possessor. There can be no desire for the symbolized without loss of the original. Timothy Findley recalls the comforting role of souvenirs he carried with him while traveling as a youth: "I depended for survival on the continuity lifted from my trunk. No matter where I was, if I could see my parents and my brother in their cheap brass frames, my postcard Cézannes, Monets, and Modiglianis sitting on the bureau, and my orange Penguin Waughes and Fitzgeralds, I was safely at home" ("Of Trunks and Burning Barns" 64). Findley aptly describes the most important function of the souvenir: to authenticate and remind its owner of an increasingly distant past, as well as to discredit the reality of the present situation (Stewart 139).

Fragmentary images inspired by my own souvenirs are an integral part of this series of work, and infiltrate the paintings in the forms of old guidebooks to local flora and fauna, images from my textbooks, or diary excerpts. The significance of these rather commonplace items falls into the realm of the personal, and, according to Stewart, would therefore possess a narrative that would be relevant specifically to myself. My choice to include these images takes into consideration the fact that the viewer will likely not possess the same personal narratives that I have attached to these items. The challenge then, in this case, is to discover a way to extend the significance of my own souvenirs so that a viewer may also appreciate their symbolic value; a challenge whose solution is informed by Susan Stewart's notion of the collection. As Stewart explains: "We cannot be proud of someone else's souvenir unless the narrative is extended to include our relationships with the object's owner or unless [...] we transform the souvenir into the collection" (137).

ii. Collections:

Collections are separate entities from souvenirs in that they are structured in such a way as to potentially increase the availability of narrative beyond the realm of the possessor, or even establish an entirely new order, independent of personal narrative. Collections reveal a great deal of information about their owners –their rituals of acquisition and the type of object that they choose to allow to pass from the private realm of the souvenir to a broader, public one. James Clifford, whose essay "Collecting Ourselves" touches on the intersection of the act of collecting with cultural ethnography, writes:

Children's collections are revealing in this light: a boy's accumulation of miniature cars, a girl's dolls, a summer-vacation 'nature museum' (with labeled stones and shells, a hummingbird in a bottle), a treasured bowl filled with the bright shavings of crayons. In these small rituals we observe the channelings of obsession, an exercise in how to make the world one's own, to gather things around oneself tastefully, appropriately.

(260)

The key words here are "we observe", an aspect that would not be possible if the items were still held within the private sanctuary of souvenir. The fact that we, as outsiders, are now presented certain items in the form of a collection signals their move from private to public sphere. While the objects remain souvenirs to their owner, the decision to house and order the items as a collection enforces a new and separate narrative that may be appreciated by all viewers.

Stewart remarks on the power of the classification system inherent to collections to supercede their content, saying: "[...] a scheme of classification is elaborated for storing or displaying the object so that the reality of the collection itself, its coherent order, overrides specific histories of the object's production and appropriation" (Stewart qtd. in Clifford 260). The content of the collection - with few exceptions - is of secondary importance to the insight the viewer may gather about the collector from their accumulation of items.

The appeal of the organized presentation of collections is widely recognized, and has influenced my continuous attempt to broaden the ability of

souvenir imagery in my paintings to appeal to a wider audience. The individual panels of All that has Happened Since work in combination, each separate image contributing toward the spatial organization of the collection. This system of presentation possesses a similarity in its structure to a literal, poetic organization of imagery. Typically, a collection may incorporate many different objects of similar type, much like the division of a family into genus and species. Items are arranged according to their place within the classification system, with the emerging patterns enhancing the collector's sense of closure. These patterns may be ordered in a way that encourages the viewer to make visual connections between similar objects, regardless of their independent histories. Gombrich identifies this circumstance as "sameness-in-difference" (qtd. in Danet and Katriel 227), and it has also been described as visual rhyming:

Consider the nature of a typical collection, say a stamp collection.

Postage stamps are, in structuralist terms, like man-made flowers: they are divide (sic) into 'species,' of which the distinctive feature is the country of origin, while within each species there exists tantalizing variation. The stamp-collector sets to work to classify them. He arranges each stamp in an album, a page for the species of each country. The stamps on each page 'rhyme' with each other, and contrast with those on other pages.

(Humphrey 1984: 132 qtd. in Danet and Katriel 227)

Although varied, the paintings in All that has Happened Since will appear harmonious to the viewer through sameness-in-difference.

iii. Postcards: A Double Deception

I will close this chapter with some discussion of my own collection of a type of souvenir, the postcard, and the impact it has had on my work, both as a collection and as individual items.

As a simultaneous physical reminder of both far away places and people, postcards represent a peculiar balance of the ordinary and the precious. Too mundane to run rampant as an obsession, yet too significant to simply throw away, the postcard is a form of souvenir that I have consistently retained over the years – in fact, I cannot remember any occasion in which I have discarded a postcard (even during a move). Consequently, I have amassed a reasonably large assortment of them, a feat that I have given as much recent consideration for its compulsive nature as for its aesthetic value to me.

References to postcards surface in my work in a manner similar to their appearance in my life – arriving every so often, in 'thoughtful occurrences'. Imagery derived from the postcard lends a sense of poignancy and loss to the images in the paintings because the actual function of the postcard is a double deception - one that operates on both the receiver's and the sender's need to "gloss-over" or elevate actual conditions. The postcard allows enough correspondence space to alleviate the writer's need to send something, and yet avoids the need for a lengthier letter in which more personal details may be expected.

Margaret Atwood's "Postcard" illustrates this duality very clearly:

I'm thinking about you. What else can I say?

The palm trees on the reverse
are a delusion; so is the pink sand.

[.]

At this distance
you're a mirage, a glossy image
fixed in the posture
of the last time I saw you.

Turn you over, there's the place
for the address. Wish you were
here. (Atwood "Postcard" 1-3, 33-39)

Atwood's poem provides a compelling example of this double standard, showing that she, like many of us, would not write anything on a postcard that she did not wish others to read upon its interception. This, combined with the tropical imagery, has drawn me to the poem, and solidified my convictions about the postcard's emotional value as a link to the past, despite (or perhaps because of) its probable inaccuracy.

Postcards seduce us because they are intentionally idealized – from the colourful, glossy surface of the photograph on the front, to the softer matte paper of the back, with its cheerful, hand-written words. Postcards are meant to be exercises in optimism. So why, then, are they able to evoke so much pathos?

For me, the answer is simple. My practice of collecting postcards from distant friends and family members over many years has created a sort of

second-hand heritage, one that is reinforced at odd intervals and special occasions, confined to the square marked “correspondence here”, and verified by the postmark. Despite my acknowledgement of the postcard's limitations, they are the only information that I have left to form a link to many past events – one of many things that I rely on to reconstruct and reinforce my present memories.

VI. **RECONSTRUCTING MEMORY**

Only a heritage ever reanimated stays relevant.

To reshape is as vital as to preserve.

David Lowenthal "Fabricating Heritage"

The most important process at work in my paintings is that of reconstructed memory, and with that, the growing awareness that my present idea of truth is a construction. Reconstructed memory is supplemented both by the original experience and by revisiting meaningful sites of memory, through photographic imagery, and is also aided by the collection and retention of symbolic objects. Reconstructed memory combines these physical and emotional aspects in its subsequent selective reshaping of their interpretation. What follows is a version of history grounded within the present, based upon notions of the past that, through the intervention of personal or collective memory, becomes a form of heritage.

i. **Memory as Medium**

It is difficult to place memory within the category of either process or product, and admittedly I consider it to fall into both. A simplistic definition of

memory encompasses both the sorting and retrieval processes executed through recollection, and the rather unstable and unpredictable end result of these actions. Memory seems to be as flexible a word in practice as the phenomenon it applies to.

W.J.T. Mitchell describes memory as a medium, calling it “a specific technology, a mechanism, a material and semiotic process subject to artifice and alteration” (Picture Theory 192). He states that memory allows us to reconstruct temporal orders by associating images, texts and other sources with various spatial configurations (such as sites). Mitchell describes this phenomenon as “imagetext”, a “double-coded system of mental storage and retrieval that may be used to remember any sequence of items...” (Picture Theory 192). For Mitchell, memory-as-medium intervenes in one’s experience, and changes it to reflect the occurrence of past events. The imagetext is a process contained entirely within the mind of the individual, and relies on a reserve of mental knowledge. One has to expect, however, that this reserve will dwindle over time and the reconstruction of memory itself must be fed in order to flourish. Additional reinforcement provided by physical remnants from the past must, then, contribute to the strength and frequency by which memory-as-medium is able to operate.

ii. Photographs

Lynne Cooke has written essays and curated exhibitions dealing with society’s collective dependence upon reproductive technologies in order to create historical memory, even if our exposure is limited to the reproduction as opposed to the original. Historical memory is, in her opinion, constructed mostly

from material provided by reproductive methods including photography, film, video and audio documentation and recordings (Cooke 23).

The idea seems increasingly prevalent, experienced on both personal and public levels. But what if the visual record is incomplete, damaged, or has never before been viewed by the subject? When presented with fragments, we endeavour to piece the parts together, link them through the clues that we observe. Details assume greater importance, and even if we are seeing the images for the first time, our ability to make a link creates a sense of familiarity that was not there before. As Cooke reiterates:

This points to the extent to which the shards and shreds of all our memories, even those from childhood, are increasingly supplemented, shaped, structured and recomposed –albeit often unwittingly –by reproductive imagery. Just as it is doubtful whether pristine memories are possible (that is, memories preserved intact from their moment of origin and resistant to subsequent shading and amplification) so seldom can clear distinctions be maintained between those memories based on direct experience and those which are mechanically mediated. (24)

Cooke makes an important statement here, emphasizing the sheer distance that our memory can take us from the actual lived “truth” – we need not have experienced an event in order to assume some form of memory of it.

To understand this process through illustration, one could look again at the writing of Timothy Findley. As mentioned, Findley structures several of his novels around an unnamed narrator, working the narrative backwards from the

present, and weaving together the threads of a story gleaned from fragments of archival photographs, interviews and news articles. In the opening pages of You Went Away, the reader meets this process through the narrator's thoughts, who is confronted with the old photographs: "Time might have claimed them all. But these were saved... fragments only – reaching backward, trying to connect – to become complete again... There is nothing more than what is here. The remnants – not the remains. The pieces – not the whole. Not a puzzle, but a patchwork of unstitched lives" (Findley 4). Findley uses reproductive technology as a point of departure for his narratives, reiterating that his source is "pieces, not a whole" and moves on to complete the rest of the story with his writing. Coupled with personal experiences, photos and other forms of image reproduction are highly influential in our fabrication of memory.

iii. The Site

Whether structural ruins are present at a location or not, the site informs the ideas captured within photographs, instilling a need in its viewer to make connections. Ruins in particular inspire a sense of transition and contemplation, as they "potently epitomize the perennial tension between what is preserved and what needs interpretation (or reconstruction)" (Settis vii). In becoming the structure that bridges loss and creativity, "ruins operate as powerful metaphors for absence or rejection and, hence, as incentives for reflection or restoration" (Settis vii).

How is memory able to mediate one's experience of the site, even if the structures themselves are long gone? Mitchell cites the work of American writer

Toni Morrison as an example of a process of “literary archaeology” – one that starts with “a journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that those remains imply”, and then “goes on to a text, a narrative, and account of the temporal processes that produced the image” (Picture Theory 202). Morrison’s method of piecing together surviving remains, with the flood of new images animated by those fragments, is analogous to my painting process. For Morrison, details about the actual site become less important than the *idea of the place* that it has evolved into, which when confronted, forces you into re-evaluation. As she writes in Beloved: “some things you forget. Other things you never do.... Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating out there outside my head” (Morrison, qtd. in Mitchell, Picture Theory 203).

‘Rememory’ is a curious word, an echo of itself, yet one that pinpoints the simultaneous experience and reworking of the imagery that Morrison encounters at the site. It refers to the established place of the site in the constructed memory of the writer, no longer to its place in the present.

iv. Symbolic Objects

In addition to her use of sites, Morrison describes “the remains”, which could be objects other than those from the site alone, objects that have survived from a particular time. Essentially, the reconstructive process (rememory, in Morrison’s case) remains the same, and Mitchell points out her “obligation to

remember, to carry memory back into materials both forgotten and immemorial, to explore both repressed experience and experience located in the blankness prior to memory" (qtd. In Mitchell Picture Theory 202). Despite the possessor's linkage of an object to the past, the fact remains that a souvenir is not in fact frozen in the era of its creation – it exists in the present, not the past. Its continued use as an item representative of past events emphasizes the active nature of remembering on the part of its holder, as the item alone does not possess these qualities intrinsically. Susan Stewart relates the souvenir to the voluntary evocation of one's own limited *idea* of childhood: "This childhood is not a childhood as lived; it is a childhood voluntarily remembered, a childhood manufactured from its material survivals. Thus it is a collage made of presents, rather than a reawakening of the past" (Stewart 145). Stewart's concept of a *reorganized present* is not an unusual view, as curator James Campbell describes the occurrence of memory in the work of Gerhard Merz in a similar manner. In his 1988 exhibition catalogue, Campbell describes Merz's treatment of memory as a subject: "never that overworn and here archaic sense of simply recovering something lost, but rather [denoting] a dynamic of *discovery* and *presence*. Not a *making-present-again* of what was, but a *gathering-together-anew* of what is" (11).

This brings me to an important point: enduring material relics (be they photographs, souvenirs, ruins, or something else) have already survived a personal editing process through their very existence in the present, one that has little to do with memory-as-medium. I am reminded of a passage from Norman

Bryson's "The Logic of the Curatorial Gaze", in which he speaks of the most popular postcard choices among buyers at the British Museum. Although the museum had carefully organized these souvenirs into an order that promoted the cards perceived to be the most desirable to patrons, the public consistently overruled their judgement by instead purchasing images of the Rosetta Stone, petrified human bodies, or Beatrix Potter illustrations (Bryson 35). As Bryson concludes: "whatever the museum may officially be doing with its objects, people who buy the postcards are rearranging the narratives in terms of personal desires that don't necessarily conform at all to the official desires of the museum" (36). As is evident from this example, people can retain very different impressions from the same experience, and will enforce those impressions through their choice of souvenir, with little regard given to "official" interpretations or standards.

The decision to discard certain items, along with the choice of which items to acquire or retain, must on some level be accompanied by the realization that the item will continue to exert its influence in one's life, shaping the course of how one sees the past. Memory, in this sense, is born the instant that the appreciable moment has ceased to exist, and thus, a struggle to retain that moment, whether physically or emotionally, begins.

v. Conclusion

If we admit that the memories we retain and allow to perpetuate are constructions, how then do we define authenticity and truth? James Clifford claims: "cultural or artistic 'authenticity' has as much to do with an inventive

present as with a past, its objectification, preservation or revival" (262). If the past is only reflected back through the present, can an 'authentic' past ever exist?

In terms of writing, author William Zinsser relates how it is easy for the telling of the story to supercede the original event in its significance and its potency. The 'authentic' past is replaced by a more current, 'processed' idea: "the act of writing about an experience takes so much longer and is so much more intense than the experience itself that you're left only with what you have written, just as the snapshots of your vacation become more real than your vacation. You have cannibalized your remembered truth and replaced it with a new one" (Zinsser 21). As David Lowenthal would add, "We achieve a false sense of consistency by updating memories to accord with our present views, remaining unaware of how much our attitudes have changed over time" ("Fabricating Heritage"). The consistency that Lowenthal describes is a comfort, and stands in place of the authenticity that is, by this point, lost. Loss of 'truth' seems inevitable, and should not be looked upon as deterioration caused by the intervention of memory-as-medium. Rather, the reflective value of this intervention should be embraced for its ability to reveal one's personality, choices and values, and how these factors influence the memories that we cultivate and preserve.

During the process of its reconstruction, the body of work presented here has ceased to represent the actual time I had intended it to portray. Rather, it has begun to reflect the reconstruction and reinterpretation of my ideas about

that point in time. Everything that I have created is in hindsight – subject to an interrogation of the factors that have mediated production – hence the title All that has Happened Since. I wonder if, twenty years from now, these works will stand in the place of what I know today to be 'factual'?

V. CONCLUSION: A CONTROLLED FLOOD

The ideas that I have discussed have helped me to understand the motivation behind certain choices I have made in my paintings. True to the nature of reconstruction, I have also found that with respect to painting these ideas converge in a manner that is far less resolute than is presented in the chronology of this paper. For example, there are no paintings in this series based exclusively on the photographic frame, or on the postcard. Each painting is an intricate construct, infiltrated by mediating factors whose impact on the piece is calculated in advance. Knowledge of sources, sites and souvenirs has nourished an awareness of and sensitivity to general descriptive clues – such as "pastness". Each stage in my research has given me a greater understanding of how and why my ideas have developed, and how to apply the more compelling revelations of my research to my painting techniques and presentation of the work.

I Technical Aspects of the Paintings

Selected techniques have helped me to convince viewers that a specific temporality is being witnessed. The appearance of "pastness" is achieved in the works in several ways, all of which are deeply rooted in my research observations. Past places and times are referenced through three main

techniques: the specific decisions about colour, the imitation of weathering and damage, and the use of gloss. These techniques pre-exist in the viewer's visual vocabulary and are readily associated with items that are aging or old, a vital factor in the interpretation of the paintings.

Colour has been restricted to a monochromatic palette in order to bypass the assumed link between a contemporary timeframe and colour photography. Bleeding the colour out refers instead to a window of time where the imposition of a date upon pictures was less straightforward. Timothy Findley, in The Wars, wrote of the linkage between an old photograph and its period: "the year itself looks sepia and soiled – muddied like its pictures" (6), a sentiment that most people can identify with if they have ever viewed images from such an era. Mike and Doug Starn used "the colours of old-fashioned photographs – smoky sepias, otherworldly blues, bleaching yellows" (Grundberg 14) in their photographs, consciously manipulating our preconceptions about timeframe. I have chosen this same palette precisely in order to access the basic understanding of timeframe that we can all associate with old photographs, even if our exposure to the stories behind them dwindles as our population ages. Through colour, or lack thereof, I am seeking the recognition of age that accompanies a faded monochrome image, especially one that has been damaged by the sun's bleaching. An old monochromatic photograph is an entity that can never be 'modernized' in a convincing fashion even if it is subjected to modern colourizing methods. This realization came with my own giddy discovery of a packet of photographs of my grandmother that had been 'improved upon' with oil crayons,

which looked like a supernatural attempt to impose colour on a timeless world.

As Campbell remarks of Merz's work: "in abandoning ourselves to [the perception of his colours], the work imposes its specific temporality on us" (18).

Colour is always used sparingly, with layers of glazes providing the richness and tone that moves the painting beyond a representation of a photograph. The colour temperature of these panels is balanced carefully so as to avoid an overly emotive pull in any particular direction. Warm sepia tones are neutralized by cool blue and green glazes in works such as Verandah and Tamarind Lot, and the cool blues and greys of The Marble Grounds and Lunchbox Gallery are offset by their honey-coloured surfaces. This balance of colour unifies the panels as they stand together in their intended collective format.

The second major feature of my painting process associated with age is the emulation of weathered and deteriorated surfaces. A loose style of brushwork is used in the panels based upon snapshots so that the image remains realistic from a distance, but breaks down upon closer scrutiny. The overall image remains true to the photograph up to a certain point, but never fully reaches the level of detail that one would expect from a photograph – features such as faces are obscured from immediate recognition by a thin and loose application of paint. Overall, the brushwork is applied in a consistent manner, with as much attention given to the branches of a mahogany tree as to the shoes and socks of a schoolboy. This loose style approximates residual information that may still be present after the original clarity has been eroded. Had I succumbed to the

temptation to focus greater attention on the individual faces, these features would certainly stand out and undermine the collective effect that is always in mind.

Obscured or eroded marks are another physical method of indicating the amount of information that is now missing or lost to me. Some areas of the paintings are intentionally left incomplete, or are rendered incomplete by applying layers of sand for texture, or by sanding off layers of paint. Poinciana, one of the earliest paintings in this series, displays a large unassuming area of textured sand in the upper right corner, as much a sympathetic reaction to my friends' seating arrangement on a very itchy stucco wall as it is a compositional device. Though I would not expect a viewer to experience the specific physical memory that I associate with this image, I can only assume that my physical memory has in some way reinforced my decision to leave this space as texture, and as such has added to the painting's perplexity.

Though more readily associated with damage than with weathering, drips are an inevitable part of this loose painting style, and I embrace their suitability to the subject of a set of ruins decomposing in the sun. Drips provide a strong tie to the tropical subject matter in terms of the humidity and rain damage observed at the site, but the pathways forged by the drips themselves on the surface also form an integral part of each painting's history. Running paint and other such deviations from my original photographic sources serve as reminders that these paintings are an interpretation of events, and that stories often change during translation. A heightened awareness of the activity on the surface of the painting stops the viewer from being drawn into the subject matter by preventing suspension of

disbelief. When viewed from a distance, Mrs. Evelyn's Boys are a clean and well-behaved group, preserved in time on the morning of my younger brother's class photo. Up close, Mrs. Evelyn's Boys are a disturbing lot whose faces and uniforms disintegrate beyond recognition and dissolve in the running paint. Viewing the painting from this distance reminds me that despite my best efforts, the names of all but two boys in this picture have been forgotten.

This series exemplifies for me a growing consideration for my painting technique's relevance and ability to not only represent, but also to enhance its subject matter. The techniques described above were used to achieve a calculated effect: to endow a painting about history with its own sense of history, by falsifying the acts of weathering and age. To return briefly to Mark Cheetham's postmodernist view, an artist can readily create their own version of 'history' and convince the viewer of its authenticity by "deploying culturally specific signs of history: fragmentation and damage" (5). Cheetham refers specifically to the artist collective General Idea, whose The Unveiling of the Cornucopia was "pre-constructed to allow for partial destruction, weathering, which lets them 'signify pastness" (5).

As one of the defining features of my paintings, gloss is a potent symbol not only for photographic images, but also for water, and for nostalgia and reflection itself. Art historian Thomas Crow equates Ross Bleckner's use of gloss in his paintings "to the coating on a photographic print. Any competent consumer of photography is habituated to look past the gloss or sheen of the paper; ... reflection is a defining trait of the medium" (117). It is therefore a natural choice

that a series of work based upon photographs also utilize gloss in its repeated glazing. Susan Stewart, who contributes an emotional interpretation of the effects of gloss, echoes Crow's relation of gloss to the photograph. In terms of the evocative nature of a glossy surface, Stewart states: "The silence of the photograph, its promise of visual intimacy at the expense of the other senses (its glossy surface reflecting us back and refusing us penetration), makes the eruption of that narrative, the telling of its story, all the more poignant" (138). It is the latter observation about gloss that has exerted the most influence in my paintings. The glossy surfaces enhance certain areas of colour, drawing deep reds and purples out from otherwise undifferentiated dark areas. Gloss must, however, be flawed in its application in order to allow points of penetration into the image and to allow the viewer to realize that gloss, too, is a manipulative technique. For this reason, the varnish does not cover the entire surface but is instead poured on and allowed to spread over the panel, or 'coaxed' into a desired area through manipulation and gravity. Gloss, or its absence, brings about a tactile awareness of the underlying paint, and the immense change that one can see in a colour if it is looked upon from a different light. In Form 1 or Mrs. Evelyn's Boys, viewers may occasionally see a reflection of their own faces amongst the children's (a reminder of the work's autobiographical content). The surface, however, remains at most a pool, as opposed to a mirror.

Autobiographical imagery is balanced by the addition of panels that represent everyday objects or schematic diagrams. These appropriations provide a measured counterweight to the personal imagery, while keeping the

autobiographical content accessible. Panels such as Poinciana juxtapose an old snapshot of friends with a biological drawing of the flamboyant tree, Royal Poinciana –a connection formed through my reconstructed memory of the particular location in which these girls are sitting. Though neither image may present the viewer with this personal connection outright, the welding of the two images reminds the viewer that this is not just an attempt to replicate a pictorial scene, it is a meditation upon a whole experience. Other panels such as the rather iconic Caribbean Spiny Lobster are based entirely upon the type of biological drawings I would have studied at the time, and are designed to fill specific niches within the collection. Each panel brings a different fragment of information to the whole, and alters the manner in which the neighbouring panels are viewed and interpreted. The combination of autobiographical content, site imagery and souvenirs from the period helps me to avoid the impression of tourism and aspire to a representation of home. It helps that my own concept of home is a rather abstract one. I am accustomed to taking my most meaningful experiences from the many cultures I have lived in, and piecing them together into a new notion of home. It is an experience that I affably liken to that of the decorator crab (*Microphrys bicornutus*), a little crustacean who picks up debris from its environment and attaches it to its hooked shell for camouflage. As the crab's environment changes, useful pieces are retained and new items are added, while conspicuous pieces are discarded. Its home evolves constantly.

i. Presentation of the Work

Perhaps the most defining trait of this body of work is its seamless frieze presentation format, a presentation strategy that I have envisioned since I developed an interest in narrative and reconstructed memory. The underlying research for the potential of this format to manipulate its viewer was developed in an earlier piece, Turtle Travel Timeline (1999). This series of 18 panels was based upon the observation and documentation of the Red-Eared Slider tank at the Calgary Zoo. Turtle Travel Timeline was designed to be understated, and to represent everyday moments in the turtles' lives. These images were small and fleeting, but remained dependent upon one another to communicate the turtles' changing situation and environment. The works were mounted below eye level at the height of the original tank, a device that forced adult viewers to lean over to view each one in turn. My observations of viewers 'reading' the panels from left to right with the assumption that a narrative would unfold, led me to consider the possibility of creating implied narrative in a collection of more loosely connected images. With All that has Happened Since, the viewer's eye moves from a photographic image of a building, to a seemingly unrelated diagram or patch of handwriting.

This collection of paintings is not, however, a mere amalgamation of diversified images, grouped together in the hope that the viewer will try to connect them. The inability to directly connect one panel to the next in a logical language pattern creates the awareness of an implied narrative, rather than an overt one. Art Historian Michael Kammen describes the effect of the individual

image versus the collective: "Taken singly, they cannot tell a complete story. Each one, however, describes a carefully chosen moment and implies circumstances that must have preceded (and are likely to follow) the scene being viewed" (Kammen N. pag.). When taken together, the series becomes a direct connection of ideas, freed from the interference of time, space and details.

Continuity is present within the collection, if not within the panels themselves. The botanical illustrations, for example, refer specifically to the same plants that are represented realistically in neighbouring panels. The chronological timeframe is overruled by a desire for harmony between paintings – a more important consideration in their placement. Repeated occurrences of this type of imagery congeals slowly into a unifying pattern, as the viewer's eye moves from the scientific descriptions of the plants, to the photographic evidence of their conquest of the ruins in the background, – this sameness-in-difference giving a sense of rhythm just as a poem has cadence in its rhyme.

Rhyme, whether visual or literal, is a reminder of what has come before, and is a device that encourages the viewer to remember the past *while* viewing the present. The following passage, a brief excerpt from Far Tortuga by acclaimed novelist and travel writer Peter Matthiessen, presents a sequence of images intent on conveying the full range of the experience (the sun rising over the island of Grand Cayman). In this particular instance, Matthiessen's process bears a resemblance to my own method of linking fragmentary images together in order to present a more complete representation of the bigger picture.

Cock crow.

Wind and cloud sail down the island, east to west. A sweet warm wind comes, sucking faint damp from the parched cactus and palmetto.

Sunrise in trackless Ally Land. New light strikes the blue spines of an iguana. Its chewing slows. Starting from its hole, a land crab pauses, then withdraws; a grain of earth rolls down into the hole.

Sunrise at Old Man, on the north coast. Blue shacks with dark shutters, closed.

Sunrise at Meagre Bay and Bodden Town, on the white road of coral marl that trails along the emerald sounds of the south shore. Fringing the sounds is the long reef, and beyond the reef, cold deep blues of the abyss.

Sunrise at Kitty Clover Land.

Sunrise at Newlands and Careening Place and Booby Cay.

Sunrise at Savanna. A lone dog on the road, stiff-legged. Poinsettia and jasmine, low white walls.

Green parrots cross the sunburst to the mango trees. Light polishes gray-silver cabin sides, glows in the bolls of the wild cotton, shines

the dun flanks of a silken cow in pastures of rough guinea grass; a gumbo limbo tree, catching up sun in red translucent peels of shedding bark, glows on black burned-over ground between gray jutting bones of ocean limestone.

New sun on a vermilion fence. Breadfruit and tamarind.

Cock crow. (Matthiessen 6-7)

Matthiessen's sunrise passage is capable of pressing the viewer to visually return to and dwell upon certain images and patterns, creating an environment that includes temporality with minimal explanation. By showing repeated sunrises at different locations on the island, Matthiessen is able to articulate a much more vivid image of the sun's steady move across the entire island and its individual settlements, bringing a palpable sense of time to his writing without ever needing to state it outright.

ii. Final Words

In conclusion, this body of work has endowed me with a substantial awareness of the role of memory as a mediator, as well as the impossibility of preserving an event intact through the methods that currently I employ. The paintings have adapted continuously as I have made these discoveries, becoming increasingly self-aware that they are constructions of memory. The work is not a fixed series, but a collection that is in itself open to rearrangement, selective editing or additions. Because of this, the works remain balanced between two opposing spheres. As Mitchell explains: "Memory, like description,

is a technique which should be subordinate to free temporality: if memory becomes dominant, we find ourselves locked in the past; if description takes over, narrative temporality, progress toward an end, is endangered, and we become paralyzed in the endless proliferation of descriptive detail" (194). The point in time where either of these two forces asserts its dominance is the point where I must stop.

You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and livable acreage. Occasionally the river floods these places. 'Floods' is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was.

Toni Morrison "The Site of Memory"

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