

**Sydney College of the Arts**

The University of Sydney

MASTER OF VISUAL ARTS

2007

DISSERTATION

**'Ik ben zo blij dat ik hier ben'**

translation

**'I am so glad that I am here'**

by

**Angela Femia**



July 2007

This volume is presented as a record  
of the work undertaken for the degree of  
Master of Visual Arts  
at Sydney College of the Arts

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements . . . . .	iv
List of Illustrations . . . . .	5
Abstract . . . . .	7
Introduction . . . . .	8
Chapter I - H O U S E   A N D   H O M E . . . . .	11
Chapter II - M E M O R Y . . . . .	29
Chapter III - P L A C E . . . . .	40
Conclusion . . . . .	48
Appendix . . . . .	49
Bibliography. . . . .	50
Studio Work . . . . .	53
Documentation DVD . . . . .	Inside Sleeve

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly I would like to thank my supervisor Michael Goldberg for his guidance and kind support. His constructive criticism and gentle encouragement will always be remembered.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Margaret Seymour, my assistant supervisor, for her thoughtful suggestions and generosity.

In addition I wish to acknowledge the special attention and assistance received from my friends Linda Renz and Julie Card without whom I could not have completed this work.

Thank you too to all the staff of Sydney College of the Arts for the kindness and assistance given to me over the years. Especially, Tony Mesiti, workshop supervisor, who was the technical magician and mathematical genius behind the construction of my Masters work.

Finally for the loving support received from my partner Steve and all my family and friends, I am forever grateful.

Mum, I dedicate this work to you!

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Figure 1 *Pookie in Search of a Home* - Ivy L. Wallace, Book Cover Illustration, (20 x 25.5 cm), illustrated by author, 1951. © 2007 Ivy L. Wallace. Image reproduced courtesy Pookie Productions Ltd.
- Figure 2 *House Wash*, Angela Femia - Video Still from two-minute video/dvd, entitled *House Wash*, mixed media, 2006.
- Figure 3 *Memory Cupboard* - Angela Femia, Video Installation prior to projection, experimental stage, installation room 1, Sydney College of the Arts, found cupboard, perspex, video, sound, (170 x 138 x 46 cm), 2006.
- Figure 4 *Memory Cupboard* - Angela Femia, Video Installation with projection, experimental stage, installation room 1, Sydney College of the Arts, found cupboard, perspex, video, sound, (170 x 138 x 46 cm), 2006.
- Figure 5 *Memory Cupboard* - Angela Femia, Video Installation detail from group show *Migrating Within*, Firstdraft Gallery, Sydney, found cupboard, perspex, video, sound, (170 x 138 x 46 cm), 2007.
- Figure 6 *La Femme Maison* - Louise Bourgeois, Drawing, ink on paper, (23.2 x 9.2 cm), from ongoing series entitled *Femme Maison*, private collection, New York, 1947. © 2007 Louise Bourgeois. Image reproduced courtesy Cheim & Read, New York.
- Figure 7 *Colorado Springs, Colorado* - Robert Adams, Gelatin Silver Print, (6 x 5 15/16 inches), The Getty Centre Collection, Los Angeles, 1968. © 2007 Robert Adams. Image reproduced courtesy J. Paul Getty Museum.
- Figure 8 *Die Familie Schneider* - Gregor Schneider, Site-specific Installation, kitchen detail. Commissioned and produced by Artangel, London, 2004. Image reproduced courtesy Artangel. Photograph by Thierry Bal.
- Figure 9 *Die Familie Schneider* - Gregor Schneider, Site-specific Installation, bathroom detail. Commissioned and produced by Artangel, London, 2004. Image reproduced courtesy Artangel. Photograph by Thierry Bal.
- Figure 10 *Frontier* - Mathieu Gallois, Site-specific Installation, Campbelltown neighbourhood development, Blair Athol, NSW Australia, polystyrene, scale 1:1, 1998. © 2007 Mathieu Gallois. Image reproduced courtesy Mathieu Gallois.
- Figure 11 *Experimental masters work* - Angela Femia, Sculpture, sand-blasted perspex, (8.5 x 8.5 x 8.5), 2005.

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Figure 12      *Geelong House* - Angela Femia, Digital Photograph, 2003.
- Figure 13      *Robin Avenue* - Angela Femia, Video Installation, Honours year exhibition work, Sydney College of the Arts, perspex, video, sound, 2003.
- Figure 14      *Robin Avenue* - Angela Femia, Video Installation detail, Honours year exhibition work, Sydney College of the Arts, perspex, video, sound, 2003.
- Figure 15      *Songs of Australia Volume 3 AT HOME* - Aleks Danko, commissioned Public Art Project, Lions Arts Centre Courtyard, University of South Australia, brick, (5.2 x 5.7 x 3.6m), 1999. © 2007 Aleks Danko. Image reproduced courtesy Aleks Danko and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne.
- Figure 16      *Songs of Australia series; Songs of Australia Volume 16:shhh, go back to sleep (an un-australian dob-in mix)* - Aleks Danko. Installation, Federation Square for National Gallery of Victoria, mixed media, 2004. © 2007 Aleks Danko. Image reproduced courtesy Aleks Danko and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne.
- Figure 17      *1939* - Angela Femia, Video Installation detail, Sydney College of the Arts, filing cabinet, fused glass, led lights, video, sound, 2002.
- Figure 18      *1939* - Angela Femia, Video Installation detail, Sydney College of the Arts, filing cabinet, fused glass, led lights, video, sound, 2002.
- Figure 19      *House* - Rachel Whiteread, Site-specific Art Project commissioned and produced by Artangel, (corner of Grove Road and Roman Road, London E3, destroyed 1994), concrete, scale 1:1, 1993. Image reproduced courtesy Artangel.
- Figure 20      *Ik ben zo blij dat ik hier ben* - Angela Femia, Masters Work, Installation, sandblasted perspex, nylon thread, halogen light, Sydney College of the Arts, 2007
- Figure 21      *Ik ben zo blij dat ik hier ben* - Angela Femia, Masters Work, Installation detail, sandblasted perspex, nylon thread, halogen light, Sydney College of the Arts, 2007
- Figure 22      *Ik ben zo blij dat ik hier ben* - Angela Femia, Masters Work, Installation detail, sandblasted perspex, nylon thread, halogen light, Sydney College of the Arts, 2007

## ABSTRACT

This paper is a brief consideration of the nature of my art practice. It seeks to discover the importance of memory to the spatial, emotional and political constructs that inform my understanding of place. Within the broader context of the Australian immigrant experience, history and personal memories are explored by looking into the notion of domestic space as embodied by the house and its relationship to the home. The female role in the family is discussed in terms of the commonly understood stereotypes associated with home in western society. By traversing a range of ideas from philosophical and scientific domains, with a focus on contemporary art, the significance of memory is highlighted as the thread that holds these notions together.

## INTRODUCTION

*Every child has a place that is remembered  
as being the most protected in the world.  
Maybe it was under a table,  
in a comfortable corner or covered by a cardboard box.  
It is an intrinsic part of childhood to experience,  
even for only a short time, the deep seduction of security.  
This experience represents our first home,  
no matter where it is, or how tentatively we knew it.  
Like childhood itself, our first home can never be remembered perfectly.  
It only appears during brief glimpses.*

*Forever building on echoes,  
we buy tables and chairs that we seem to recognise,  
choose familiar colours for our walls,  
lay down carpets in a certain way - always searching  
for the right pattern to unlock the combination  
that will let us back inside the memory.*

*We tend to chapter our lives by the houses we've lived in.*

*So it is like snails that little children carry home on their backs,  
sheltered though they wander away,  
eating from unknown kitchens, running down imaginary hills,  
playing late into the night. They are at home everywhere.  
Until, that is, someone tells them that home is too small a place.  
Until, all too soon,  
they grow a little bit bigger and must move into another house,  
and then another and another,  
each of which fits them less and less securely  
than the one they first remember.<sup>1</sup>*

Like a child trying to find my way back to that secure place, this text is an investigation of the ideas that underpin my research and inform the origin and manifestation of my artwork.

Chapter One introduces my notion of home and its symbol the house. Referring to writings by scientists, anthropologists and psychologists, I touch on topics as diverse as insect organisational behaviour and obsessive-compulsive disorder, in order to explain the way in which my personal experiences have influenced my research. The work of the French philosopher and poet, Gaston Bachelard, whose book *Poetics of Space* discusses the house in terms that resonate strongly with my concerns, is also consulted.

---

<sup>1</sup> Angela Femia

My artwork is examined in light of these findings and considered together with key works by American based, French artist Louise Bourgeois, American photographer Robert Adams, German artist Gregor Schneider and the Australian Mathieu Gallois.

In Chapter Two I discuss the relationship of memory to the perception of home, place and the Self. Scientific research and cultural theories relating to memory are referenced and my practical work and the work of the Australian artist Aleks Danko are considered in this regard.

In Chapter Three an outline of a personal view of place is examined by briefly raising relevant concepts by Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gaston Bachelard. They are discussed in relation to my artwork and the work of the British artist Rachel Whiteread.

Feminist issues underpin much of this dissertation and my investigations acknowledge the vast body of writing on this subject. However, feminism will not be the primary focus.

This research is at all times accompanied by a personal narrative which not only underlies and structures the discourse but also informs and directs the practical work I have undertaken.

memories are motionless,  
the more securely they are fixed in space  
the sounder they are.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *Poétique De L'espace. (English) The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) p.9.