

In Absentia

“A living creature fills an empty refuge, images inhabit, and all corners are haunted, if not inhabited”.

Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* 1957

My work deals with a wide range of conceptual ideas that are filtered through the lens of personal experience and grounded in art history and literature. It is my goal to utilize the traditions of historical realism to help create unease within my rendered spaces. By painting images of the domestic realm I hope to capture my interest in social role-playing and my own struggles to define my belonging within the home.

Although none of the reference images in this series are painted from my personal living spaces, this work is autobiographical in that it exposes my own daily struggles with traditional roles of mother and wife. Like many people, after being stuck inside my house, raising children, working, creating, and isolating during the pandemic, western societies unrealistic expectations of a perfectly ordered existence have been amplified. Cracks in our social framework have been exposed, our over consumption of objects and time were laid bare. As days blended into each other in an endless motion of banal activities, I have never been more aware of how light and dark become demarcations of time. I often found myself looking into my own chaotic rooms like a crime scene; I can see it, as it is, strange and unraveled. I see many contradictions; the domestic space is at the same time a site of female repression, colonial oppression, and comforting familiarity. I see life unfolding in its joy and its uncontrollable nature, and I see a trickling of loss. I see intimate secrets and alienation. Though I can feel dislocated in my own domestic space at times, I am not in despair; rather I revel in the uncanny feeling I experience. I have always been drawn to a good mystery.

This new body of work is painted from found photographs. Where and why I collect my source images is just as important as the rooms they represent. First and foremost, I create paintings of photographs; I purposely leave references of a mechanical lens. I am deeply interested in our society's obsession with documenting every minutia of life and I would consider myself an image hoarder. They are collected from multiple sources in which the photographic agenda is to record or document the space and objects just as they are; Internet sites like MLS listings, various archives, kijiji ads, and even crime scene documentation are a wellspring of inspiration. The photos are a mixture of current and historical (within my life span) and some are even infamous, absorbed into our collective memories. They are not idealized, they are not marketed images such as “Home and Garden” magazines, they are real spaces and they were lived in. None of my sources were photographed with the agenda of creative purpose. In many instances, it was the imperfect compositions, the strange point of view or angles that I was drawn to. Inspired by filmic suspense masters such as Alfred Hitchcock, Atom Egoyan, and David Lynch; I cropped, I added and I subtracted information, and I edited colour to turn the

utilitarian photographic images to emotive paintings. My references to film and literature are layered into the works and titles and become another way for the viewer to find different ways to identify with the scene.

My painted descriptions aim to expose the way people (specifically within a realm of western middle class) live imperfectly behind closed doors, without the expectations of an audience. I aim to ask the question, when we are gone (whether it be at the end of a persons life or the collapse of human society on this planet) what do the remains of our lives say about our state of being. As we gaze into the disembodied spaces, in absence of its players, the viewer will try to make sense of the scene and without any specific character reference they will only have their own experiences to guide them. The objects and furniture act as an inventory of desires and fears and when we look into these as a social mirror, we can see the personal implications as the voyeur, which can be both comforting and uncomfortable. We all feel the need to fill in the empty spaces, to put things back into order, to hide the unspoken things. We all subconsciously and consciously analyze and pass judgments based on personal coded value systems. By focusing on creating mood with the dramatic use of light and shadow, the private living rooms become a stage or theatre in which a range of social interactions play out. As all space is defined and formed by activity, void of the creators, rooms will always remain haunted revealing the true motivation of the activity and social structure that supports it. My aim is to have the spaces reflect the middle class ideals and gender roles of the people who should be present, not unlike the 17th century Genre painting and 19th Century Realism movement I openly reference. I am interested in suggesting the value systems, socio-economic power dynamics, and inequities found in gender, family, privacy, and intimacy, while encouraging the viewer to think about the domestic spaces of past and present relevant to his or her daily life.

In Henri Lefebvre's 1977 "The Critique of Everyday Life" he writes to see properly the errors of our ways "we need to place them at a reasonable, well judged distance, like the objects we see before us. Then their many-sided strangeness becomes apparent: in relation to ourselves, but also within themselves and in relation to themselves. In this strangeness lies their truth, the truth of their alienation. It is then that consciousness of alienation – that strange awareness of the strange – liberates us, or begins to liberate us, from alienation." (Henri Lefebvre p. 20).