

TRUE OR FALSE:  
NOSTALGIA AND THE ETERNAL RETURN

by

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Approved:

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Date

“The past is never dead. It isn’t even past.”

- William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*

## INTRODUCTION

My material investigations look to history to understand the present. The past informs contemporary constructions of personal and national identity in a symbiotic relationship of collective mythmaking. In the age of post-truth, fake news, and alternative facts, discernment between reality and fiction is increasingly difficult. Idealized representations of the past become refuges of a simpler time when objectivity existed. This nostalgia calls into question the perceived impartiality of institutions that present and preserve history. Notions of belief and truth rely on unstable methods bolstered by institutional authority. History is exposed as a form of creative storytelling rather than a concrete list of facts. In this post-simulacra era of hyperreality, believability rests less on fact-checked accountability and more on affecting our emotional registers. Authenticity is valued, but can be widely interpreted. Our understanding of history, nation, and ourselves has always been at the mercy of institutional authority and is informed by the ideologies of dominant power structures. My artistic practice attempts to expose the agenda and infrastructure of arbiters of

history in an effort to understand personal and national formulations of identity through a series of interrogations of truth, mythmaking, and institutional authority.

As a Canadian who recently moved to the United States, I looked to my surroundings in order to understand contemporary constructions of American identity – the Deep South. Christopher Bates, in his essay *“Oh, I’m a Good Ol’ Rebel”*, describes a culture of nostalgia existing in the Southern United States that is promoted through tourism and historical presentations that continues to inform Southern identities (197). After the devastation of the Civil War, novelists and travel magazines perpetuated the myth of the Lost Cause in an effort to rehabilitate the reputation of the South (Bates 197). In *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South*, Tara McPherson discusses how the Lost Cause promoted picturesque southern settings and symbols that embraced romantic notions of antebellum plantation life and ignored the horrors of slavery (3). By the early twentieth century, a positive and favorable conception of the South prevailed that was defined by a longing for a lost era.

Nostalgia is a recurring theme in the South and our technologically driven, truth-obsessed society. A sentimental longing for the past, nostalgia arises from negative feelings about the present comforted by consoling memories of an idealized history. In many cases, such as the Lost Cause, nostalgia has a negative reputation for promoting histories without guilt (McPherson 83). In the essay *Nostalgia and Its Discontents*, Svetlana Boym outlines that nostalgia is not opposed to modernity, that it is a yearning

for another time rather than place, and that it looks forward as well as backward (8). Nostalgia is collaborative, combining personal and collective memories, as opposed to an individual longing for the past. Boym describes the existence of two types of nostalgia: reflective and restorative. Reflective nostalgia relies on social memory, details, meditation on time and history, and critical reflection. Restorative nostalgia is exemplified in national memory by the protection and belief in an absolute truth perpetuated through symbols. (Boym 16). Restorative nostalgia is prevalent in the construction of American and Southern identity through the idealization of certain aspects of the past and the manipulation of symbols. This realization has led me to an examination of the signifiers employed in the proliferation of restorative nostalgia located in architecture and domestic spaces, literature and cinema, historical institutions and tourist sites. Through repetition, reduction, scale, and material I attempt to destabilize collective memory and institutional authority in order to question identity construction, nationhood formation, and collaborative myth making.

## ETERNAL RETURN

Jocelyn Hazelwood Donlon describes the rocking chair as a nostalgic icon of a bygone era, slower-paced lifestyles, and southern porch culture in *Swinging in Place: Porch Life in Southern Culture* (26). In *Rokken* [fig. 1], the rocking chair is distilled to its

most defining feature, the rocker. This motif is repeated and overlapped, the rockers radiating around a central core. *Rokken* simulates a circular movement but remains static, similar to the back and forth motion of a rocking chair. The rocking chair is known for its soothing and palliative properties rather than progress, which is associated with directional movement. The calming and sedative effect of rocking chairs is symbolic of the analgesic purpose of the Lost Cause, meant to assuage white guilt about slavery by presenting a sanitized version of the past (McPherson 83). *Rokken*, in its nostalgic form and thwarted motion, explores the seduction and danger of the repetition of history. In *The Gay Science*, Friedrich Nietzsche describes his theory of *eternal return* as the recurrence of the universe's energy an interminable number of times across infinite time and space (54). Nietzsche warns that the circularity of time is a burden of the "heaviest weight" (54). Looking back to an idealized past in an effort to reproduce it in the present does not take into account the problems associated with that time. Attempting to recreate historical power structures ignores the actual state and growth of present society. The implied kinetic action, but actual stillness of *Rokken* evokes a society that attempts to move forward by looking back at its past.

The South's idealization of antebellum history and Nietzsche's theory of *eternal return* are also exemplified in the labyrinth of staircases in the video *Tote the Weary Load* [fig. 2]. Nearly every scene from the legendary film *Gone with the Wind* (1939) that takes place on or near a staircase is appropriated, sampled, and remixed in this

looped video. *Gone with the Wind* was chosen as source material due to its reputation, as Tony Horwitz's asserts in *Confederates in the Attic*, for constructing the popular memory of the Civil War and stereotypes of the South in national and international imaginations (296). The spectator is taken on a virtual tour of Hollywood's reimagining of the South as Scarlett O'Hara walks up and down the luxurious staircases of Twelve Oaks, Tara, and her home shared with Rhett Butler in Atlanta. In *Tote the Weary Load*, the characters of *GWTW* are frozen in an endless loop, forced to relive and repeat the eras of the antebellum South, Civil War, and Reconstruction; much like the current relationship of the South to its history.

The spatial and symbolic power of staircases lends to their prevalent use in film and their isolation and repetition in the video *Tote the Weary Load*. In *Steps and Stairways*, Cleo Balden describes how the staircase has been utilized throughout film history, most notably in Hollywood, as a setting for scenes of high emotional intensity and narrative crisis that ingrain these moments into our memory (224). Staircases signify motion both literally and narratively as a character moves up or down the stairs and furthers the plot. A staircase can be interpreted symbolically as a passageway, which lends significance to their use by characters at moments of transition. Staircases are also cultural signifiers that denote patriarchal hierarchies between human social interactions (Balden 228).

Staircases are used in film as a method of display for women's bodies to be consumed by male characters and the cinematic male gaze. Mary Ann Doan in *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940's* says that, "it is on the stairway that she (a female character) is displayed as spectacle for the male gaze" (135). In the infamous scene at Twelve Oaks in *GWTW* the stairs play an important role in a ceremonial courtship ritual. The young women display themselves for sexual objectification, descending the grand staircase in their refinery, hoping to be asked to dance by their male counterparts. In *Tote the Weary Load*, a scene where Scarlett and a friend gossip on the stairs about the indecorous fate of a fellow Southern Belle seems to glitch out in a ceaseless repetition of policed Southern femininity. For a moment the viewer feels trapped, like Scarlett, in the suffocating bonds of the construction of white Southern womanhood.

Scarlett's emotional despair escalates in *Tote the Weary Load* until the final moment of the film when she is sobbing on the red stairs after Rhett's rejection and departure. Scarlett is neither up nor down the stairs and her empty victories have yielded nothing. In the final scene of *GWTW* Scarlett turns back to Tara, a symbol of home and tradition. With this gesture, she fails to fulfill the audience's hopes and expectations of her promise as an allegory for the South's progression into the future. In *Tote the Weary Load*, she slowly lifts her head and is about to utter the last and hopeful words of the film, "Tomorrow is another day", when the same exuberant cry

that announced the beginning of the Civil War can be heard and Scarlett is transported back to Twelve Oaks, destined to forever repeat the past.

## REVIVAL

Nostalgia for the antebellum period is evident in the romanticized architecture of the South, but the white-columned plantation-style houses are a revival of Greek architecture and are emblematic of the earliest forming of American national identity. In *Southern Architecture*, Kenneth Severens explains that to align their new nation with Greek democracy, the Founding Fathers adorned their fledgling nation's government buildings, banks, town halls and houses with columns, pilasters, heavy cornices, gables with pediments, and unadorned friezes. These design flourishes were synonymous with trust, reason, order, and created a fusion of politics and architecture (88). *Façade* [fig. 3] consists of two flat ionic pilasters, standing a humble eight feet high and two inches thick, that are instantly recognizable as classical load-bearing architectural elements. Thin fluting runs up the shaft of the column joining the ionic base and capital complete with characteristic volutes. A layer of flat, white paint synthesizes the surface creating an optical illusion that appears embossed or debossed depending on the angle. *Façade's* simplicity reduces and exposes these pilasters as propagandist symbols of

democracy appropriated by early American architects in hopes of aligning their new nation with Greco-Roman ideals.

*Façade* is critical of the surreptitious promotion of ideologies through architecture and the postmodern creation and perpetuation of myths through symbols. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard describes our culture as existing in a hyperreality where symbols and signs that no longer have any reference to the real and therefore substitute the real are promoted through media and inform our perceived reality (1). *Façade* attempts to expose this postmodern tendency by reducing the language of dominant power structures to Emojis and Clipart. As the viewer circles and looks behind the columns, the unfinished backs bearing paint smears and stamps denoting the plywood grade are revealed. This disclosure creates a dissonance between the flimsy representation of the symbol and the strength and stability it signifies. Lazily leaning against the wall, *Façade* resembles theatre props being stored until they are needed to mimic columns, again running counter to the idea of their existence as structurally supportive architectural elements. *Façade*'s reductive qualities and contradictory nature deflate powerful symbols and reveal the covert dissemination of dominant ideologies.

The inexpensive and low-grade materials that comprise *Façade* point to the impermanence of contemporary building practices and the fickleness of capitalist consumers in the face of ever-changing trends. Modern architecture incorporates

theatrical illusion when previously structural components such as load-bearing columns become trompe l'oeil. In *Blubberland: The Dangers of Happiness*, E. M. Farrelly discusses how the popularity of the McMansion in suburban communities is testament to the trend of mass-produced housing that incorporates low-quality materials and craftsmanship and combines disparate architectural elements to connote luxury, wealth, and taste (98). The McMansion, like *Façade*, is indicative of the manipulation of meaning through symbols and signifiers. To the discerning eye, the absurdity of the McMansion and *Façade* flattens and exposes the simulacrum, rendering it a poor construction of failed meaning and cheap plywood.

## RUIN

The South became synonymous with neoclassical architecture after the Civil War as photographs of devastated plantation mansions circulated to evoke sentimentality for the tragedy and loss of the South in promotion of the Lost Cause (McPherson 38). This romantic reimagining led to a movement to preserve the nostalgic memory of the South through the restoration of antebellum plantations and the construction of post-bellum Greek Revival mansions that were even more extravagant than their original inspirations. These ostentatious post-war recreations of historic architecture are analogous to early American neoclassicism's creation of a new national identity

influenced by Greek ideals and the McMansion's attempt to project wealth and class through the manipulation of loaded symbols.

Lavish plantation-style homes built at the beginning of the twentieth century constructed the popular image of the South in national and international imaginations through their proliferation in promotional tourist products. This rebranding aligned the image and values of the postwar South with the antebellum South, albeit a more palatable and sanitized version for primarily white tourists (McPherson 47). The beauty and romance of a bygone era conveyed by ivory houses with cake-icing embellishments sugarcoats or completely erases the horrors of slavery. Nietzsche's warning in *eternal return* about the circularity of time being a "burden of the heaviest weight" is materialized in these contemporary glorifications of southern antebellum symbols and ideals.

*Folly* [fig. 4] is a critique of these neoclassical playgrounds for white fantasy free of the burdensome historical reckoning of slavery. The intricate detailing of this oversized ceiling medallion references the excessive and alluring interior architectural ornamentation of these whitewashed antebellum mansions. The cake-like layers of *Folly* build up to frame the repeating pattern of the Greek-inspired acanthus leaf carved into the surface. The role of moulding in interior design is to hide unsightly architectural features, conceal gaps, and add detail. The form of *Folly* calls this purpose into question by isolating the ceiling medallion and removing it from its typical

placement on the ceiling, rendering it useless and its previous function a peculiarity. The purpose of ornate moulding to disguise and distort recalls the misrepresentation of history in the beauty and grandeur of preserved antebellum homes that assuage white guilt by hiding the uncomfortable history of slavery.

From a distance, *Folly* is a good representation of its original. As the viewer draws closer, inconsistencies in the carving of the acanthus patterning reveal *Folly's* imperfect craftsmanship and small protrusions and indentations in the surface belie its cheap material. Much like theatre props, *Folly* requires distance for its trompe l'oeil characteristics to take effect. *Folly* is made of Polystyrene foam, found at Home Depot and Lowe's, which is used in the production of both theatre props and modern houses. In classical architecture, moulding was carved out of marble, wood, or plaster, but now it is manufactured from plastic and foam. *Folly*, like *Façade*, uses modern materials and methods to reference the contemporary appropriation and consumption of historic architectural motifs as symbols of wealth and class.

*Folly's* dislocation from the ceiling to the floor elicits sentimental images of the landscape of ruin in the South that promoted the Lost Cause after the Civil War (McPherson 38). This architectural extraction conjures visions of toppled over columns and headless marble statues that, in turn, evoke familiar and melancholic representations of Greek ruins and an empire in decline. These devastated plantation mansions hold as much cultural weight as the preserved homes and serve as nostalgic

shrines of the Old South for tourists. Anthony Vidler, in his book *Warped Space: Art, Architecture and Anxiety in Modern Culture*, describes the ruin as symbolic of the passage of time and evoking feelings of nostalgia and sorrow (151). In the case of the picturesque decay of the South, the ruin is a fragment of a lost whole and reminds us of an idealized and complete past. The preservation of ruins serve as a mournful elegy to the fall of the South, appealing to emotion rather than knowledge, and ignore its history. At the same time the remnant points to potential reconstruction and a possible utopic future (Vidler 151). *Folly* disrupts any idealistic yearnings with its name that is defined as a lack of good sense or a costly ornamental building with no practical purpose.

Although *Façade* and *Folly* evoke post-bellum and antebellum Greek Revival architecture, they also resist temporality in their nod to the long history of architectural rediscovery that continues in contemporary design. Ruins are purported to gesture to the glory of the past and the idyllic promise of the future, but these remnants compress these ideas into the reality of the present – a simulation of historic symbols in cheap materials that you can buy from Home Depot. These relics drain the romance from the past in their simple materiality and flat perfection. They are not weathered by time and nature but made of new material and covered with a fresh coat of white paint. The inconsistent commitment to scale of *Façade* and *Folly* disregards the human form as a

standard measuring tool, transporting viewers down a rabbit-hole where from moment to moment spectators sense themselves giant or miniature.

## MATERIAL CULTURE

This scale adjustment on the part of the spectator is most apparent when standing in front of the towering mantelpiece, *Hearth* [fig. 5]. At eight feet high and twelve feet long, *Hearth* is an oversized ode to the fireplace mantel or chimneypiece that once served the functional purpose of acting as a hood to catch smoke from fire, but has since become obsolete due to advances in heating technology. *Hearth* is also a monument to the former gathering space of family and friends that, although continues to exist in people's homes, has been replaced by the television. In *Dismantling Mantelpieces: Narrating Identities and Materializing Culture in the Home*, Rachel Hurdley describes the mantelpiece as the focal point of a room that forms an architectural structure around which furniture and objects are ordered. Mantelpieces "make sense" of a room and continue to be built in people's homes despite a lack of need (718).

Similar to the dissemination of ideologies and values through architectural symbols, active processes of meaning creation occur in the home with material culture. Susan Stewart in *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir*,

*the Collection*, describes how since culture is now based within an exchange economy, elusive authentic experiences are inscribed on purchasable goods and these objects become the origin point of personal narrative (136). Often the mantelpiece serves as a locus of display for these social performances that communicate interiority, serving as a public exhibition of the self through a manipulation of objects. Souvenirs of past experiences and personal artifacts create narratives that exist in an intersection of the social and personal. These domestic stories transform the consumer into a producer of meaning (Hurdley 719).

Stewart describes the miniature as representing “closure, interiority, the domestic, and the overly cultural” while the gigantic represents “infinity, exteriority, the public, and the overly natural” (70). *Hearth* becomes a reversal of the theory of the dollhouse and the tragic distance of looking in to miniature worlds, as the mantle is enlarged and the viewer is rendered miniature. If the miniature is the origin of private history and the gigantic projects a public history than the enormity of this domestic object is a collision of these two worlds. *Hearth* is a monument to methods of identity construction and the notion of self as the sum of objects one owns.

The doubling of the scale of *Hearth* causes this interior domestic embellishment to be misinterpreted as structural architecture. The legs of the mantel mimic columns and the shelf overhead transforms it into an archway. *Hearth* is painted the same white as *Façade* and *Folly* and becomes another architectural remnant. As references to

interior and exterior architecture, *Hearth*, *Folly* and *Façade* inevitably draw attention to their surroundings. In the Master of Fine Arts Exhibition at the Georgia Museum of Art [fig. 6], the moulding on *Hearth* highlights the only decorative element in the room, the ornamental lip on the false wall in the middle of the floor. The heightened embellishment on all three pieces point to the scarcity of decoration in the museum - a space that is meant to remain neutral and disappear. This action illuminates the space of the institution and brings it into focus for contemplation by the viewer.

## CONSUMING HISTORY

The immersive experiences created by museums through period rooms and lavish displays attempt to present a replication of a previous era through the manipulation of objects. These objects have a residual past that when placed alongside other objects with disparate pasts creates an unsettling effect. The status of functional objects in the museum is removed as the now purposeless artifacts lose their utilitarian nature. Handcrafted objects that bear the use marks of their owners like chairs, beds, and tables are now hermetically sealed off from human contact.

*Farrago* [fig. 7], which means “confused mixture” in Latin, is an assemblage of found table legs, chair legs, and stair spindles radiating out of a solid wood center.

*Farrago* comments on divergent amalgamations of furniture styles displayed in

museums and collections that lend them the perception of a whole. *Farrago's* coat of white paint unsuccessfully attempts to unify the peculiar combination. This fragmented domestic item conjures the uncanny in its familiarity and removal of function. There is comfort in *Farrago's* recognizable components but the viewer feels a sense of unease when treading close to its antagonistic, jutting limbs. *Farrago's* form is unknown, simultaneously mimicking satellites and cells, the antique and the futuristic, the future-past. It is playful, evoking children's toys such as jacks, and dangerous, recalling WWII naval mines.

The institutional authority of a museum lends authenticity to a replica and, in turn, viewers' have expectations of museums to display authentic artifacts. *Early American* [fig. 8] is another furniture configuration that questions the status of the replica. Home Depot sells table legs that are labeled "Early American" and MinWax makes a wood varnish that is delineated "Early American." The time in American history that these products are referencing is not defined, but the label nevertheless conjures feelings of nostalgia and authenticity. Assembled in the same way as *Farrago*, *Early American* serves as a counterpoint to the authentic and lived pasts of the antique table legs.

*Early American* also speaks to the consumption and personal value embedded in replicas. Reproductions of artifacts are products that tourists buy to preserve a connection to the past. Collectors of furniture replicas pay extravagant sums for well-

made copies to decorate their houses. Human values are embedded in design and through consumption there is a hopeful transfer of those merits to new owners. From the collector who is paying a gross sum for a Colonial Revival end table to the Home Depot consumer on a budget, a sense of meaning creation and identity formation is achieved through the consumption of objects. The doubling of historical classification and meaning on commercial objects that were manufactured contemporarily in *Early American* is an attempt to expose this futile gesture. Despite the description on the tag and a loose, nonspecific inspiration, *Early American's* table legs will never achieve the status of "authentic". The cosmetic varnish alters the state of the wood, but is ineffectual at heightening its validity. The authenticity of these products lies in the eyes of the consumer.

In researching objects in museums, I question whether institutions are unbiased and I am critical of the notion that the authentic object is a catalyst for belief. As part of the exhibition *The Game Show* at the Lyndon House Arts Center in 2017, I created a site-specific intervention in the Ware-Lyndon Historic House called *In Situ* to explore my skepticism. I made a "scavenger hunt" amongst the period rooms consisting of ten furniture sculptures and ceramics that were created in response to design elements in the house to appear like a natural part of the museum display. Participants were given a visual list of the interlopers and instructed to find them.

The scavenger hunt activated the historic house and foot traffic increased as visitors to the contemporary art museum also made their way to the historic home. Miniature versions of the furniture configurations, called *Bibelot I, II, III, and IV* [fig. 9], were flocked to mimic the rich hues of burgundy, royal blue, and emerald in the upholstery and drapery of the house. The *Bibelots* were easiest to find as their absurd nature exposed them immediately and viewers said these strange objects drew their attention to other objects in the room that they otherwise would not have noticed.

*Rosalie With or Without Grapes (For Belter)* [fig. 10] is similar to *Rokken* in that it consists of multiple rocking chair rockers rotating around a cube, but is smaller in scale and embellished with floral wooden inlays. *Rosalie* was directly inspired by a set of Rococo Revival chairs in the front parlor that were made by the infamous German cabinetmaker, John Henry Belter. Although made of cheap pine stained a dark cherry to mimic rosewood, *Rosalie* blends stealthily with a set of Belter's chairs. Despite *Rosalie's* odd configuration and lack of functionality, onlookers often mistook it for a furniture item with some mysterious purpose. Frosted porcelain replicas of wedding plates, candleholders, mirrors, and a brush, called *Ersatz I, II, III, IV, and V* [fig. 11], hid in corners, mixed in with similar objects, or in plain sight. These were most difficult to find and only revealed their inauthentic nature to the discriminating eye through clumsy hand-building and inaccurate materials. *Ersatz* sculptures don't seek to hide their existence as replicas and underline their materiality and handmade nature

through inconsistent surfaces and inelegant edges. They also draw attention to the objects they mimic, removing the original from its broader historical context and isolating it as an object for contemplation.

In an artist talk I gave at the museum, a “Tour of the Fakes”, I led a group through the historic house. Instead of pointing out my obvious and ridiculous additions, I spoke about the covert replicas and visual trickery in the rooms that was not immediately apparent. I spoke about forgeries in surface design, such as fake woodwork, that were popular during this era in order to demonstrate wealth. Period rooms can be interpreted as immersive theatre sets and I pointed out props, such as reproductions of letters written by former occupants, that were placed on tables next to pen and ink to suspend spectators’ belief that they have travelled back in time. The Italianate ironwork on the front porch was replaced due to age and weathering and, although based on a pattern from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is quite different from the original. I also identified that, in a set of portraits of the owners, the painting of Dr. Lyndon is an original and the rendering of Mrs. Lyndon is a copy. After realizing the ubiquitous nature of copies and replicas in museum display, viewers questioned the role of authenticity in the museum. Authenticity is veiled under institutional authority and viewers wondered about the implications for creativity and improvisation in historical display.

## PARAFICTION

Parafictions are an experiment with truth through fictional narratives that have some basis in reality. In this era of “post-truth”, parafictions propose alternatives to accepted truths to understand the practical applications of trust. For a brief moment, parafictions may be perceived as fact and so these narratives shift between imaginary worlds and our lived experiences. In Carrie Lambert-Beatty’s essay *Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausability*, she aligns parafiction with the French theorist Jean Baudrillard’s post-simulacra as being more real than the real without any reference to reality (54). Parafictions serve a variety of functions from training viewers to critically consume information, exposing all facts as debatable, and displaying art’s long history of ambivalence to truth. The radical potential of parafiction lies in perceived plausible worlds that reiterate reality while rendering future possibilities.

I was influenced by the German artist Iris Haussler’s parafictional archeological intervention at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto in 2008 called *He Named her Amber* [fig. 12] that is described in Gillian Mackay’s article in *Canadian Art* magazine, *Iris Haussler: Brilliant Disguise*. This hyperrealistic installation consisted of a guided tour of an excavation of objects hidden in the walls of the historic house attached to the museum called the Grange by a scullery maid named Mary. This immersive narrative experience was presented as real in order to question institutional authority and heighten empathy (82-87).

*Rosalind Stella Gare (RSG)* [fig. 13] is a result of my experimentation with parafiction. Since parafictions and Haussler's interventions rely on stylistic mimicry and institutional authority, a window display case in the atrium of the Lamar Dodd School of Art served as the perfect place to exhibit objects and information that might be interpreted as non-art. The two recessed shelves protected by sliding glass doors and a lock lent items presented an air of importance and preservation. The space mimics a small museum or library display and its location in a breezeway meant people might only be able to spend a few moments with the information on their way to class.

Through printed information and randomly collected objects, I created a material portrait of *RSG*. Her relationship to the real is an unfinished Bird of Paradise wedding quilt top that was made during the Civil War and displayed at the American Folk Art Museum in New York City. Newspaper templates that were used to construct the quilt pattern were found that place and date the coverlet and also reveal the tragedy of the exclusion of the groom. People have romantic speculations that the quilt is unfinished because the seamstress's fiancé died in the Civil War and she was too heartbroken to continue. Similar to the symbolism associated with a ruin, the incomplete coverlet inspires melancholic feelings and a yearning for wholeness.

Using this provocative information gap to my advantage, I fabricated a story about finding a box of a woman's belongings in my attic that contained newspaper templates that matched the quilt's indices in the American Folk Art Museum. This

“evidence” traced this trove of artifacts to the unfinished Bird of Paradise quilt and became the connection to reality that would validate my fiction. I relied on a mixture of real facts, tangible objects, and methods of museum display to lend credibility and authenticity to my creation. Books about quilts were displayed alongside informative labels that gave my story historical backing and mimicked museum display. Objects like photos, locks of hair, antique gloves, and pillboxes gave *RSG* a palpable materiality [fig. 14]. There were items that exposed the display’s forgery, such as newspaper cutouts, that came from a recent, local periodical. Methods of disclosure are as important as concealment in parafiction and this contemporary inclusion grounded the exhibition in the present and revealed the display as an art project.

*RSG* met with a variety of reactions. Some people who believed it were angry at the deception and the prospect that the exhibition had been concocted to fool them. Certain spectators were upset that *RSG* had never actually existed and experienced a sense of loss at the revelation. Others reveled in the playful aspects of suspending disbelief and voyaging into discovery through a mixture of genres. *RSG* and parafiction demonstrate the potential of using institutional spaces and methods of museum display to question trust and authority. Methods of museum display imbue objects with authenticity, inserting imaginary personages into the past and spectator’s lived experiences. *RSG* commenced the new life of the mysterious woman behind the unfinished quilt and I plan to continue to add chapters via experiments with fictional

narrative in the guise of museum display. Each segment will endow her with more agency as she is drawn from the inaction of the ashes of her dead fiancé through performative action in the manipulation of objects and information. At the same time, these narratives will bring into the spotlight women's histories across the ages that are often unwritten or overshadowed by patriarchal accounts.

## CONCLUSION

History is misunderstood as a static presentation of objective facts. In actuality, history is an active and evolving form of creative expression that varies from place to place. Institutions such as museums are often concerned with the presentation of "authentic facts" and ignore problems around historical interpretation. Books and movies confuse fiction with fact and present false narratives that in turn represent a broader culture. Tourist attractions leave out uncomfortable truths in lieu of whitewashed entertainment. When consuming history in any form it is important to understand that cultures produce historical meanings in the service of constructing and maintaining national identities.

My artistic practice engages in material and textual investigation both inside and outside of the studio. Looking through the lenses of artist, amateur historian, scientist, archaeologist, and cultural anthropologist, I explore methods of the consumption of

history to address the relationship between the past and identity. My work critiques the notion of institution as bearer of unbiased facts and artifact as placeholder of truth through tactical subversion in craft.

My current work explores the repetition of history and Nietzsche's theory of *eternal return* as a theme through the manipulation of fictionalized memories rendered in literature, film, and presentations of history. Domestic objects become iconic symbols of a misremembered past, fragmenting and refracting to create an echo chamber of nostalgia. Using the language of architecture, I flatten dominant ideologies through a parody of the monumental in cheap building materials. In the age of post-truth, fake news and alternative facts, I imbue objects with artificial authenticity in order to present parafiction that disrupt accepted beliefs, discourses and ideologies. The familiar is rendered absurd by tampering with cultural symbols and functional items that have basis in reality and the imagined in an attempt to question collective memory and public trust. With equal amounts levity and gravity, I mirror and distort the past to distance the present and offer hope for the future. My material investigations question the way individual, regional, and national identities are constructed in order to understand the formulation of collective myths, their relevance to the present, and ways to productively disrupt them.

LIST OF FIGURES



Figure 1 | *Rokken*

turned ash spindles and rockers, MinWax Golden Oak wood varnish, 54" x 54" x 54",  
2017



FIGURE 2 | *Tote the Weary Load*

still from video with found footage from *Gone With The Wind*, 7:42, loop, 2016



FIGURE 3 | *Façade*

plywood and particle board, (2) 96" x 16", 2017



FIGURE 4 | *Folly*

Polystyrene, Spackle, 48" x 48" x 4", 2018



FIGURE 5 | Hearth

plywood and particle board, 96" x 108" x 11", 2018



FIGURE 6 | *Master of Fine Arts Exhibition*

Georgia Museum of Fine Art, 2018

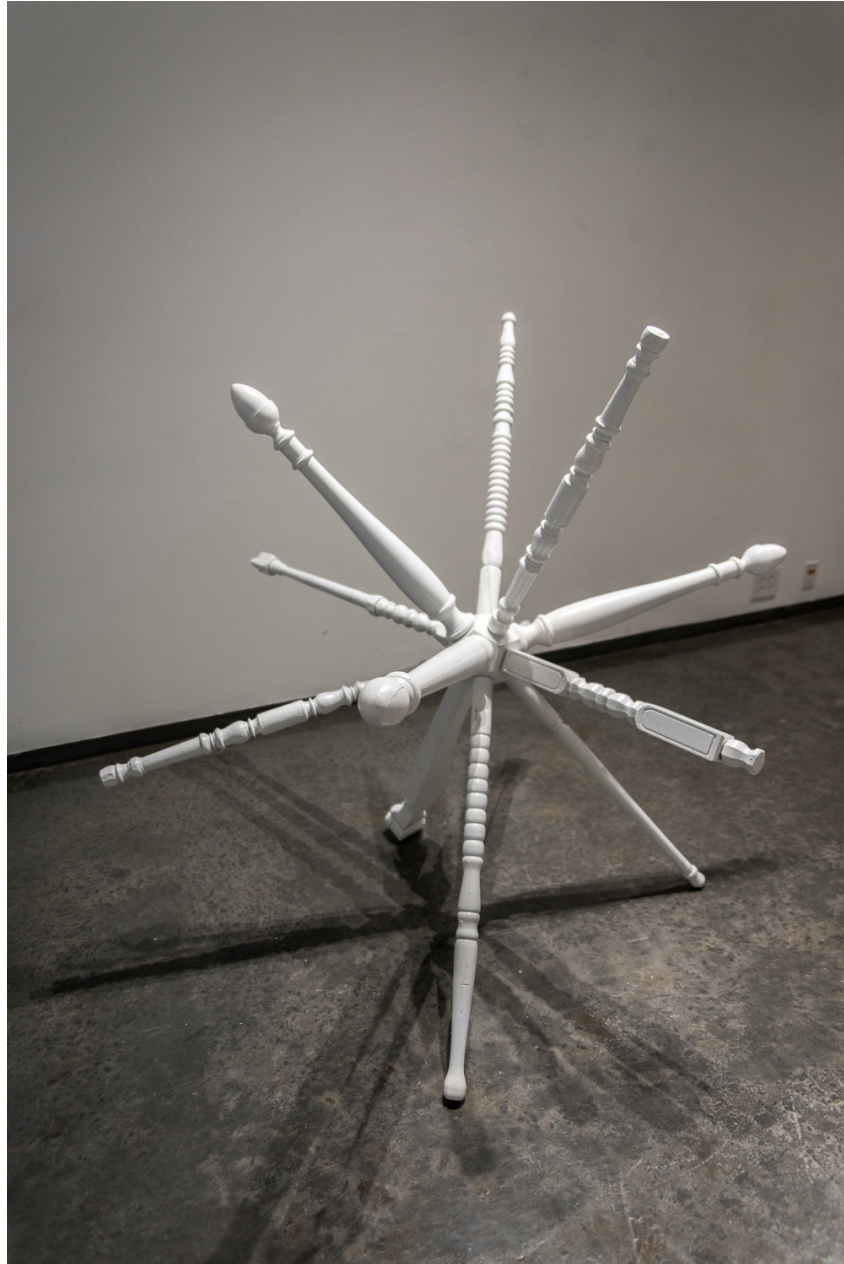


FIGURE 7 | *Farrago*

antique wooden table legs, antique wooden stair spindles,  
white spray paint, 4' x 8' x 10', 2016



FIGURE 8 | *Early American*

"Early American" table legs from Home Depot,  
MinWax "Early American" wood varnish, 5' x 4' x 4', 2016



FIGURE 9 | *Bibelot II (In Situ)*

found and turned spindles, flocking, 14" x 14" x 14", 2017



FIGURE 10 | *Rosalie With or Without Grapes (For Belmer)*

turned pine spindles and rockers, MinWax Cherry wood varnish,  
found wooden onlays, 36"x36"x36", 2017



FIGURE 11 | *Ersatz I (In Situ)*

hand-built frost porcelain, gold lustre, 9" x 9", 2017



FIGURE 12 | Iris Haussler's Exhibition *He Named Her Amber*

The Grange, Art Gallery of Ontario, 2008



FIGURE 13 | *Rosalind Stella Gare*

institutional intervention at the Lamar Dodd School of Art, 2017



FIGURE 14 | *Rosalind Stella Gare*

institutional intervention at the Lamar Dodd School of Art, 2017

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