Playing house: exploring domesticity gone awry

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Playing house:
Exploring domesticity gone awry

by

Amanda Janette Hall

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Major: Integrated Visual Arts

Program of Study Committee:
April Katz, Co-Major Professor
Barbara Walton, Co-Major Professor
C. Arthur Croyle
Paula Curran

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I would like to thank my committee chairs, April Katz and Barbara Walton, and my committee members, C. Arthur Croyle and Paula Curran for their guidance and support throughout the course of my research and explorations. The difficulties I encountered in process and execution were felt by them as well, and it is as much to their credit as mine that this exhibition came to fruition.

In addition, I would like to thank my friends, colleagues, the department faculty, and staff for making my time at Iowa State University so enjoyable and full of growth.

Finally, thanks to my family for their encouragement and involvement. They have provided their support through their patient assistance, their timely encouragement, and their abundant love.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The body of work that comprises my master’s thesis is built upon layers of thematic exploration within the field of art history and the realm of popular culture. It draws from my illustration background as well as from the toys, games, and experiences of my childhood. While the subject matter is sometimes quite serious, it is important to me that there be an outward approachability in my work that allows for a more universal connection with my audience. Thematic content varies, but is centered around the quirks of our day-to-day human experience, the singular nature of American culture—and the idea that, over time, our most mundane activities sometimes become our strangest. This written thesis component is intended to elaborate upon the influences behind and the themes found within the exhibition Playing House: Domesticity Gone Awry. (Figure 1)

Artistically, I am drawn to scenes of domestic life and the depiction of a narrative. Constructions such as shadow boxes and non-traditional books have always been a source of delight, and my recent graduate work explores these constructions as they relate to my larger artistic theme. This aspect of my work has allowed me to explore the boundaries between the three-dimensional and two-dimensional world as it relates to print making. As an object-oriented person, it seems fitting to have a dialogue such as this within myself, and I appreciate the way this format provides unique display and collaboration opportunities through its repeatability and its ability to be assembled in multiple different
ways. Most works in the exhibition are small in scale. This too relates to the emphasis I place on the preciousness of objects, and creates an intimate relationship with my audience. I enjoy presenting these in ways that are intellectually as well as artistically enlightening, often with the incorporation of a puzzle or other playful components.

When most effective, the creations that I find so stimulating during construction become universally engaging to a wider audience. The puzzles contained within the methods of assembly add another layer of meaning to my explorations of subjects such as hoarding, housekeeping, dating and relationships, and the way we spend our day-to-day lives. By showing allegories and extreme examples of the ways that our ideal lives differ from our actual lives, I am bringing ironies to light in a non-confrontational manner. The work is easily approached by the audience, who can find truth in what is depicted—often by recognizing in them the practices of neighbors, distant relatives, or friends. Because I’m not forcing anyone to take a side or form a conclusion, the messages become more about awareness. Often, they relate to ironies so ubiquitous in our American culture that it is difficult to see that they exist. I use humor, a playful format, and innocuous colors and illustration techniques to draw attention to practices and situations that I feel require more thought from those around me.
CHAPTER II
ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

Artist David Driesbach paraphrased Deuteronomy 6:11 in the following way:
“We drink from wells we did not dig, and warm ourselves by fires we did not stoke.”
(Driesbach) This is clearly the case with the objects that comprise Playing House: Domesticity Gone Awry.

Childhood Influences

I led a very happy childhood surrounded by all the raw ingredients that my creativity needed to flourish—our house was never short of crayons, paints, scraps of paper, bits of string, and stout glue. I remember being best pleased when I was in the process of making as a means to an end. Once I spent hours at a relative’s house drawing, cutting, and constructing three-dimensional paper chess pieces so that we could use them on an old checker board we found in the basement. Another time, I made a series of tiny dolls out of popsicle sticks—complete with clothing and household furnishings made from scraps of fabric. I remember that the toys I enjoyed the most were diminutive and fragile, and the activities I liked the best were puzzles, constructions, and creating imagined domestic spaces for imagined individuals.

Another childhood pastime of note was collecting. My family collects antiques, and I was raised in a house full of objects brimming with mystique and narrative potential. My earliest collections were colored rocks and stray buttons—easily found and readily
placed into my tiny hands and pockets, then preserved in a plastic film canister and often taken out and arranged into patterns. Frequent trips to antique stores throughout elementary school led to a wider availability of objects to categorize and assemble. When I began to receive allowance money, my collecting expanded into marbles, beads, sea shells, patterned tea cups and saucers, and “pretty glass,” which was mostly jewel toned, busily patterned, and ornamentally Victorian.

This interest in collections continued to be a part of my life as I grew up. After completing my undergraduate degree in medical illustration, I worked at an art museum with an emphasis on decorative arts. Visual Literacy, a concept that the museum had begun to use in order to integrate itself more fully into the curriculum of its college-age constituents, centered around the idea that a person can be taught to relay visual information just as they can be taught to read written words. I spent hours with tour groups and in training, verbalizing what I was observing around me in the gallery and drawing conclusions from these observations.

Over time, I became interested in the collections management activities of the museum. I spent hours in storage, pouring over items that had not yet been fully researched or catalogued. My interests were piqued by a prominent glass collection, which recalled the collecting interests of my youth. Knowledge soon backed my earlier fascination, and my personal collections—especially of glass—began to expand. When I started graduate school, I did not imagine that these pastimes and interests would later play a critical role in my work.
Art Historical Influences

My early explorations in graduate school centered around painting narratives and finding common memory using old family photographs. (Figure 2) I felt (and still feel) a visceral pull toward the expressive compositions and brush strokes of the Russian Impressionists and artists who obliquely address aspects of home life such as Mary Cassatt with her pastoral scenes of family bliss and Edward Hopper with a more bleak and lonely glimpse into our familiar dwelling places. (Figures 3 and 4) Following this earlier body of photograph-based narrative paintings, I was encouraged to create imagined scenarios in the form of shadow box constructions that would allow me to execute my paintings and monotypes “from life.” (Figure 5) These shadow boxes soon took on a personal meaning and richness beyond the prints I was creating from them, and their diminutive quality became an aesthetic that I incorporated into my overall body of work. As this body has evolved, I have become aware of contemporary artists who are utilizing different and varied means to express aspects of the domestic message that I am hoping to express.

Aesthetic and Conceptual Influences within Art History

Edward Gorey

More than any other artist or illustrator, this body of work owes some of its pithy wit and illustrative quality to Edward Gorey. As a child, I was given as many books as I
could read, and because I was not allowed to watch “questionable” content on television, I received my entire foundation in the horror/mystery genre by reading Edgar Alan Poe, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, and many others. This instilled a passion for the Victorian sense of the macabre, and naturally led to my discovery of Edward Gorey as someone who was simultaneously Victorian in his tastes, illustrative, and delightfully witty in his subject matter and presentation. He also seemed to straddle the boundaries between the traditional roles of the “illustrator,” the “artist,” and the “author.” I remember being appalled by my tendency to be amused by the *Gashlycrumb Tinies*, a rhyming alphabet describing the strange deaths of twenty-six ill-fated children. (*A is for Amy who fell down the stairs; B is for Basil, assaulted by bears…*) (Figure 6) As I created work for *Playing House*, I remembered the lesson I’d learned from Gorey: humor makes the medicine sweeter.

Another pivotal set of illustrations by Gorey include illustrated pseudo-allegories. My favorite, *The Galoshes of Remorse*, (Figure 7) depicts a dolorous woman sitting at the edge of a swampy abyss. It is surrounded with Victorian flotsam in the form of banners and lounging men playing with toys of the sort you find in British party crackers and wearing paper hats. The caption reads, “*Frivolity, at the edge of a moral swamp, hears hymn-singing in the distance, and dons the galoshes of remorse.*” This was a revelation—a specific kind of humor that appealed to the masses as a product of the ridiculous, which also appealed on a more academic level to the sense of irony and parody involved in using a statement and idea that are close enough to the original to attempt a sense of false gravitas—and are altered enough to point out the truth of its ridiculousness.
This, upon reflection, was the starting point for the messages and mechanisms behind
 Playing House.

Joseph Lappie and other Book Artists

An Iowa artist, Joseph Lappie, visited printmaking classes of mine at a formative
stage in my graduate education. In addition to learning practical methods for binding and
bookmaking, his art and instruction made me aware of an entire realm of possibilities in
the form of alternative books that were being made by contemporary artists. (Figure 8)
Non-traditional book artists like Julie Chen have not only given me practical solutions to
the shapes I have needed for some of my projects, but have also provided an affirmation
that there are few rules in terms of a book’s construction. In The Routine, (Figure 9) for
instance, I’d planned a relatively straightforward page-to-page pop-up format, but was
having difficulty making the form justify the theme I’d chosen for the book— that of the
universality and repetitive nature of routines. After finding an image of a carousel book
that opened up into a round space divided into wedge-like sections, I knew I’d discovered
the format that would suit my message. When the viewer is finished looking at all the
sections in the carousel and has seen every part of the book character’s routine, he finds
himself back at the beginning, ready to begin another day of the same activities. Trips to
the Center for Book Arts in Minneapolis further enforced my desire to create objects that
could be held and appreciated on an individual basis. I realized that it was possible for me
to be able to have one-on-one conversations with my audience, and I began to look for
ways I could incorporate this intimacy. Suddenly, the projects and puzzles that had excited me in my youth began to find a logical place within my art.

**Cabinets of Curiosities, Reliquaries, and Museum Collections**

Cabinets of Curiosities (Figure 10) used to be prevalent in middle- and upper-class Victorian homes. The style of the time was one of ornamentation and expression of opulence; and a collection of historical, cultural, and exquisitely decorated objects about which one could tell a story was a source of entertainment to family and friends. Cabinets of curiosity took collections—objects—and elevated their status by grouping and arranging them. Some were studied exhaustively, and others remained mysterious to their viewers. Botanical specimens, family ephemera, travel souvenirs, and “one-ofs” were popular in such cabinets. (Calder, 96-98) These laid the foundations of what we consider modern museums. Although my personal collecting interests tend to take this form, the influence of this style of categorization emerges in a more subtle way in works such as *Garage Sale* and *Hoard House*.

Mark Dion’s cabinets of curiosity, obsessive categorization, and strange juxtaposition of objects have informed my reverence for the everyday object and what it is capable of expressing. (Figure 11) What humans collect, what they choose to preserve, and what they view as disposable changes from culture to culture and from age to age. The works in this exhibit are made in such a way that they themselves, in a sense, become candidates for inclusion within their own cabinet of curiosities.
The reliquary at Clyde, Missouri, located near my childhood home, is a different kind of cabinet of curiosity. Filled with bottles, boxes, and a glass coffin that each contain various body parts of saints and holy individuals, this room is dedicated to one of the more peculiar practices of the Catholic church. Religious messages aside, the mania for acquiring, retaining, and categorizing parts of our human existence plays a large role in the mentality behind my work. Collections care within the museum falls under this category as well, and I am certain that forming and using categories and classifications, as well as honing my powers of observation on a micro level, has helped inform my artistic direction while in graduate school.

**Dario Robleto**

An exhibition at the Des Moines Art Center of Dario Robleto’s work further informed my sense of fascination with the lengths humans take to ornament their surroundings, honor their dead, and venerate influential events. The idea that one could create a false history that would be more telling or more honest or more applicable than what really existed was mesmerizing. Robleto displayed album covers to bands that were never formed, bottled sounds and actions, and created thousands of paper flowers to frame memorials and create relics for events that were not memorialized when they occurred. (Vicario) (Figure 12) While my work has not yet turned toward physical relics and remains firmly planted in the realm of the “domestic,” I found myself thinking of the Robleto exhibit again and again as I created interiors in works such as the *Garage Sale* and *Merit Vest for Couponers*. 
False Narratives

Beauvais Lyons, in addition to being a first-class printmaker, has provided inspiration in the form of his false historical records. (Figure 13) Lyons’s illustrations, containing archaeological data about creatures and artifacts that have never existed, are a fascinating sociological study. By using a familiar format and appropriate words and style, he is able to convince his audience of the authenticity of his message. This has been an attractive idea, and I have found myself identifying with Lyon’s attention to detail and ability to be specific in order to generalize as my work has developed. As I planned projects such as Old Maid, Garage Sale, and Tarot, I found myself creating characters that had historical backgrounds. The most successful of these had entire stories surrounding them—I knew what they liked and disliked, what their houses looked like, and the kind of lives they led. This added a richness and a reality to these works that I could not have achieved with flatter character portrayals.

Cindy Sherman’s photography has also provided me with inspiration for a false record. The photographs she creates include film stills from movies that have never been made, and photoshoots of individuals that are imaginary but true to type. I am fascinated by Sherman’s ability to inspire a desire for a narrative from her audience. While she has never publically professed to any over-arching message behind her photographs (in fact, they all remainuntitled in order to further mask their creator’s agenda), there are as many speculations as to what her images might mean as there are individuals who view them. (Krauss, 36-41) In this way, Sherman provided an excellent study for me as I decided how much information to give my audience, and how much information they would
naturally find and assign on their own. Finally, Martha Rosler has provided me with a redefinition of the word *feminism* through her depiction of the day-to-day lives of women. Rosler’s irony and collaged juxtapositions point out the deception behind stereotypes that continue to damage women as they search for their place in society. Two collage series, *Body Beautiful, or Beauty Knows No Pain* (1965-72) and *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* (1967-1972) particularly resonate by depicting traditional women’s household roles and graphic images of the Vietnam War. (Figure 14) Rosler’s work shows that domestic scenes don’t have to elicit a warm and comfortable response, and can be extremely powerful and message-laden. This has been crucial to my understanding of how to best relate my concepts and theme.

**Popular Culture as an Influence**

Finally, one of my largest influences has been popular culture—reality television in particular. Individual programs or scenarios have repeatedly informed my projects. The *Merit Vest for Couponers* (Figure 15) came from a friend’s anecdote about a television show she’d watched that interviewed “extreme couponers.” Weekly installments of the show “Hoarders” had a large effect on the way I chose to portray my particular hoarder in *Hoard House.* (Figure 16) The monster pop-up, *The Routine*, (Figure 9) came tangentially from an old *Kids in the Hall* sketch comedy scene, where very normal-looking individuals described their very normal days, which all ended in bizarre occurrences. The game of *Old Maid* (Figure 17) was of course based on the deck of cards I had as a child, as well as current profiles of questionable content found on
internet dating websites. *Storage* (Figure 18) illustrates the slightly ominous and voyeuristic practice of opening others’ storage units—and was conceived while watching a show called “Storage Wars” in which contestants bid against each other to purchase the mysterious contents of abandoned storage units in California. Beyond the outward competition to find the most valuable items, this show in particular is fascinating as a study in social anthropology—each unit becomes a time capsule created by a specific human being at a specific point in history.

My interest in television and contemporary culture is somewhat specialized in that I am most interested in over-arching societal themes and the ways our domestic culture is changing over time. This perhaps leads me to reflect on these trends more than the average audience for these television shows, and results in commentary that is simultaneously familiar and disarming to a populace primed by cultural standards.
CHAPTER III
ABOUT THE WORK

Ernest Hemmingway said, “All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence that you know.” Ironically, by using imagined scenes, scenarios, individuals, and occupations, I am attempting to voice truths in human behaviors—idiosyncrasies that might normally be overlooked due to their familiarity. I aim to keep my subject matter accessible, which is why the comfort and seemingly mundane nature of the domestic realm has served me well. Instead of telling viewers my thoughts or beliefs about what I observe around me, I want to present these quirks and discrepancies in a way that merely brings them to the viewer’s attention and causes them to ruminate upon or reference what they might not have otherwise considered. No one is forced to take a side, and it’s easy to find “someone else” in the tragic figures that are sometimes presented.

The important part for me as the artist is to mix in just enough banal humanity that most viewers are forced to confront the fact that they might have a little of this tragedy in themselves as well. For instance, in Merit Vest for Couponers (Figure 15), most of the “badges” earned by the recipient are for using coupons that most of us would never consider using (“Buy six bathtubs, get the seventh free,” for instance). Occasionally, a merit badge highlights a coupon that seems much more reasonable, such as “30% off cheese,” and perhaps causes the viewer to come to the realization that these projects are not just parodies of extreme cases, but might be illustrative of their own life on some level as well.
The Hoard House

The first work I made in this body, *The Hoard House* (Figure 19) is a synthesis of all the transitions that took place in my graduate studies. I moved from painting to printmaking, from two dimensions to three dimensions, and from easily-read messages and subject matter to more subtle and specific over-arching themes. Three flat diagrammatic prints show the entire contents of one woman’s house—her furniture, her clothing, her plants, her garbage, and her cats. (Figure 20) When cut out and assembled, these individual components can be folded into three-dimensional objects and placed within the paper house. When printed overlapping in three colors, the resulting visual confusion conveys a message that even useful items become useless when they are too numerous. *The Hoard House* accidentally accomplished what I would later try to intentionally capture in my work—the sense of playfulness about a serious subject, the simultaneous universality and specificity of a particular way in which our domestic lives go “awry,” the puzzle component in aid of a message, and the idea that one work can be viewed and experienced in multiple ways to increase interface with the audience.

While not initially foremost in my mind, I did frequently consider my viewer when designing projects after the hoard house. Most of these works are intended to be viewed closely in an intimate setting and experienced over time. I wanted my subject matter to be dense enough that someone with a print or construction in their home would be able to notice different objects, sections, or movement each time they approached my work.
Resulting Works

With these lessons in mind, I set out to create more paper constructions. *The Routine* (Figure 9) was modeled to physically engage the viewer in its somewhat complex carousel construction. I was attracted by the idea that something so fragile and complicated could be used to describe something so mundane and so easily taken for granted. *The Routine*’s central character, a monster-like creature, is shown going through a very familiar-looking day of eating his breakfast, riding the bus, sitting in an office, checking his mail, watching TV, and setting his alarm clock. Our daily routine is something that often receives little or no consideration, and is thought to be relatively unique to us as individuals. In this book, the daily routine of the creature becomes universal and worthy of consideration.

Next, I began to think of games as they related to the various domestic themes I was addressing and as they related to my interest in interactive prints. *Old Maid*, the deck of 52 playing cards (Figure 17), was a response to my increasing fear that I would soon be labeled as such by my friends and relatives—and my rebellion against what I thought was a premature diagnosis. Because so many people had suggested online dating, I perused the more popular dating websites, and was left with a sense that although all the single people remaining in my area might turn out to be quite a good match for each other, none seemed to be a good fit for myself.

I remembered the horror of being labeled the “Old Maid” when I’d played this common card game as a child, and thought back to how pitifully hackneyed the matches
and illustrations had been on the deck that I’d used at that time. Therefore, my version of *Old Maid* not only emphasized what I found disquieting about the original game, it also explored the more bizarre aspects of dating profiles—the strange things people say, and the odd self-representations that people choose to show the rest of the world. By using the card game’s format of very stereotypical “matches” (such as doctor/nurse, cowboy/cowgirl) I was able to draw attention to the fact that computer matches based on superficial criteria may not be the best fit for a solid relationship. To further the analogy, a deck of cards was printed with “bad habits” written on the back (in the subscriber’s own “handwriting”). These were placed in a bound and hinged folio for easy perusal. As the “Old Maid,” one can thumb through all possible men for matches, and as the “Eligible Bachelor” (a much kinder term that draws attention to the cruelty of the single woman’s fate), one can thumb through each woman for a match. When a card is taken out of the folio (when you go on a “date” with that person and “take them out,”) the bad habit is revealed on the back. These include things that are rarely said in online profiles, and range from the mundane (“I collect dolls”) to the more serious (“I’m already married”) to the downright strange (“I save my fingernail clippings”). In this way, I hoped to draw attention to the limitations and the pitfalls of this new form of finding love.

Playing cards also provided me with an excellent vehicle for my message in *Tarot*, (Figure 21) a 78-card deck of playing cards depicting the specific “fate” of the homemaker. In this deck, each card of the *Major Arcana* loses most of its exotic subject matter and is replaced by scenes that become humorous in their simplicity. “Death,” for instance, is the act of flushing a goldfish down the toilet. “The Sun” becomes a tanning
salon, “The Magician” is using the microwave, and “Judgment” finds the unlikely heroine naked in front of her bathroom mirror. I hoped to create scenes that were universal enough that they would find a spot of resonation with viewers that have been part of a family, and by adding the Tarot element of “mysticism,” point out the opposite—that much of what happens in our private lives is so routine that it is overlooked in our day-to-day thoughts concerning our ultimate fate.

The theme of games continued with the block puzzle called Allegory, (Figure 22) created out of my frustration with the organization of my home life. It occurred to me that my life was very much like a faceted block puzzle with a different image on each side. If I chose to assemble the “work” side, my professional affairs were in order—but that left the rest of the block puzzle (my responsibilities) in disarray. Ultimately, this puzzle allowed the viewer to organize their home life in one of six categories: family, friends, work, health, spirituality, or housekeeping—but never in more than one category at a time.

Something that was unexpected occurred in preparation for this exhibit—I found myself thinking of domestic handicrafts as a means to illustrate the domestic messages I was relaying. Activities from my childhood such as cross stitching and embroidery found their way into my repertoire of mediums, and several works were stitched because the message became more clear when juxtaposed with the time and detailed attention the completion of these objects required. In the cross stitches, Home Sweet Home (Figure 23) and Picket Fence, (Figure 24) houses in disrepair were stitched photorealistically and framed. Then, to emphasize the way we often gloss over our possessions, surroundings,
and situations, a thin sheet of Plexiglas was drilled and cross stitched. This created a layer of traditional cross stitch patterning that lay over a more desperate-looking background, perhaps illustrating the inability of humans to see flaws in what they see and interact with every day.

Merit Badges for Couponers (Figure 15) is a bright green vest reminiscent of those that employees wear at discount stores and the sashes that Girl Scouts wear for meetings. It had occurred to me that in the case of extreme couponers, there has to be another level of motivation besides saving money—namely, that of a sense of accomplishment, or a reward for a job well done. I thought about a fitting physical award that might accompany each purchase, to further increase what I was sure was the real motivation behind most people’s search for bargains. This led me to remember my Girl Scout merit sash—and to imagine what merit badges for those who use coupons might look like.

In Days of the Week, (Figure 25) tea towels depict what really might occur in a home each day, as opposed to the charming chores usually executed by kittens, chickens, or rosy-cheeked youth on the traditional tea towels of the 1930’s, 40’s, and 50’s. Household occurrences such as a clogged toilet, a sink full of dirty dishes, and piles of trash waiting to be taken out to the curb more honestly illustrate the activities of a typical household. There is something appropriate, thematically, about using a domestic craft to tell a larger story about domesticity, and I think these stitched items might be the beginning of a new direction (or addition) to my work.
CHAPTER IV
PROCESS

“Sometimes stupidity is good. If you would have been more knowledgeable about how something is done, you wouldn’t have had to come up with a new answer.”

-Iowa State Associate Professor Andreas Schwab, Fall 2012

My foray into printmaking was a trial by fire. Having not had any printmaking courses in my undergraduate work, I wasn’t entirely sure of the capabilities of the medium. Additionally, since my own aesthetic influences had only occasionally ventured into printmaking, I was not familiar with what other artists were creating using similar tools and processes. After almost a year of trying to make my lithographs look like everyone else’s, I turned to the Hoard House project and its centralized message in desperation. Here was a theme about which I was excited, and this caused me to concentrate on my process and aim for more accurate results. Here also was a project that was constructed in a way that is relatively scarce in the traditional world of framed prints. The excitement of something that is not finished when it comes off the press, but rather just begun, made me think about printing in a whole new light.

Although initially this may have happened accidentally, I continue to remain loyal to my process. Printmaking is integral to my concept as well as my results—it allows me to create multiples, which then allow me to make alterations in assembly that transform the prints from a map or pattern into the ultimate works. Since communication with others is so important in this body of work, multiples also allow for collaborations in the
future in which others are able to assemble the designs I’ve made. Finally, the ability to touch and feel and personally interact with these works is important to their overall structure. Without the ability to reproduce these objects, they would become much more precious, making interaction less desirable.

As far as lithography specifically, this appears to be the most efficient and accurate way of transferring and reproducing my line drawings. Although I enjoy other ways of making marks (specifically painting, monotype, and relief printing,) lithography allows me to use a familiar process to easily create as many prints as I desire. In order to further the way lithography can best suit my needs, I have begun utilizing more contemporary methods within the process. Photo-lithography plates mean that I can start with a pen-and-ink drawing on paper, digitally scan it, and create a transparency that can then be used to burn the same image onto a printing plate. These plates are able to be reproduced if damaged, and the transparency creates an exact duplicate of the original line work. Cutting that would have traditionally been done with a precision knife blade has been replaced in Peep Show (Figure 26) by a laser cutter—a process that includes scanning the original image and creating a vector drawing that is compatible with the laser cutter’s software.

While these activities save time, hand-assembly and individual coloration remain actions that I prefer to complete with each iteration. As the creator, I am personally satisfied by this fusion, and conceptually there is an appropriate balance of each project’s reproducibility versus its hand-created and domestically reminiscent nature.
Beyond printing, most of my projects have a tactile and three-dimensional component in their construction. This likely stems from my love of puzzles and problem-solving, although I am careful that I always use this to further enhance my already existing messages. I have enjoyed experimenting with different techniques in these assemblies—learning new methods of bookbinding as needed, laser-cutting, and various needlework-related details. Most projects could easily be mass-produced with more sophisticated equipment, but I believed it was important in this exhibit to make as many things by hand as possible. After the hours spent cross stitching on *Picket Fence* and *Home Sweet Home*, I have been reflecting on the handiwork that women have done over the years, the extreme number of hours spent in these endeavors, and the almost nonexistent reward for their efforts. Working by hand was my way of paying homage to generations of artists who, while perhaps satisfied by a higher level of gratification, were never called artists outside their homes.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Kiowa say, “Everything has a beginning.” Although this exhibition marks the completion of the research, exploration, and growth that has become a part of my MFA degree, it also signifies the beginning of the next phase—the research, exploration, and creative expression that will occur after my graduate experience has concluded. In exploring the theme of domesticity, I feel I am exploring an almost endless source of subject matter rife with duplicities, ironies, and strange practices that will continue to be taken for granted. The work is particularly meaningful in a time in American culture where society is simultaneously reminiscent about past domestic practices and actively engaged in shedding what was once familiar in order to more fully engage with an increasingly technological world. It is important to address these changes as they relate to our basic humanity, and bring to life aspects of our losses and gains that might not otherwise be fully and consciously felt.

Additionally, there are thousands of puzzles and book constructions yet to be formed and tried. My research and working method are currently evolving and should continue to evolve, guided by the advice of other professionals and adapted by trial and error. Themes of what it means to be a feminist, how we treat the disadvantaged, excess, and home life will play a large role in my next body of work, guided by the feedback from Playing House and what I have learned in its making. By using a freer medium and process, by selecting subject matter that resonates personally, and by knowing my own
working style, capabilities, and limitations, I plan to continue these explorations and push their scale and meaning.
Figure 1. Exhibition: *Playing House: Domesticity Gone Awry.*

Interior and Exterior Shots. Design on Main, 203 Main Street, March 31-April 9 2013
Figure 2: Cauliflower Salad, oil on canvas, 20 x 36 inches. Amanda Hall, 2009
Figure 3. *Room in New York*, oil on canvas, 29 x 36 inches. Edward Hopper, 1932.
(Sheldon Art Museum, Lincoln, NE)

Figure 4. *Breakfast in Bed*, oil on canvas, 25 5/8 x 29 inches. Mary Cassatt, 1897
Figure 5. Constructed shadowbox scene using dollhouse supplies, and the resulting monotype print. 9 inches by 12 inches, 2011.

Figure 6. Detail from *The Gashlycrumb Tinies (B is for Basil)*. Printed dimensions variable. Edward Gorey, 1963 (Amphigorey)
Figure 7. *The Galoshes of Remorse*, printed in *Amphigorey Again*, printed dimensions variable. Edward Gorey, 2006

Figure 8. *The Artificer Arisen, The Artificer Fallen*. Dimensions variable.

Joseph Lappie, 2009 (Lappie)
Figure 9. The Routine. 4 x 6.5 x 6.5 inches. Assembled and bound lithograph, 2011

Figure 10. Example of a Cabinet of Curiosity from the Naturkunde Museum, Berlin.
Figure 11. *Travels of William Bartram Reconsidered.* 77 x 48 x 27 inches. Cabinet and found objects, Mark Dion, 2008. (Art21)
Figure 12.  *Defiant Gardens*. Detail. Mixed media, 79.5 x 61 x 3.5 inches.

Dario Robleto, 2011 (Des Moines Art Center, Vicario)


Figure 15. *Merit Vest for Couponers* and detail, mixed media, 20 x 26 x 1 inches, 2013
Figure 16. Comparison: Film still from Hoarders, 2012 and detail from assembled Hoard House, 2011

Figure 17. Installation shots of Old Maid. Folio: 7.5 x 5.75 x 1.5 inches. Laminated and bound lithograph, 2012
Figure 18. Storage. 4 x 4 x .75 inches when folded. Bound and digitally printed lithograph. 2013

Figure 19. Hoard House. 6 x 7.5 x 7 inches. Assembled and colored lithograph, 2011
Figure 20. Hoard House. Foundation prints. Lithograph, each 16 x 20 inches, 2011.

Figure 21. Tarot. Detail. Card dimensions: 3 x 4 inches. Scan used to create finished lithograph, 2012.
Figure 22. Allegory. Installation View and Details. Blocks 2 x 2 x 2 inches each.

Painted lithograph and wooden blocks, 2013.
**Figure 23.** *Home Sweet Home.* 14 x 14 inches framed. Counted cross stitch and plexiglas, 2013.

**Figure 24.** *Picket Fence.* 16 x 16 inches framed. Counted cross stitch and plexiglas, 2013.
Figure 25. *Days of the Week*. Dimensions variable. Embroidered tea towels, 2013.

Figure 26. *Peep Show*. Laser-cut paper, glue, wood, lightbulb and wiring, artificial greenery. House is 8 x 4 x 8 inches, 2012.
REFERENCES


