



Crowded by Your Absence

Tamara Deedman

Crowded by Your Absence

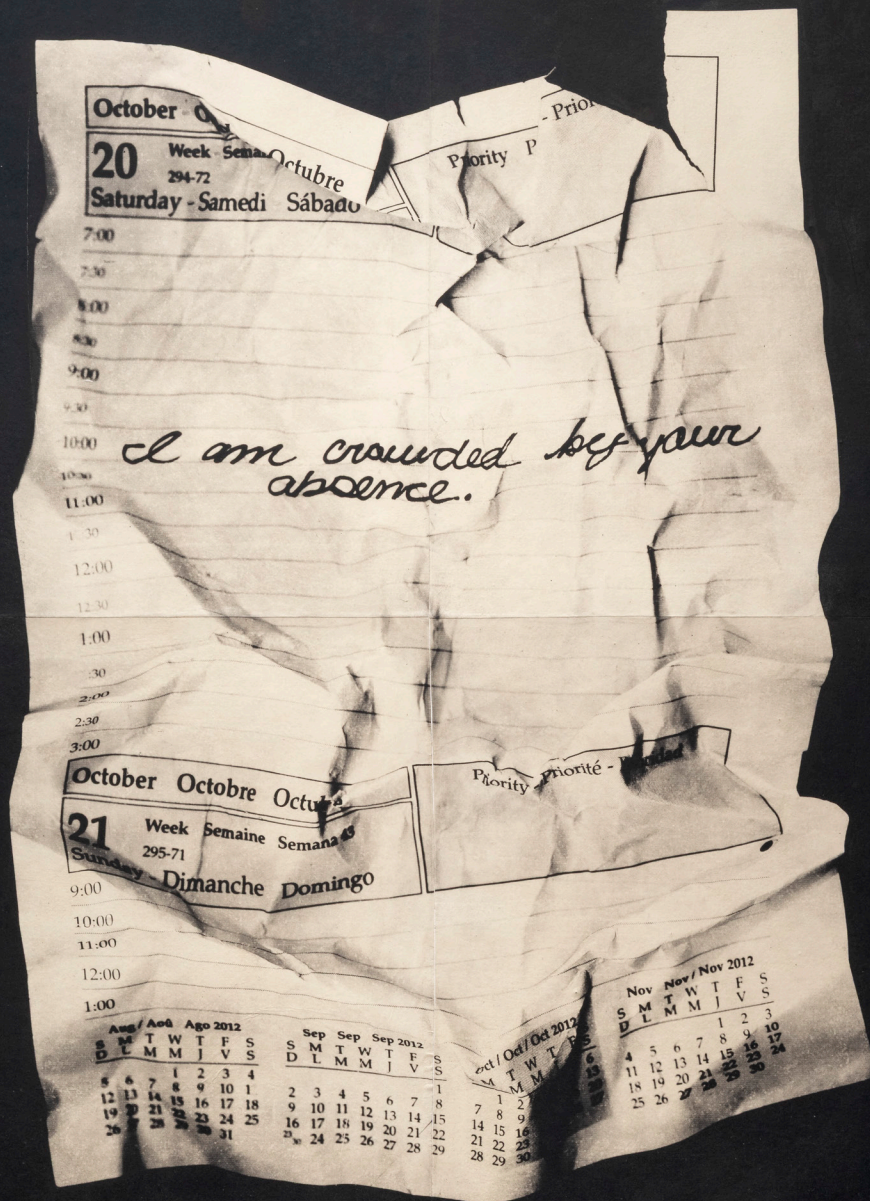
By

Tamara Jaclyn Deedman

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Masters of Fine Arts
in
Printmaking



Land Acknowledgement

It is a deep privilege to be making art and writing this thesis on Treaty 6 territory in Amiskwaciwâskahikan/Edmonton Alberta. I am a white settler, raised deep within the prairies and foothills of rural Alberta. This body of work embeds itself in museum and archive theory, which has historically and presently perpetuated harm to indigenous communities and individuals. Archives and collections do not contain fact, they contain narrative, they embody the biases of the collector or curator that has built them. The regulation of archives "...has long been a tool used by settler-colonial nations to configure sanitized narratives of colonial histories through the perspective of the colonizer."¹ This sits within the forefront of my mind as I make work about my lived experiences in rural spaces that were taken by force, and the history of the land in which I grew up have been white washed. I am highly cognizant of how the manipulation of archives and collections have been used in perpetuity to facilitate the erasure of indigenous stories, systems and knowledge and culture. As I control and transform an inherited archive of a person who no longer is with us, I am vigilant of the power hierarchies that archives institute and how those structures are embedded in the methods of my manipulation and curation of my late fathers things.

Table of Contents

Land Acknowledgement.....	5
Gallery Statement.....	9
Introduction	10
Personhood Through Objecthood.....	14
<i>Pickle Jar</i>	20
<i>Chalkline</i>	25
<i>Monkey</i>	28
<i>Beer Can</i>	33
<i>Lamp</i>	36
We Are What We Do With Our Hands (19,534 Can Tabs).....	38
Family Portrait (Your Last Attempt at Archiving).....	46
Most Days I am a Museum of Things I Want to Forget.....	46
My Body Burns With The Weight of Your Belongings.....	52
I Am Not A Daughter I am A Vessel of Grief.....	58
<i>Tattoos as Self Care in Grief Work</i>	62
<i>Tattoos as a Curated Collect</i>	64
Reflection.....	68
Bibliography.....	70
Acknowledgements.....	74
Biography.....	77

Gallery Statement

Beyond the threshold of the large rolling doors is a gateway - in lies a trove of treasures: cases of can tabs, binders filled with antique coins, and wardrobes crowded with family mementos, hand written archives and obsolete technology. Each item had been deemed precious, meticulously stored to preserve its original, ideal state. But as the dust settles, the burden (and pleasures) of her late father's storage unit come into focus. How is she going to deal with it all?

Crowded by your Absence is about processing and transforming family archives – simultaneously treasured collections and hoarded trash – to wrestle with the phenomenon of object attachment as a coping mechanism. This body of work explores notions of human attachment to objects that hold both physical and emotional space, and how these occupy memory, identity, and grief. On a much more personal level, through her father's archive, Deedman questions what objects can tell us about coping with embodied trauma. Positioning the work in conversation with her father's belongings to explore how one "recognizes the embedded vulnerabilities of memory, inhibition, human existence, the precariousness of home, and the politics of belonging." Through inherited objects. Navigating both her father's absence and the surplus of his objects, Deedman explores how these items materialize relationships within domestic spaces. More importantly, considering how they mark endurance, trauma, and coping mechanisms; every collected item is a signifier and a reminder of her father's addiction and substance abuse.

Introduction

*Content Warning: Throughout this thesis, I talk about the lived experiences of domestic abuse, substance abuse, and confronting parental death head on. It's raw, confessional and weighted, but please know that this body of work has a happy ending.*²

*Crowded by Your Absence*³ is rooted in the transformative care of personal histories, inherited archives, their handwritten corresponding records, mental illness, coping mechanisms, grief and what it looks like to heal. This body of work talks heavily about addiction, and the physical manifestations of substance abuse and coping. It's important to note that this work comes from a place of deep empathy, and responsibility. This is my inheritance and I carry it with the utmost care, tending to it and nurturing its growth and understanding.

As I sit and evaluate my past and present work, I am hit with the realization of a through line through it all – grief. Although not my initial intention, a duality exists; the physical labour of making, grieving and healing has happened in the production of this body of work. My art practice was something my father and I never talked about. A point of contention and pain; he googled my name and a screenprint - confessional in nature that spoke directly to him, greeted him under the images tag on google. My mother called me later, relaying the message that my father, who I had not talked to in four years, called her in distress about his encounter. A hot creeping feeling crawled up my spine and enwrapped my skull with searing heat. The guilt swallowed me, and for weeks I faced the repercussions of my art practice, and fought internally whether I would continue to make work about my lived experiences.

On August 8th of 2018, my father went into the intensive care unit and never fully recovered. After ten years of no contact, I was immersed in my abuser's

² Foo, Stephanie. What My Bones Know. Ballantine Books, 21 Feb. 2023.Pg 5

³ Pearson, Mallory. "The Heaviest Rain We've Ever Had". KINGDOMS IN THE WILD, 2017, www.kingdomsinthewild.com/how-to-time-travel-by-mallory-pearson.

life as his primary caregiver outside of hospice. Unable to speak for himself, I now carried the burdens and pleasures of managing his personal collections while he was in a medically induced coma. Once he awoke, he and I had to navigate how and where his collections were going to live as he was given the news that he would never go back home. Heavy discussions took place to make sure that his possessions were being given the utmost care, that

everything would be kept, even though there was no money or space. This experience became the anchor of my thesis, caring for a man who hurt others because he was deeply hurt, and how that hurt embodied itself within our material worlds.

My father passed October 20th, 2020 due to renal failure. As his executor of his estate, and his relationships with family non-existent, I inherited everything. There has been great joy and sadness combing through his possessions and getting a glimpse of the inner workings of his mind. It feels like connection, one that we were never able to make when we both existed in the physical world. Due to the nature of his relationships, the COVID-19 pandemic, and personal financial strain, I made the decision to not hold a funeral for my father.

Dad, I am honoured to share this body of work with you. Your legacy and mine are now deeply entwined. It feels like the appropriate funeral I could never give you. I wish I could share this triumph with you. I hope you're proud.





October 20
Week 20
Saturday - Samedi
7:00

*I am crowded by your
absence.*

October 21
Week 21
Sunday - Dimanche
7:00

Nov 1st Nov 2012
S M T F S
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30

Personhood through Objecthood

"Does death have the capacity both to turn people into things and to bring inanimate objects to life?"⁴ or "will (our stories) highlight the extent to which human beings and thinghood overlap, the extent to which the us and the it slip-slide into each other?"⁵

Five objects hung, posed, documented, drawn, and printed. Reliquaries of a relationship that are framed within a white border hung on the walls – a pickle jar of cantabs, a vintage chalk line, a 1950's stuffed monkey, a crushed beer can and a torpedo lamp. Beside each, its companion, the same image paired with a ripped book page from my fathers personal records imposed over top.

This is my fathers formal introduction, a curated set of reliquaries denoting our complicated relationship. Within the lexicon of labour, The language of print is integral to this body of work, referencing the history of my fathers family, all who worked hard labour jobs to make ends meet in England and in Canada. These prints act as an indicator and reference of that labour and of my impulse to implement my fathers same coping mechanisms, to keep and collect. "I am my fathers daughter and always have been."⁶ I was a horrible painter, making one of something, never able to let it go. Every piece felt like a part of me, bringing them to life and to let them go to never be seen again was something I fought with. Printmaking was the remedy, the way in which I could create using the multiple, the very reason I was drawn to it in the first place. I am implementing those same coping mechanisms, documenting each item through my hand with tenderness, all a proxy for my father – this is my quality time with him, a ceremony, the act of bonding through his things. A personal transformation happens through the process of making each of these prints. They are a way of moving through our histories, freeing myself from the burden

4 Brown, Bill. *Thing Theory*. Critical Inquiry. Vol 28, 2001. Page 7

5 Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. Page 4

6 Wren, Lyra. *The Lost Girls: A Poetry Collection on Girlhood, Grief and Growing Up*. The Outsider Poet Press, L.L.C, 2023.

of their emotional weight. "Psychologist Jean Piaget (says), objects help us think about such things as number, space, time, causality, and life. Piaget reminds us that our learning is situated, concrete, and personal."⁷ I believe this is true for grief and healing as well, each object embodying the capabilities of both. We move through them, imprint on them leaving my own histories.

Each of these prints demand slowness both in their making and their processing. Jennifer Roberts, an art historian at Harvard University, tasks her students to pick a piece of artwork within a museum and have them sit in front of it for a minimum of three hours. Roberts goal was to create "opportunities for students to engage in deceleration, patience and immersive attention"⁸ I carried Roberts' ideology of slowly looking into the making of this work. Closely looking at each object, getting to know them most intimately; the weave of thread on the monkey, barren from years of coping, frayed rope ends that point to the pull of a tight chalk line, The fading of ink on the pickle jar label due to UV light while it anticipates being filled with can tabs, the beauty and imperfections of the torpedo lamps blue milk glass carefully embossed with florals, and the way the beer can reflected light in its crushed state.

The curation of the objects were well considered, to tell smaller stories within a larger one, they feed off each other as a series, but work seperately. Susan Hiller's writing about her installation displayed in the Freud Museum supports this. "Any collection of objects was an ambiguously bounded unit that told a particular story, and it was setting the boundaries that the story was told."⁹ Objects are not just things, but collectively a lens in which we look through to understand and digest our world. In an age of information overload and impersonal connections, this work was vital in understanding the emotional weight of objects and family histories (torpedo lamp and monkey), direct correlation of personal memory (chalkline and beer can) and coping mechanisms (cantabs). Although this work is in situ of personal narratives, I am conscious of "...at least two possible stories: one is the story that the narrator, in this case the artist thinks shes telling – the story teller's story – and the other is the story that the listener is understanding or hearing or imagining on the basis of the same objects"¹⁰ Relational aesthetics (in theory and in placement) are intentional here, allowing my viewer to create narratives based on the objects order or the objects picked, but if they choose to spend more time with them, their relationship with them will change. Spending time trying to read the

7 Sherry Turkle. *Evocative Objects : Things We Think With*. The MIT Press, 2007. Page 308-309

8 Roberts, Jennifer, L. The Power of Patience. Harvard Magazine. 2013 Issue 116, Page 40-43

9 Merewether, Charles. The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art. "Working Through Objects by Susan Hiller". London, Whitechapel, 2006. Page 42

10 Merewether, Charles. The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art. "Working Through Objects by Susan Hiller". London, Whitechapel, 2006. Page 42

obscured book pages layered over top, allowing the viewer a glimpse into the personal records of my father, and my personal messages to him on his own archive pages.

To curate means to care, but to manipulate this inherited archive pointedly, I needed to be aware of how power hierarchies and colonial ideologies play a significant role in institutional collections and how they can perpetuate harm. The embodiment of those power hierarchies are present, not just culturally but from a family/domestic perspective. In my formative years the umbrella of substance abuse shaded our lives, carving his dominance into my psyche – When I started caring for my father, for the first time in our relationship that power hierarchy had flipped. This was something I was immediately aware of and made sure I came from a place of care and understanding, making sure I was not perpetuating those same harmful power structures my father had instilled. I am now the holder of our family histories. I am intentional and delicate with what is put in front of you, constantly thinking about how my father would react to my choice of objects, their histories, or my handling of them. “It was the obligation of (the artist) to care for, preserve, study, and exhibit these culturally enriched things. Reputedly, this was for the same of cultural perpetuation: the transmission of values from one generation to the next.”¹¹ This is my obligation to my fathers archive. It is my responsibility to “(respect but be authentic to) an object’s intangible as well as tangible nature, and (to) collaborate in a meaningful way with (my father).”¹²



Top: Installation shot of *A Melancholic Archivation of Your Addiction, We Are What We Own and We Are What We Cherish* in FAB Gallery 2025, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Bottom: Installation shot of *Lord Beer Me Strength (2035 Hour of The Office)* and *I Haven't Heard Your Voice In Years, But I Still Have Conversations With Your Things* in FAB Gallery 2025, Edmonton, Alberta Canada

¹¹ Hein, Hilde S. “The Authority of Objects: From Regime Change to Paradigm Shift.” *Curator* Vol. 50, Issue 1, January 2007. Page 78

¹² Ogden, Sherelyn. “Understanding, Respect, and Collaboration in Cultural Heritage Preservation: A Conservator’s Developing Perspective.” *Library Trends*, vol. 56 no. 1, 2007, p. 275



A Melancholic Archivation of Your Addiction
 Lithography and Photopolymer Gravure on Mitsumata chine collod on BFK Rives
 21"x28" Individually, 2024.

A Melancholic Archivation of Your Addiction (Pickle Jar)

"Everything you ever let go of has claw marks on it."¹³

When my father was in his medically induced coma, we were told ahead of time that he would never be able to return to his home in Red Water, Alberta.

My husband and I prepared to enter his home – large boxes in tow, with a trailer to move it all. We entered his trailer with set rules imposed on ourselves.

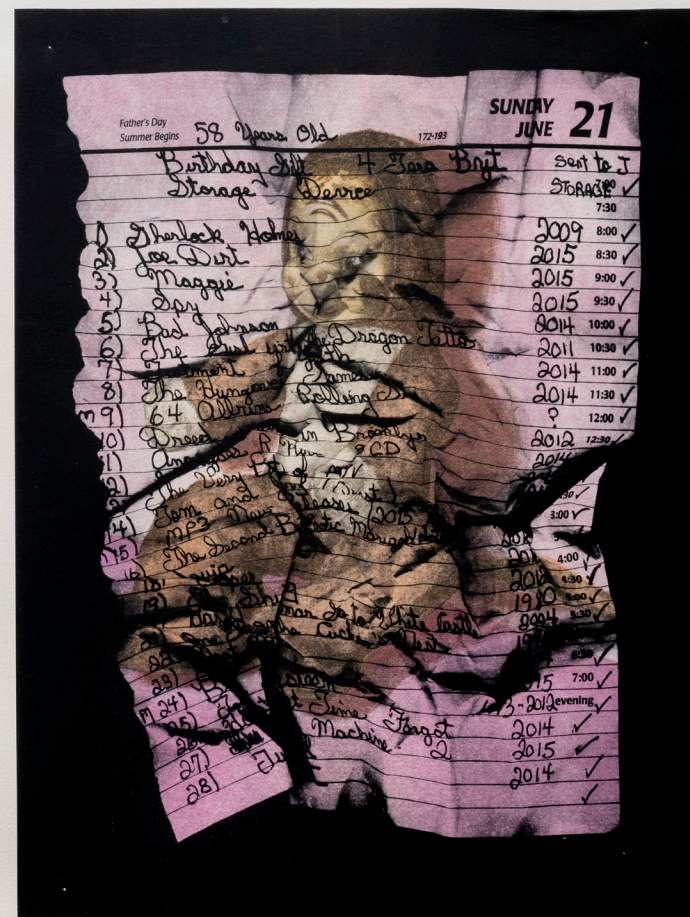
If it wasn't clearly garbage, we threw nothing away. This wasn't our home, and although I had not spoken to my father in ten years, I knew how he was – everything had a use and nothing was garbage. We spent a week meticulously packing and wrapping his belongings to place them in a storage unit till we could discuss with him how to move forward. We delegated tasks by room, and once finished one we would move onto the next. When

I entered the dining room I was faced with three large china cabinets. Expecting to open them up and find dishes, I was confronted with the detritus of his substance abuse; thousands of cantabs bagged and boxed and overflowing. We packed them up and put them into storage without question.

After his passing, during his storage unit clean out I was faced with the remnants of his addiction again. I kept a single box, which housed this overflowing pickle jar of can tabs.



¹³ Wallace, David Foster. Infinite Jest. Abacus, 1997.



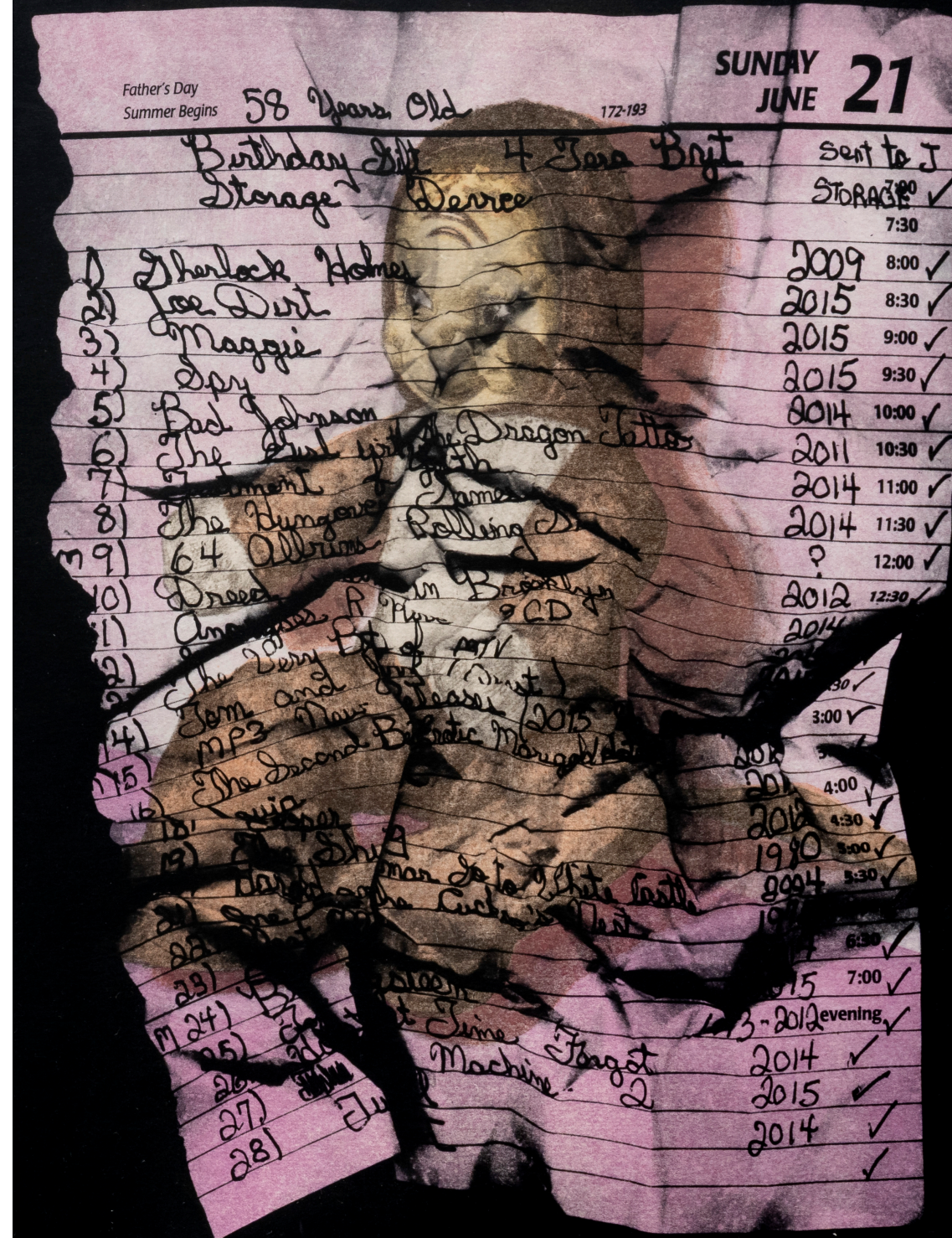
We Are What We Cherish
Lithography and Photopolymer Gravure on Mitsumata chine collod on BFK Rives
21"x28" Individually, 2025.

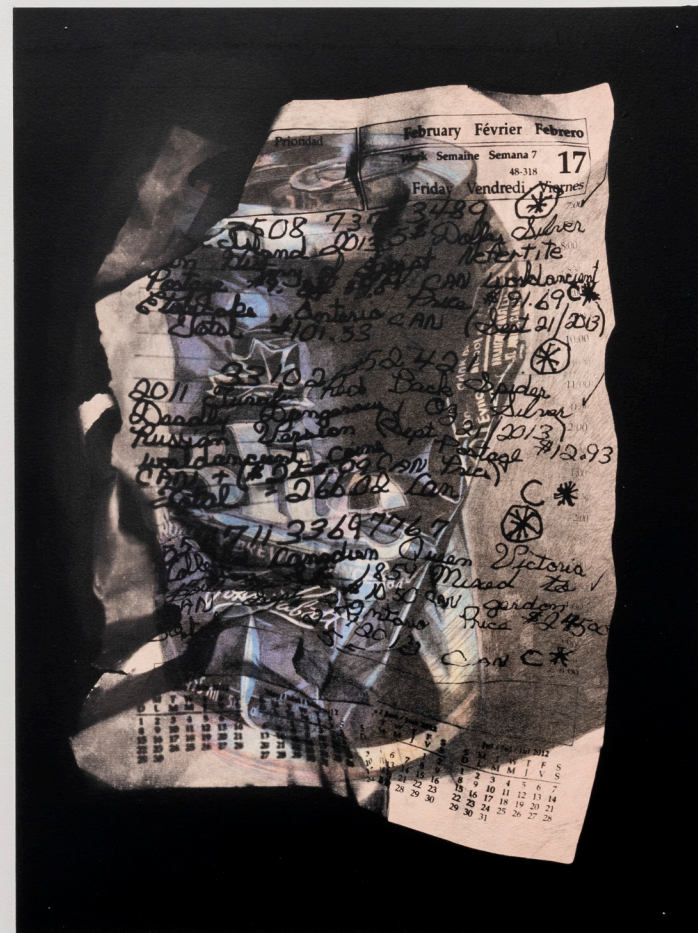
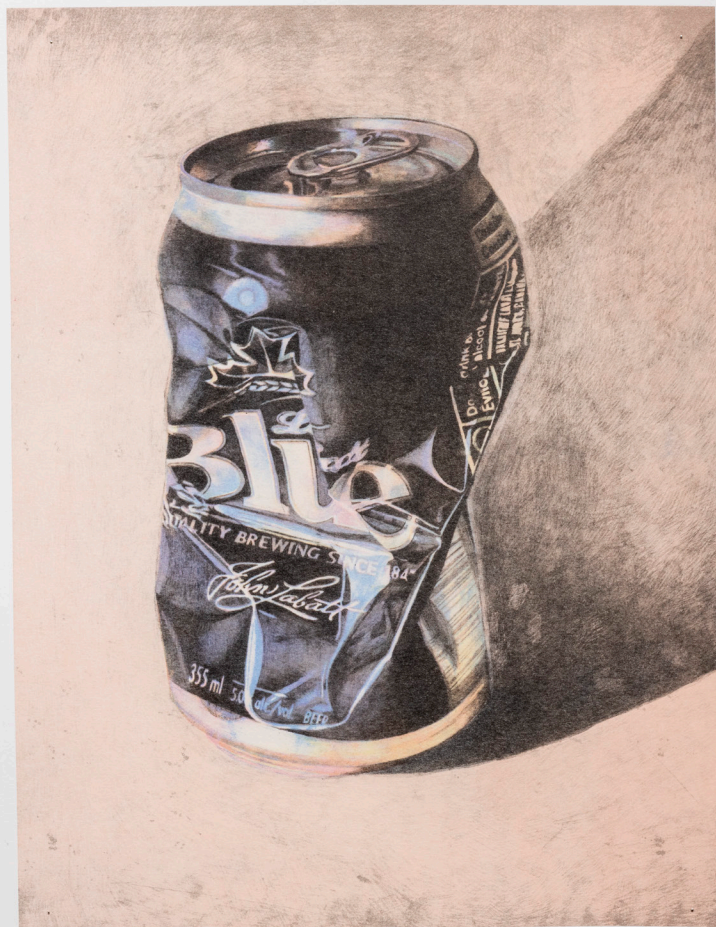
We Are What We Cherish (Monkey)

My father was severely neglected. While he was in a coma, his twin sister told me of the regular occurrence that my grandmother would take both my aunt and my father to the bar with her in their small town in Manitoba. She would leave the two of them in the car, while she drank inside for hours. "Donald

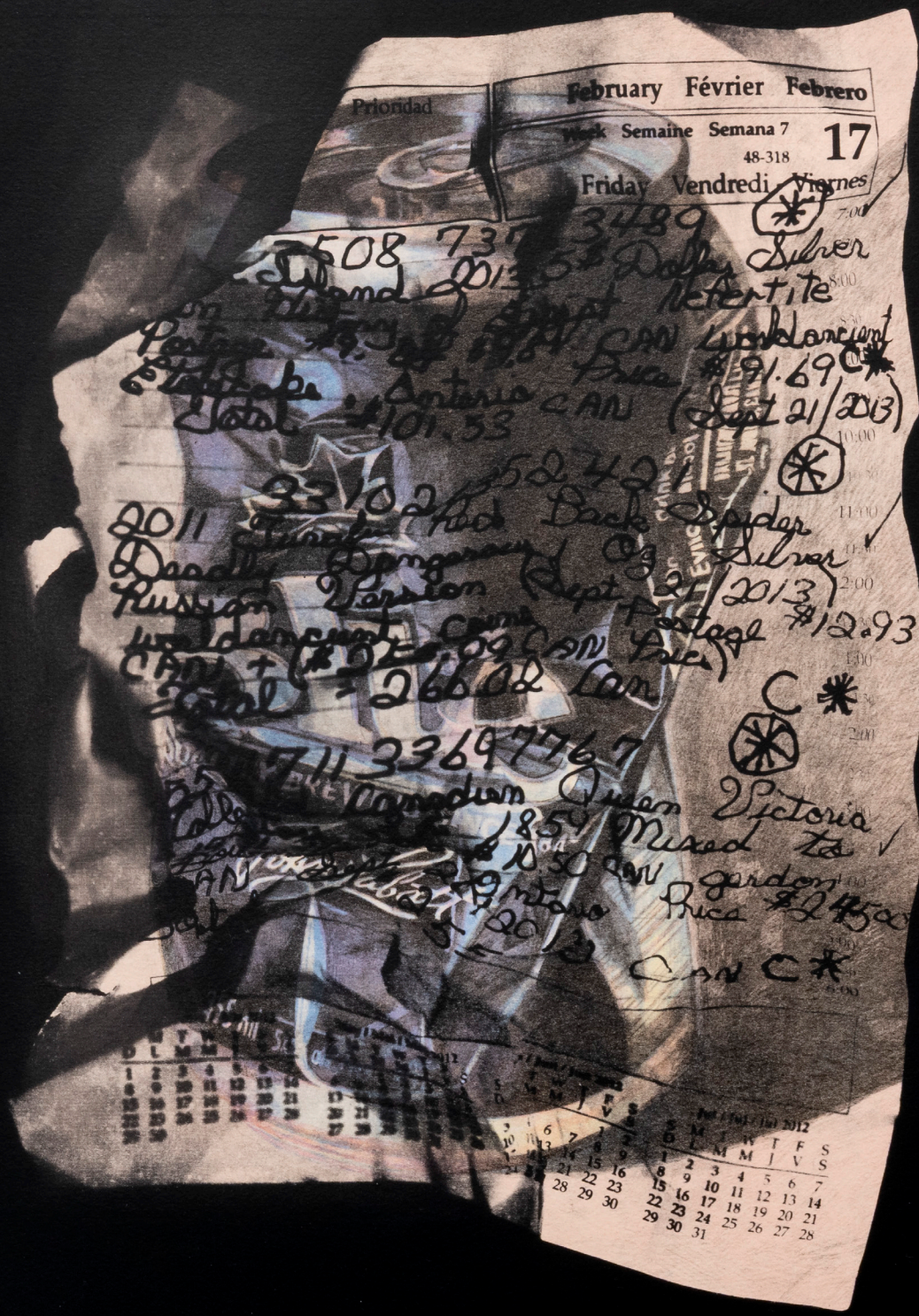
Winnicott introduced the phrase "transitional object" to refer to physical objects to which children form intense attachments as they develop autonomy from their parents."¹⁴ From my understanding my father learned to do this quickly, creating a connection with an inanimate object out of necessity to cope with the neglect he endured. He gave me this monkey long before I cut contact with him, I must have been a preteen, not fully understanding the weight of this object gifted to me. Even then I held it dear, my father equated love to objects, and when he would come home from working on the railroad for three months, his pockets were overflowing with trades money. He wasn't an affectionate man, someone I now understand was never given the proper tools to deal with his emotions. He did what made sense to him, he would try to show his love by buying things. This object held an emotional weight that all the other gifts didn't. It was a part of him and his history. It wasn't new or shiny, and it didn't reflect on what he thought I was interested in, it didn't feel like a purchase that was meant to buy my affection. I have cherished it for the past twenty one years and will continue to do so.

¹⁴ Frost, Randy O, and Gail Steketee. *Stuff*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 20 Apr. 2010. Page 49





Lord Beer Me Strength (2035 Hours of The Office)
Lithography and Photopolymer Gravure on Mitsumata chine collod on BFK Rives
21"x28" Individually, 2024.



Lord Beer Me Strength (2035 Hours of The Office) (Beer Can)

I would walk home from school and would open the door and be greeted by my father sitting at our makeshift patio kitchen table. Empty labatt blue beer cans would cover its surface, and he would be sitting in the same plastic lawn chair he was in when I left for school. I would approach with caution, even though I knew he was much nicer when he was drunk. There sat a man in the depths of his depression clutching to the only thing that numbed his pain.

This object is the only one in the series that wasn't from my fathers personal collection. Bought, drank, crushed, drawn and printed, an authentic indicator of my fathers most harmful coping mechanism. It's title, a pairing of my own coping mechanism, repeating the same television show endlessly to drown out my own racing thoughts.



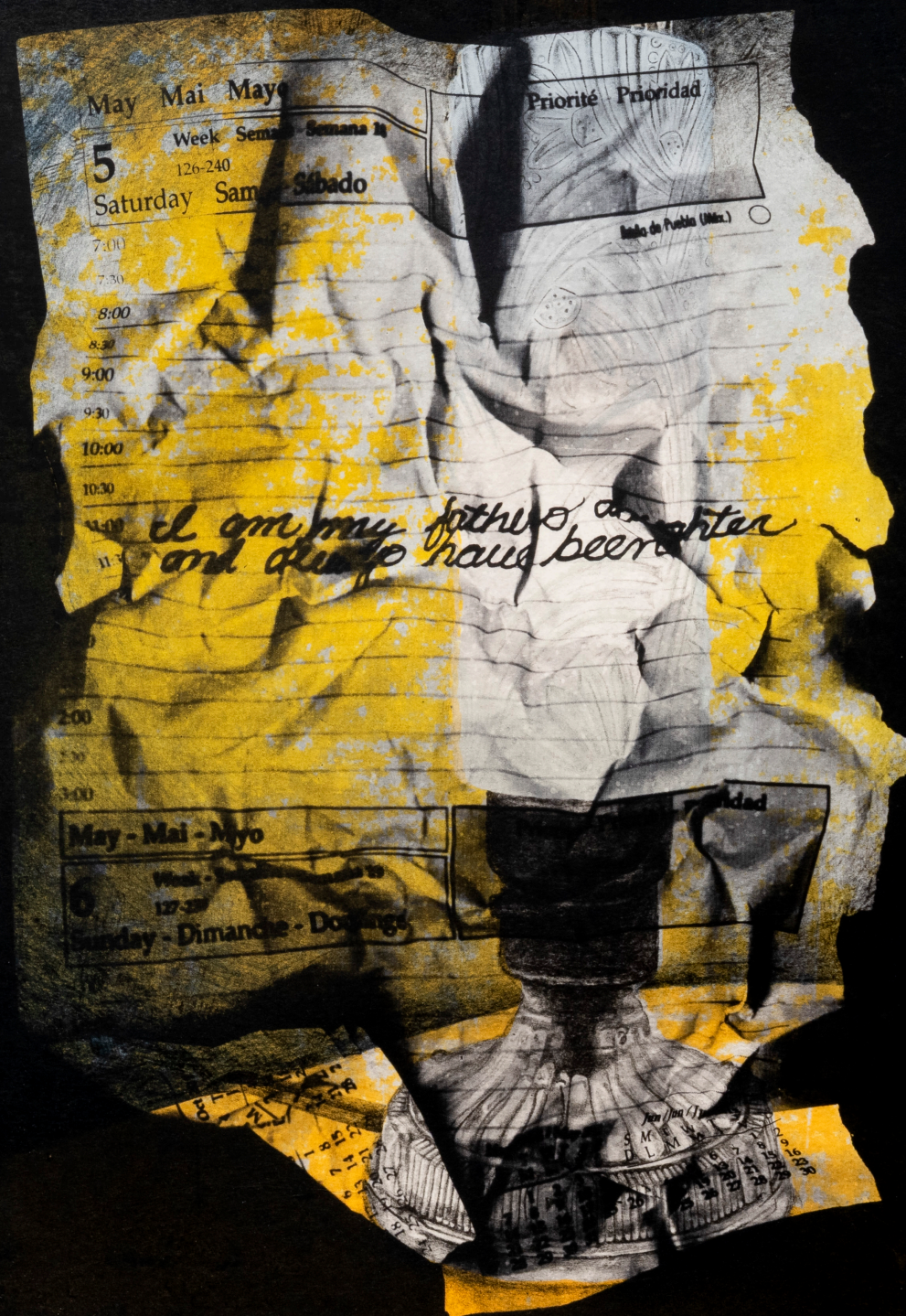
I Haven't Heard Your Voice In Years, But I Still Have Conversations With Your Things
Lithography and Photopolymer Gravure on Mitsumata chine collé on BFK Rives
21"x28" Individually, 2023.



***I Haven't Heard Your Voice In Years,
But I Still Have Conversations With Your Things (Torpedo Lamp)***

What I know of this object is very little. A set of torpedo lamps that belonged to my grandmother on my fathers side, always displayed but never used. My entire life they sat on a shelf as a pair, never separate, never plugged in and never turned on . My father kept them as mementos of my grandparents, removed from their utilitarian purpose. The only time I have ever seen either of them turned on was for this print, a posed still life of the object in use. They currently sit in my studio not plugged in and never turned on. A memento to my father and my grandparents who I never met. "I am my fathers daughter and always have been."¹⁵

¹⁵ Wren, Lyra. The Lost Girls: A Poetry Collection on Girlhood, Grief and Growing Up. Outsider Poet Press, LLC, 28 July 2023.



We Are What We Do With Our Hands¹⁶ (19,534 Can Tabs)

This work is an investigation of the physical manifestations of the routines of surviving, hoarding, and substance abuse within domestic settings in rural Alberta. Inspired by Doris Salcedo's work *Untitled, (1550 chairs)*, she describes the work as the "topography of war"¹⁷ not from a cultural standpoint but from a civilian/victim stand point. I see this work in a similar way, the topography of substance abuse and coping within rural Alberta. In the analysis of Salcedo's work, Author "Ann Cvetkovich acknowledges that, often as ephemeral as the traumatizing experiences that generate them, must nevertheless be integrated into public culture as archive resources, thereby also revealing the need to reinvent the archive as itself a form of mourning."¹⁸ Salcedo's work brings the domestic to the public, revealing the trauma of displacement to the public's eye. Juxtaposing her idea to archives and collected histories in rural areas, usually idyllic snapshots of prairie life, there is no mention of the hardships of isolation, and lack of social services for individuals seeking care or reprieve in rural areas. This is prevalent in rural museums, romanticising what it means to live a "humble" life. In my home town of Mirror, Alberta, their archives have always romanticized ideas of what it was like living in an area that was pivotal to the history of Alberta's railway systems. At the front of our local museum was a giant ball of twine, said to have been made by the general store owners in the early 1900's. They would keep every piece of twine and tie them together, each piece from the shipments of goods they would receive from the railways. There is no note on how long the owners did this, but unraveled the museum claims that it would be 12.98 kilometers long. The rug of cantabs is a counter to this, Cvetkovich's idea of reinventing the archive as a place of mourning, I offer up a common reality of what the routines of mourning can look like in rural townships.

¹⁶ A quotation inspired by Louise Bourgeois - "I am not what I am, I am what I do with my hands"

¹⁷ Martin Schulze. "Doris Salcedo's impressive chair installation – What you should know " 2019-12-09. <https://publicdelivery.org/doris-salcedo-chairs/>. Accessed 2025-02-20.

¹⁸ Lauzon, Claudette. *The Unmaking of Home in Contemporary Art*

Legal scholar Sarah Harding states:

"...The things and places we identify as "cultural property...are the products of and reflect our collective experiences in their creation, in their formal dedication, and in the on-going reinscription of their meaning... But the significance of much (if not most) cultural property and heritage originates not in the public realm, but in personal experiences, everyday life, and local contexts."¹⁹

The rest of this work surrounds the can tabs, reflecting and juxtaposing my lived experiences of the gravity of coping with mental illness in domestic spaces. Four unfinished tables hang on the wall, looking directly at their own imprint on six curtains hanging in the window. The tables, made by my father, and their imprints, printed by me are a juxtaposition of the "healthier" side of coping – making. These tables, like the can tabs, held no utilitarian purpose or known monetary value, but my father carried both to every place he lived till we moved him into continuing care.

Sir James Frazer's piece *The Golden Bough* describes the lure of possessions through something he calls "Sympathetic Magic". He describes two kinds; the Law of Similarity and the Law of Contagion. The law similarity is the act of categorizing objects that are in sympathy or in other words share properties that are related. The Law of Contagion is connecting objects due to their proximity or if they were touching. Although these objects were not collected, the octagonal tables exist within both of these laws, but not just within their physical properties. Made from reclaimed wood they are a symbol of the transformation, labour and care that he prioritized when he was able to dig himself out of his alcohol addiction. The law of contagion "... has to do with the desire to be connected to someone or something else, but rather with the fear of being disconnected from a part of oneself"²⁰ These tables are markers for larger desires, My father was a dreamer, but suffered greatly from trauma and addiction. These tables exemplify my fathers desires of leaving a mark on the world through the things he makes and builds.

This work is also about routine. The routines of collection, substance abuse, coping mechanisms, and printmaking. The pinching of a can tab, wiggling it back and forth 19,534 times, the measuring, cutting and screwing together four octagon tables and one more twice their size, the dance of rolling the tables up in ink to imprint six identical curtains onto their surfaces. It's a shared labour, one that feels like connection as makers, but as individuals needing to cope.

¹⁹ Harding, Sarah. "Cultural Property and the Limitations of Preservation." *Law and Policy*, Vol. 25, No.1, January 2003. Pg. 17-18

²⁰ Frost, Randy O, and Gail Steketee. *Stuff*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 20 Apr. 2010. Page 45



Installation Shot of *We Are What We Do With Our Hands* (19,534 Can Tabs)
Relief print on curtains and wall, Inherited Table Tops, Can Tabs and Rug.
Variable sizes, FAB Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, 2025.

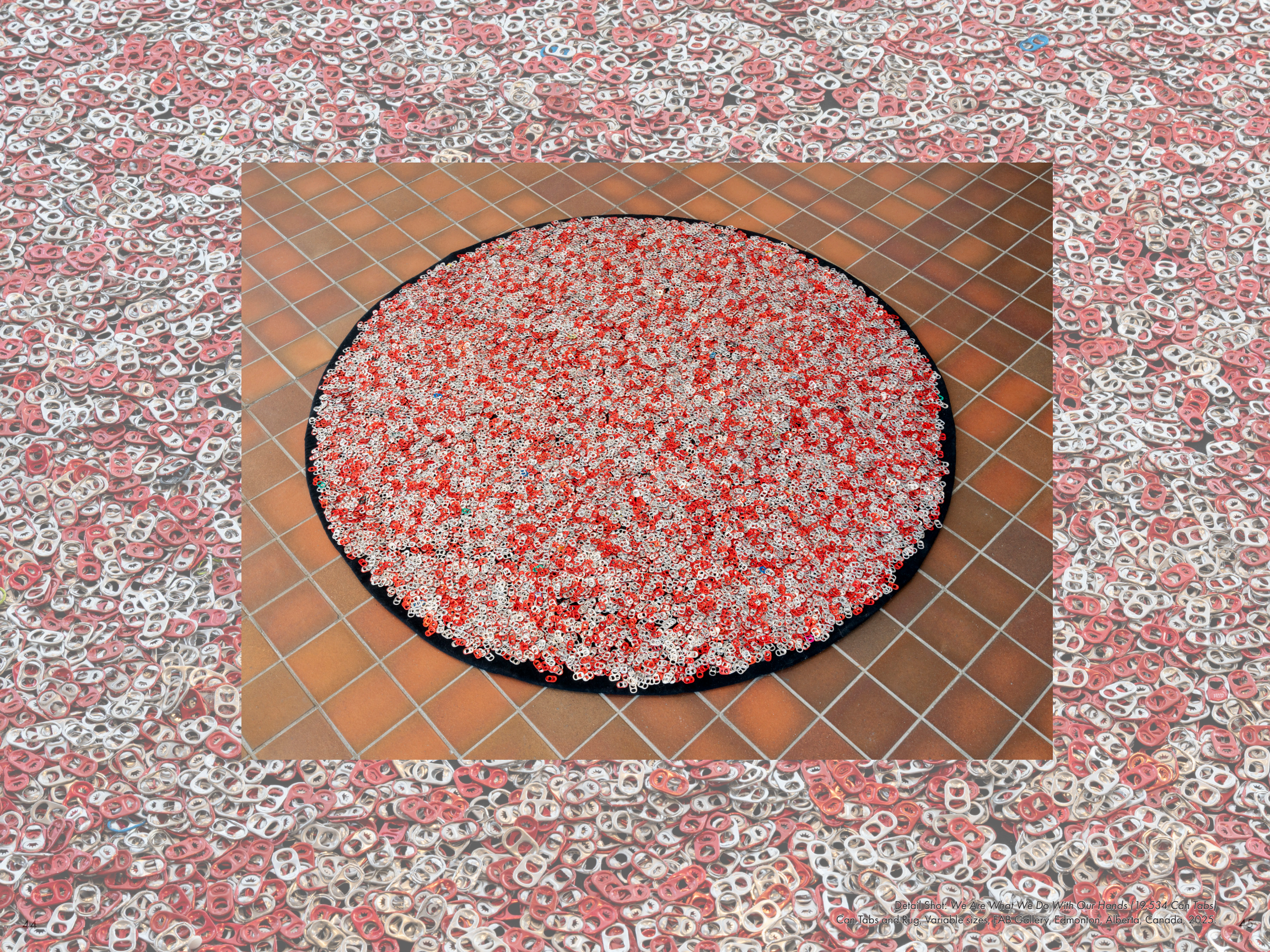


Top: Installation Shot of *We Are What We Do With Our Hands* (19,534 Can Tabs)
Relief Print on Curtains, Variable sizes, FAB Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, 2025.

Bottom: Installation Shot of *We Are What We Do With Our Hands* (19,534 Can Tabs)
Inherited Table Tops, Variable sizes, FAB Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, 2025.

Right: Installation Shot of *We Are What We Do With Our Hands* (19,534 Can Tabs)
Chine Colle of Inherited Table, Can Tabs on Rug, Variable sizes, FAB Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, 2025.





Detail Shot: We Are What We Do With Our Hands (19,534 Can Tabs)
Can Tabs and Rug, Variable sizes, FAB Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, 2025.

Most Days I am A Museum Of Things I Want To Forget & Family Portrait (Your Last Attempt at Archiving)

My fathers death wasn't abnormal or unexpected. We knew it was coming, together tiptoeing around his mortality, him mostly trying to avoid the topic. He passed in the emergency room of Westlock hospital without family present, a weight I still bear the burden of. "Death may occur in a variety of settings as a result of violence or accident. However – excluding deaths resulting from colonialism, wars, and violence – in contemporary Western society death occurs overwhelmingly in hospitals, giving medicine a prominent role... bereavement services in particular have emerged as a psychological solution for managing grief."²¹ Directly after his death, we were tasked to clean out Dennis's continuing care room within a week. I entered the room, bed made while the rest of his things were sitting in their final resting place where he placed them. The place he inhabited for the last two years of his life felt sanitized – as if made to erase his bodily presence other than his earthly objects. The only item present on his sanitized bed was a laminated sheet of paper sitting in the center of his made bed; on the front a generic poem about loss and grief and on the back a list of services to dealing with bereavement. It wasn't mine to keep, but to only look and read, another poke to an already open wound.

These two images are a direct response to the dualities of mortality and the cold treatment of family after a passing within medical systems. This is not a direct critique of the health care workers, but of a larger system that favors profit and money over human lives. These images are different sides of the same coin, one cannot exist without the other as "the universality of death is accompanied by unique and diverse experiences of grief that touch each of us and are worthy of exploration."²²

21 Ord, Robyn L. "IT'S LIKE A TATTOO": Rethinking Dominant Discourses on Grief. Canadian Social Work Review, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2009, Page 196

22 Ord, Robyn L. "IT'S LIKE A TATTOO": Rethinking Dominant Discourses on Grief. Canadian Social Work Review, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2009, Page 195

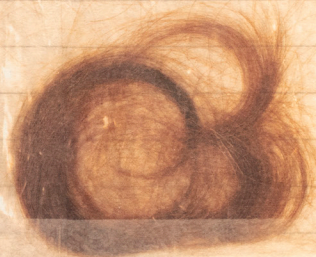
The one on the left, an open notebook; taped inside is a cutting of my fathers baby hair paired and beside it my braid after a routine haircut. These objects are placed on top of the last used page of one of his notebooks, a deteriorated attempt at a last entry, to cope and archive his ever growing collection even in a home. Imposed underneath, an image of his continuing care room right after his death. On the right is my open weekly planner from October 2020, depicting the conversations and the upheaval of everyday life that happens directly after loss. For both of these pieces their scale is intentional, letting the viewer access the written hand readily (mine and his), depicting the responsibilities of inheritance - remembrance, paperwork, selfcare, notification of family, rest and taxes. "I do this not to make a spectacle out of my suffering – I'm not a victim or a narcissist – but to make these works immersive and confrontational."²³ The lithographs from before were small intentionally, to be read slowly, this work is meant to give the viewer immediate access, loss even when expected is abrupt, their display and size mimicking that feeling.



Installation: *Family Portrait (Your Last Attempt at Archiving)* and *Most Days I Am A Museum of Things I Want To Forget*
Digital on Okawara mounted to Birch Panel, 40" x 60" Individually, FAB Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, 2025

23 Legleitner, Emily. want and fear. 2023. University of Alberta, Master of Fine Arts (Printmaking)

#1397 ~ Platoon #6.99
 # #1398 - 2 Hitchcock Classic
 The Birds #1 of 2 #6.99
 # #1399 Psycho - Alfred Hitchcock 6.99
 # #1400 - Superman Returns
 Wide Screen Edition
 # #1401 1/2 Strong
 # #1402 Superman



Family Portrait (Your Last Attempt at Archiving)
 Digital Print on Okawara Mounted on Birch Panel
 40" x 60"

OCTOBER

Monday
19

Call Kim (social worker) Westlock
left message

Tuesday
20

Wednesday
21

Mildred wet appointment 1:30pm

Thursday
22

Cancelled

SNAP Screen class 6-9pm

Friday
23

10am @ Westlock funeral home

Death Certificate x10

Westlock storage facility @ noon

13:24

Saturday Clean out
24 Dennis's room
we need

boxes + tape
garbage bags

Sunday
25

week

also Find AHS card,
SIN card, photocopy will
AISH info.

Find a picture of
Dennis.

inventory documentation
for selling?

Phone Meeting

possibly cancer
- blood count going down

Heart failure - blood transfusion
extra fluids to body

Scan in January for cancer

* losing blood someplace but don't know
where.

Call to notify of death.

Debbie

Pam

Don

AISH

CRA

cpp-b. - call about death benefit.

RBC Bank

* next week - pick up ashes.

What were Dennis's mom and dad's names?

Dennis inventory from CC

- 60 binders of coins.
- 2 boxes of coins in envelopes.
- 1 box of daytimers/books.

My Body Burns With The Weight of Your Belongings

800 coins hang on the wall. Below, a coffee table overcome with 60 binders, and 683 manilla folders of coins. The remains of a curated collection that represent the physical weight of the pleasure and burdens of my fathers physical inheritance. Two weeks before my father passed we were in constant communication about his coin collection in his room. He was sure that the continuing care staff were stealing his things. His paranoia wasn't new, but it had reached new heights. "This is why owning absolutely any object is always so satisfying and so disappointing at the same time: a whole series lies behind every single object, making it a source of anxiety."²⁴ My father wasn't a man of wealth, he was on AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped), a social program in Alberta that provides an income for those who can not work due to physical, developmental, or mental health disabilities. These coins, cabinets of DVD's and a TV were all my father had in his room, he clung to them, his "...possessions (provided) a sense of security, reminiscent of Winnicott's transitional objects."²⁵ No longer to develop autonomy from his parents, these coins felt like the transitional objects for a man facing his own mortality – seeking comfort and control when it was in low supply. I can now identify he was coping through his collection and possessions which can be attributed to compensation theory, and terror management theory. "Compensation theory suggests that people who question their self-worth need evidence to reassure themselves of their value and importance. Physical objects (in this case coins) provide clear and tangible verification of mastery of the world."²⁶ And terror management theory, when specifically facing the fear of death. "(Fear) encourages tribalism, by making us want to affiliate with a group identity (or a group of objects) that will outlive us."²⁷ A mastery and fear is present, the methods of record keeping and archiving meticulous. My fathers written hand on each singular coin's domicile, creating a sense of control of his surroundings.

24 Baudrillard, Jean. *The System of Objects*. New York, NY: Verso, 1996. Page 86

25 Frost, Randy O, and Gail Steketee. *Stuff*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 20 Apr. 2010. Page 50

26 Frost, Randy O, and Gail Steketee. *Stuff*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 20 Apr. 2010. Page 55

27 Cain, Susan. *Bittersweet : How Sorrow and Longing Make Us Whole*. New York, Crown, 2022. Page 177



Top: *My Body Burns With The Weight of Your Belongings*
Inherited Coin Collection, Variable Sizes, 2025, FAB Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Bottom: Details of *My Body Burns With The Weight of Your Belongings*
Inherited Coin Collection, Variable Sizes, 2025, FAB Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada





I Am Not A Daughter I Am A Vessel of Grief
Photopolymer Gravure on Okawara Mounted to Birch Panel
and Laser Engraving on Inherited Clothing, Varied Sizes, 2025
FAB Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta Canada

I Am Not a Daughter I Am a Vessel Of Grief

Tattoos are not static, they blur, fade, age, lift, shrink, expand and scar - anticipatory indicators of the physical manifestations of my grief. Due to a slight allergy to some tattoo inks, the outlines of my tattoos can become raised. This usually happens with a sudden temperature change, but I have also noted that it can happen through the physical symptoms of anxiety and panic attacks. A crawling that starts from my feet and travels up my entire body, one of my first indicators my body is actively in fight mode. I have also noted that this can happen during intense bouts of grief. Faced with something that triggers a memory in public, My heart tugs and my body begins to tingle and my tattoos start to itch. "Tattoos are a way in which grief can be embodied on the skin. Tattooing one's grief can be an act of resistance to the notion that grief can or should be cured...By putting tattoos on my body (and imposing my tattoos where they exist on my skin on a representation of my fathers corporeal body) I am using (both) as a site of resistance by not conforming to dominant, normative expressions of grief."²⁸ I knew a tattoo for my father would happen eventually, but had no idea what the image would be or when I would get it. As I made this work, it was clear, He spent so much time sharing his collections with me, it only seemed fitting to get some of them on my body permanently. For this installation I received two tattoos; an american traditional rendition of my fathers 1950's childhood stuffed monkey on my shin, and a neotraditional bolo tie made of cantabs housing the pendant of the necklace he was wearing when he passed. Referencing Catherine Opie's photograph titled "Self Portrait/Cutting"²⁹ I then photographed my body right after being tattooed; one image of my back showing the bolo tie tattoo with me grasping my fathers ashes behind my back, and its companion, my legs forward facing, confronting the monkey for the second time.

²⁸ Ord, Robyn L. "IT'S LIKE A TATTOO": Rethinking Dominant Discourses on Grief. *Canadian Social Work Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2009, Page 206

²⁹ Opie, Catherine. "Self-Portrait/Cutting." Whitney.org, 2015, whitney.org/collection/works/8990.

Before his passing, everytime I would go to visit my father he would pull out any new additions to his collection. At this time in his life it was DVD's, something he could purchase at the Giant Tiger just up the road when he was out on his motorized scooter. We would talk about their plots, actors, or if he had watched them yet and which one were his favorites (RED with Bruce Willis). If he hadn't watched them yet, he would show me how he was archiving them, and how quickly (or slowly) he was filling his notebooks. This is where we bonded, sharing our interests and discussing their intricacies. This installation is me sharing my collection with him. A curated collection of my own that bears no physical weight, Laser engravings where my tattoos exist on my body on to his clothing in the same areas. Clothing is made for a single utilitarian purpose, to hold the body, my fathers jeans and shirt float in the center of the room empty, denoting the physical loss of my father.





Left and Right: *I Am Not A Daughter I Am A Vessel of Grief*
 Photopolymer Gravure on Okawara Mounted to Birch Panel
 Photographer: Keil Hunka
 30"x40", 2025



Tattoos as Self Care in Grief Work

Preparatory and in the aftermath – It's self care in its most basic form, sitting with myself and listening to what my body needs. Getting tattooed is about slowing down. I pack meals, water bottles, books, headphones, devices, and extra clothes, getting ready to sit in an uncomfortable position for as long as possible. Tattoos hurt, the older I get the worse I am at getting tattooed but for me this is not a deterrent. It feels like I earned it, sitting well, working through the pain in a similar fashion in which I'd sit with my anxiety and grief. For me there is only joy in tattoo's, even outside the scope of a memorial piece, it was a way for me to reclaim my body from years of disordered eating and self esteem issues. Getting to exist with pieces of art permanently marked on my body helped reshape my identity. In the aftermath, a large open wound that needs tender care for weeks. In the first few days after a tattoo, I relish in the rushing feeling of my blood coursing through my body to the site of the tattoo, a reminder that my body is doing its best to take care of me. As I already implemented the use of tattooing as a method of self care, this installation came together very intuitively. Directly accessing my grief and looking back on my own coping mechanisms, I hope to remove the performative aspects of grieving publicly, and come to it authentically. Following rule number eight of Sister Corita Kent's Immaculate Heart Art School she suggests "Don't try to create and analyze at the same time, they're different processes"³⁰ I sat in my grief, reaching out to see what felt authentic to my process of coping. Thinking about how my father wrestled with his own suffering, I asked myself if there was a symbol, object or marker that denoted my pain specifically. Collecting tattoo's was my direct response to his passing, defaulting to a process outside of art making that is only associated with joy. In the year after his death, I accumulated seven medium to large tattoos. They were "a means of coping, (embodying) my experience (of grief, joy) and pain with tattooing."³¹ Grief fundamentally changes you, I interact with the world differently because of it. It only seemed fitting to permanently alter myself in its name.

30 "Ten Rules | Corita.org." www.corita.org, www.corita.org/tenrules.

31 Ord, Robyn L. "IT'S LIKE A TATTOO": Rethinking Dominant Discourses on Grief. *Canadian Social Work Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2009, Page 196



Detail of *I Am Not A Daughter I Am A Vessel of Grief*
Laser Engraving on Inherited Clothing, Variable Size, 2025
FAB Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Tattoos as Curated Collections

Like printmaking, tattooing enables my desire to collect. My process for getting tattooed is one of a curator and of a collector. I seek out artists whose portfolio I like, looking at their colour theory, linework, compositions, and style. With no guarantee that they'll take me on as a client, I email them with my idea. There is a sense of gambling, the same feeling one would get while bidding for an item. "Most scholars who study collecting seem to agree that a collection must be a set of objects, meaning more than one, and that the items must be related in some way – they must have some kind of cohesive theme. They also must be actively acquired, meaning there must be some kind of passion or fire to seek out and obtain them."³² Once the tattoo artist accepts me as a client, I let them run with my idea, no specifics other than general things I want included and allow them to make their own interpretations. There is a sense of mystery, one of the same that drew me to printmaking in the first place. My canvas is limited, although my collection holds no physical space outside of my body, I am aware of the same theory Susan Hiller talks about in relation to groups of objects. Every artist, placement, and situational relationship are considered when getting a tattoo. Even though they are not considered objects, they still tell a collective story. I am the art piece, outwardly portraying the things I cherish, telling a story of my own lived experiences and coping mechanisms.

Tattoo work by:

Jessie Beans, Lee Brooker, Anne Cornelson, Kyla Evans, Antony Flemming, Ryan Gagne, Sydney Mason³³, Katrina Rowsell, Brent Smith, and Mitchel Von Trapp.

³² Frost, Randy O, and Gail Steketee. *Stuff*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 20 Apr. 2010. Page 52

³³ Sydney Mason is the artist who designed and tattooed me for this body of work. [instagram.com/sydney_mason](https://www.instagram.com/sydney_mason)





Left and Right:
Detail of *I Am Not A Daughter I Am A Vessel of Grief*
Laser Engraving on Inherited Clothing, Variable Size
2025, FAB Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada



Reflection

Through the majority of my masters, I had the honour of sharing space with Richard Boulet. While in a deep discussion about mental health and art, he summed up my work in a single sentence; "Been Harmed, Haved Harmed, Can Heal."³⁴

This work embodies what it means and what it looks like to succumb, cope, grieve and to heal in the past (family histories) and the present. Through Mourning and Melancholia,³⁵ This work was me flowing from one to the other now with intention. Not even realizing it, when I first began this body of work in 2021 I was situated in melancholia, my own desire to hold on and be wholly consumed by the physical and emotional weight of my fathers things. There was the unresolved trauma of what it means to be a caregiver to someone who was the incendiary source of pain and trauma in my formative years. I was clinging desperately to what was left of my father and allowing it to imprint on me because that's all I had left. We had so little time together and I was grasping at anything to keep him close or to understand who he was and who I am. Regardless of my intent, I am my father's daughter whether I want to be or not. Spending critical time with his things has allowed me to move into meaningful mourning, sitting with and realizing the joy that can exist in this body of work, and in the work of healing. I take these lessons and skills into community care, committed to developing and theorizing arts methods as a way to explore how trauma and grief becomes embedded in our material worlds.

It is important to note that I am not a psychologist, this work is the labour of me trying to understand my own coping mechanisms and where they come from, putting in the work to heal from decades of harm that have passed down. This is not meant to be a document to diagnose, but rather to reflect on my lived experiences with coping in the same way my father did. This is a companion to the work, not necessary to understand it, but to compliment it. Just another part of intertwining my legacy with a man who I wish I got more time with.

³⁴ This was from an in person discussion and cannot find a source other then from Richard Boulet.

³⁵ Freud, Sigmund. Mourning and Melancholia. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume 14, 1914-1916. Page 243-258



Bibliography

- Atkinson, Meera. *The Poetics of Transgenerational Trauma*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2017
- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Orion Press, 1964.
- Balfour, Barbara. *The What and Why of Print*. Perspectives on Contemporary Printmaking, 2018
- Baudrillard, Jean. *The System of Objects*. New York, NY: Verso, 1996.
- Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. 1st Mariner Books ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007.
- Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Brollo, Deidre. *Untying the Knot: Memory and Forgetting in Contemporary Print Work*. Perspectives on Contemporary Printmaking, 2018.
- Brown, Bill. *Thing Theory*. Critical Inquiry, Autumn 2001
- Boltanski, Christian. *Research and Presentation of All That Remains of my Childhood 1944-1950*. Documents of Contemporary Art: Whitechapel Gallery: The Archive
- Durga Chew-Bose. *Too Much and Not the Mood*. HarperCollins, 11 Apr. 2017.
- Cain, Susan. *Bittersweet: How Sorrow and Longing Make Us Whole*. New York, Crown, 2022.
- Clavir, Miriam. "Conservation and Cultural Significance." In *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas, and Uncomfortable Truths*. Edited by A. Richmond and A. Bracker. London: Elsevier, Butterworth-Heinemann, 2009. Pg. 139- 149
- Dauber, Kenneth. *The Logic of Sentiment: Stowe, Hawthorne, Melville*. New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.
- Foo, Stephanie. *What My Bones Know*. Ballantine Books, 21 Feb. 2023.
- Foote, Catherine E., and Arthur W. Frank. "Foucault and Therapy: The disciplining of Grief." *Reading Foucault for Social Work* (1999): 157-187.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Mourning and Melancholia*. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume 14, 1914-1916. Page 243-258
- Frost, Randy O, and Gail Steketee. *Stuff*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 20 Apr. 2010.
- Frazer, James George. 2009. *The Golden Bough*. [Electronic Resource] : A Study of Magic and Religion. Floating Press. <https://search-ebscohost-com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat03710a&AN=alb.7648108&site=eds-live&scope=site>.
- Harding, Sarah. "Cultural Property and the Limitations of Preservation." *Law and Policy*, Vol. 25, No.1, January 2003. Pg. 17-36
- Harman, Graham. *Object-Oriented Ontology*. Penguin UK, 1 Mar. 2018.
- Hein, Hilde S. "The Authority of Objects: From Regime Change to Paradigm Shift." *Curator: The Museum Journal*, vol. 50, no. 1, Jan. 2007, pp. 77–85
- Higonnet, Anne. *Pictures of Innocence : The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood*. New York, N.Y., Thames and Hudson, 1998.
- Hiller, Susan. *Working Through Objects, 1994*, Documents of Contemporary Art: Whitechapel Gallery: The Archive. MIT Press and White Chapel Press. 2006

Hunt, Dallas. *"Nikikîwân 1: Contesting Settler Colonial Archives Through Indigenous Oral History"* Canadian Literature 230/231 (Autumn 2016)

Huyssen, Andreas. *Present Pasts Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford Univ. Press, 2009.

Jarrett, Christian. "The Psychology of Stuff and Things." *The Psychologist*, vol. 26, 2013, pp. 560–565., thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-26/edition-8/psychology-stuff-and-things.

Kingsfather, Erika. "From Activism to Artistic Practice: (Re)Imagining Indigenous Women's Labour Activism in Contemporary Art". *RACAR*, Volume 47, Issue 1, 2022, 58-71

Lauzon, Claudette. *The Unmaking of Home in Contemporary Art*. University of Toronto Press, 2017

Carmen Maria Machado. *In the Dream House*. Graywolf Press, 5 Nov. 2019.

McCurdy, Jennette. *I'm Glad My Mom Died*. Simon & Schuster, 9 Aug. 2022.

Nake, Frieder. *Printing Plates and Pixel Matrix: The Mechanisation of Memory*. Perspectives on Contemporary Printmaking: Critical Writing Since 1986. Manchester University Press, 2018. Page 196-206

Ogden, Sherelyn. "Understanding, Respect and Collaboration in Cultural Heritage Preservation: A Conservator's Developing Perspective." *Library Trends*, Vol. 56, No. 1, Summer 2007. Pg. 275-287

Ozeki, Ruth. *The Book of Form and Emptiness*. S.I., Penguin Publishing Group, 2021.

Parkinson, Liz. *Lost and Found: The Recovery of Wonder in Collection and Display*. Printopolis, 2017

Pearson, Mallory. "The Heaviest Rain We've Ever Had". *KINGDOMS IN THE WILD*, 2017, www.kingdomsinthewild.com/how-to-time-travel-by-mallory-pearson.

Pye, Elizabeth, *"The Meaning of Objects. Caring for the past: Issues in Conservation for Archaeology and Museums"*. James and James, 2001

Roberts, Jennifer L. *Contact: Art and the Pull of Print*. Princeton University Press, 2024

Rubin-Kunda, Lezli. *At Home: Talks with Canadian Artists about Place and Practice*. Goose Lane, 2018.

Slate, Jenny. *Little Weirds*. Little, Brown, 5 Nov. 2019.

Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Penguin Books Ltd, 2003.

Stewart, Susan. *On Longing : Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham, Duke University Press, 1993.

Turkle, Sherry. *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*. MIT Press. 2007

Winnicott, D. W. *Playing and Reality*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2005.

Wren, Lyra. *The Lost Girls: A Poetry Collection on Girlhood, Grief and Growing Up*. The Outsider Poet Press, L.L.C, 2023.

Acknowledgements

To **Sean Caulfield**, I have the utmost gratitude and respect for you and am so thankful for your continuous support. Thank you for your conversations, listening intently through all my tears, and philosophizing about film, music, visual art and beyond. Because of you I am a better printer, artist, problem solver and educator.

To **Marilène Oliver**, thank you for helping me realize my strength is in my empathy. Your engagement with my work made me feel seen when I didn't realize that's what I needed while making work from the gut.

To **Steve Dixon** and **Marc Siegner**, thank you for all the tea, chats and the technical support. I can only hope that I can become the wealth of knowledge you both are at some point in my life.

To my jury, **Dr. Maité Snauwaert**, **Dr. Natalie Loveless**, and my chair **Dr. Yelena Gluzman**, thank you for challenging me while simultaneously being the most compassionate people. I will look back on my defense fondly thanks to all of you.

To **April Dean** and **James Boychuk-Hunter** for your resilience and problem solving skills with ever changing installations and rolling with the punches.

To the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and to the Alberta Foundation for The Arts, thank you for funding my research, and artistic efforts.

To **Maddie Sturm**, **Maria Rosati**, **Livvy Arau McSweeney**, **Sheryl Spencer**, **Emily Legleitner**, **Yvonne Mullock**, and **Sam McLeish** what an honour it was to share space and ideas with you. You have all fundamentally changed me as a person and as an artist and for that I am incredibly grateful.

To **Richard Boulet** for teaching me to give myself grace in life and in my practice, and teaching me to revel in slow processes.

To my mom, **Lorea Willington**, for always supporting my artistic endeavors even when they deal with hard subjects. I am so proud to call you my mother.

To my best friend **Casey Nielsen**, getting to spend the last 28 years of my life with you has been a dream. Thank you for listening intently about my research even when it was a jumbled mess, and thank you for being my extra set of hands when I needed them. This work wouldn't exist without you.

To **Brett Steadman**; my heart, my soul, my sounding board and my unmoveable rock, You are my greatest joy, and without your support this degree would have been wholly impossible. I cannot imagine going through life without you. Thank you for forever inspiring me, pushing me, and supporting me. I love you so much.

And last but not least, to my father **Dennis Deedman**. I am so thankful for getting to spend the last two years of your life getting to know you. I love you, miss you, and will continue to carry your legacy forward in a way that I think you'd approve of.

Biography



Tamara Deedman (She/Her)

(b. 1991, Lacombe, Alberta) is an artist and educator based in Treaty 6 territory (Edmonton, Alberta). She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University in 2015, and her Master of Fine Arts with a specialization in printmaking at the University of Alberta in 2025. Deedman's practice is rooted in what she calls empathetic making; the transformative care of personal histories, inherited archives, their handwritten corresponding records, mental illness, coping mechanisms, addictions, grief and healing, and how it is embedded in our material worlds. When not working in the studio, Deedman embeds herself in non-profits and artist run centers, and is an advocate for creating safe and accessible spaces for communities who are looking to find wellness through the act of making. Her work includes printmaking, drawing, ceramics and installation, with a heavy emphasis in lithographic methods.

www.TamaraDeedman.com



© Tamara Deedman, 2025
Photography by Blaine Campbell
blainecampbell.com