

Question 4: From the series of FINE ART MAKING research strand lectures, choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists or designers that relate to your practice or interests, and construct a 2,500-word essay. Critically assess primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioners.

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“How is home presented through contemporary artwork?”

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Introduction

Traditionally, home connotes belonging, security and ease. This sense of belonging occurs earlier depictions of British domestic life, such as L.S. Lowry. Lowry's artwork presents home as a stable community foundation (e.g. *Going to the match*, 1928). Building on this, Bachelard contends in *The Poetics of Space* that home is refuge stating, "the house shelters daydreaming" (Bachelard, 1964, p. 6). Perpetually, people feel somatic and cognitive attachment to the place they identify as home. This is undermined by contemporary societal changes in ways of living. In *Place*, Tacita Dean and Jeremy Millar write how "uprooting and removal surrounds us" (Dean and Millar, 2005, p.11), presenting that intensifying rates of migration and regeneration, alongside the spectacle ideal of domestic gender roles and economic instability cause psychological instability, consequently subverting traditional associations with the concept of home. (Debord, 1967).



Figure 1: L. S. Lowry, *Going to the Match* (1928)

Rachel Whiteread's *House* (1993) presents the deconstructive, unfixed, transitional essence of contemporary living. "House" represents home's actuality of material structure turned fragile due to memory. *House* materialises structure turned fragile, simultaneously questioning

whether home can be recreated (Mullins, 2017). The practise of Francesca Woodman reflects this, and its interiority resonates in the work of Do Ho Suh who treats home as a portable condition. (Suh, 2025; Townsend, 2006).

Paul Winstanley's artwork presents recording of interior and transitional spaces. Winstanley's paintings show interior furnishing trends may only associate with people that have experienced a similar space. This reiterates how the constant change in ways of living – in this instance in terms of consumerism - obscures connection to what contemporary home is (Winstanely, 2011).

Ideas

A conceptual foundation for understanding the social transformation is Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1964). Spaces are described as people's connection to themselves and the physical structure within a space. Home is conceptualised as the emotional relationship between the self and the physical structure creates a feeling of security, enhancing human capacity to imagine (Bachelard, 1964). In essay "*The Uncanny*" by Freud, the security of a home is described to change because of factors including domestic comfort. Freud writes of the domestic spaces becoming "unhomely" (unheimlich). (Freud 1919, p. 145).

Artists including Whiteread, Micheal Landy and Paul Winstanley also present the shifting connotations of home within the contemporary environment. In *Place*, Dean and Millar the uncertainty of physical environment is explored writing "place is never fixed; it is always becoming" (Dean and Millar, 2005). The spectacle of the shifting ideological constructions of domestic gender roles and changing domestic spaces is highlighted as a "charged political space" (Perry, 2004). This coincides with Landy's *Semi-Detached*; suburban identity is criticised for factors such as the lifestyle being undistinguishable (Nesbitt and Slyce, 2004). The suburban identity cannot be transposed as a concept of home.

Through sculpture, contemporary artwork presents home as a physical cast of itself. Mark Miodownik explores how material is a renewed matter of memory (Miodownik, 2014). This is rearticulated with materials used by Whiteread and Suh as they implant memory into sculpture.

The concept of the spectacle - theorised by Guy Debord - reflects modern home as idealised images highlighting disparity of suburban life and domestic changes (Debord, 1967). Rachel Whiteread and Micheal Landy and Do Ho Suh all explore the spectacle through memory and recreation. These theorists support the artists intentions of presenting art in a contemporary environment. The artwork reconceives the home as unstable, psychological and only physically shaped by domestic objects that reference traditional domestic conditions.

Memory

Do Ho Suh explores memory of home within his artwork, through his experience as a migrant from South Korea to New York using themes of displacement (Suh, 2014). In the *Walk the house* exhibition catalogue, Suh explains how he sees “life as a passageway” (Suh, 2025, p.32) supporting the psychological memory that is held within his artworks. For instance, *Rubbing/Loving project* displaces a home as a full-size cast memory, proving that memory is transitional and Suhs he says the “body carries its own house” (Suh, 2014, p.18).

The act of rubbing creates a physical replica, akin to a moulding process. It forces awareness of pattern, shape and form which become memorable of the lived experience of home during the repetitive process. This corresponds with Bachelard’s idea that we “live in the details of the house” (Bachelard, 1964, p.8), as the rubbings show detail that we may ignore until we realise the detail’s absence.



Figure 2: Do Ho Suh, *Rubbing/ Loving Project* (2013-22)

In the following work, the recreation of objects within a bathroom extract emotion from the viewer as they familiarise their memory with the recreated objects or spaces. Although most objects Suh creates are generic, domestic and familiar to people, they retain personal usage and attachment, linking to Sudjic's argument that objects are autobiographical (Sudjic, 2009). Suh using material as a form of memory links to Miodownik's notion "materials carry the story of our lives" (Miodownik, 2014, p.89). The material has been shaped into memory of Suh's home at a certain point in his life.



Figure 3: Do Ho Suh, *Specimen Series: 348 West 22nd Street, APT. New York, NY 10011, USA – Toilet* (2013)

Do Ho Suh's work critiques the spectacle of traditional home. The ideal traditional strength of home is juxtaposed with thin fabric and paper models, although still carries the weight of the physical and emotional labour dedicated to creating the pieces. The objects appear uncanny due to the change in material, reverberating Freud's definition of the uncanny being unhomely (Freud, 1919). The *Blueprint* catalogue summarises these works as 'emotional architecture' (Suh, 2016).

As a result of home existing in a contemporary landscape, we can uproot the object of home and physically carry the emotion, memory, touch and composition of it everywhere.

Shifting Spaces

Emptiness connotes unease for our cognitive attachment to home. Freud writes “the home becomes unhomely” confirming that when items that create our identity are removed, we feel unfamiliar within a space (Freud 1919). The traditional connotation of home is breached with the spectacle of domestic interiors that culturally should provide a sense of safety. The paintings are a borderline of public and private space. They create unease because of their lack of identity; scarce furniture is featured hinting at human presence and habitation but has a sense of the suspension of time (Winstanley, 2011).

The scarcity of furniture juxtaposes itself as biographical; impersonal and generic objects contribute further is the feeling of emotional emptiness. The rooms appear uneasy as our presence will mean never experiencing a completely empty space; our pursuit for comfort within the placelessness and silence of the rooms creates tension.

Winstanley paints threshold environments presenting a spectacle of emptiness, while Landy's *Breakdown* shows a spectacle rupture of possession and consumerism (Landy, 2001). In the absence of people, a destination left behind creating the atmosphere of a non-space (Auge, 1995). We only know what a place feels like when our energy surrounds it. Whiteread uses material to present absence of emotional depth; Winstanley shows this through *in transit series*, which reflect the transition of the movement from one place to another. The paintings are blurred – but more realistic than a slow shutter speed – suggesting the traces of bodies passing through the transitional spaces (Winstanley, 2011).



Figure 4: Paul Winstanley, *Span B* (2006)

Winstanley's *Station* reflects withdrawal, introspection and the ambiguity of home. They are public places where we are as vulnerable as we are within domestic spaces; we search for ease in these spaces where we search for comfort during the transitional, suspended time (Winstanley, 2011). Winstanley demonstrates domestic modern space shaped by spectacle and absence instead of belonging and ease, showing our discomfort of domestic areas in contemporary culture.



Figure 5: Paul Winstanley, *Station* (1998)

Although constructed with intentionally softened lighting, the colour palette is reflected by how these transitional spaces were decorated. The cold and hollow colour palette reflects our restraint and frigidity to these places. Particularly the use of Chrome Green which is associated with insanity due to being overused in waiting rooms, hospitals and asylums originally based on a study of it having a calming effect. This reflects the cause of psychological breakdown hence, changing our relationship with already daunting spaces of passivity.

Connection of the body and space

Woodman's *Untitled, Providence, Rhode Island Series* uses her figure to soften the atmosphere of abandoned rooms (Townsend, 2006). The exchange between body and environment reflect how ravelled we are within spaces. The figure becomes absorbed as a part of the room emphasised by the monotone photograph; there is no visual separation of the temperature of the colour of Woodman and her surroundings. Furthermore, the area around the body is vast in comparison to the space around it. The space becomes the overpowering presence, confirming the swallowing of traditional connotations of home.



Figure 6: Francesca Woodman, *Untitled, Providence, Rhode Island* (1976)

In the image above, Woodman reveals her face which is usually completely or partially covered, heightening the subdued presence of the body. Chris Townsend discusses the absorption of a body onto domestic and architectural surfaces (Townsend, 2006). Within Suh's sculptural

representations of home, he transforms architecture into memory in comparison to woodman where she visually absorbs into the material of the space. This is reiterated through her image, untitled, providence, Rhode Island. The shadow cast by the lighting creates harmony between the figure and the space as though the room has received the memory of the figure. It is a dramatic contrast to the surrounding harmony of grey tones where her skin blends into the background.



Figure 7: Francesca Woodman, *Untitled, Providence, Rhode Island* (1976)

Woodman hints at the instability of home with the technique of slow shutter speed and long exposure, similarly to Winstanley's slightly blurred paintings. However, Woodman's artwork uses the figure as the point of focus to add to the character of the image unlike Winstanley's absent paintings. The intimacy of Woodman's body presents the home defined by domestic gender roles (Perry, 2004). Historically the female body was owned by domesticity; Woodman presents pressures of this ownership through using spaces that absorb the figure. Miodownik

writes of materials and surfaces as emotional structure, claiming the unconscious surfaces that are covered by the body perform a transition of energy (Miodownik, 2014). Our consciousness is entrapped a room when we enter as conversely, the room reveals our energy. Bachelard's idea that intimate spaces create a "psychic dwelling" reiterates the connection of material and body as one. A home becomes a part of our psychic and the body dissolves into the home (Bachelard, 1964). Sudjic theorises rooms as psychological objects. Merging Sudjic's theory and Townsend's analysis, woodman becomes the psychological object as the space becomes one (Sudjic, 2009).

Material

Rachel Whiteread engaged with issues in working class displacement within urban regeneration within the East London urban environment; in essence a factor in creating the changing connotations around loss of the traditional connotations of home in the contemporary environment (Mullins, 2017). Opposing to Bachelard's presentation of the importance of intimate and domestic spaces - where Whiteread presents the loss of intimacy by reversing the domestic space to the public - the memory existing from a previous space is revealed as a new structure, showing a reversed concept of how we live in the details of the house.



Figure 8: Rachel Whiteread, *House* (1993)

House, was a life sized, concrete cast replica of the void spaces within a Victorian terraced house, also someone's home. Concrete is an anti-monument to the spectacle of traditional British home, similarly to the controversial use of concrete to create the barbican centre. (Miodownik, 2014). Miodownik's exploration of material in stuff matters emphasises the importance of the use of concrete. Concrete has connotations of permanence, juxtaposing the rapid destruction of home, history and the eventual demolition of this sculpture in 1994. The use of architecture and working in sculptural medium emphasises shifting gender roles whilst presenting the shift in the perception of home. Whiteread exposes the urbanisation and criticises the rapid regeneration of an area as undesirable, presenting how fragile contemporary home has become. Correspondingly, Micheal Landy's *Semi- Detached* reflects issues of the suburban spectacle and how suburban areas lack character and comfortability.

House is uncanny due to the reversal of the appliances and the reversal of interior to exterior a result of the casting. The exterior emphasises the absence of home within the structure. Freud

writes “what once was homely becomes unhomely” (Freud, 1919). The process of regeneration embodies the shift in what home connotes in this situation. Differently, Do Ho Suh reconstructs the spectacle of contemporary home through movement through life rather than creating a memorial, capturing the destruction of home to reverse over.

The sculpture created a materialised memory for evidence of the domestic space; the version of the house is an uninhabitable memorial (Mullins, 2017). Similarly to Winstanley, Whiteread transgresses over public and a private space and excludes the use of humans in *House*. This absence dismantles the spectacle of the ideal home, emphasising the decline of safety in domestic space. Whiteread has disrupted the spectacle of the idealised middle – class British life due to its placement in a regular urban environment. The shape and structure have a partial sense of familiarity to what was once a familiar, domestic space though lacks all functionality. The monument of house had no practical purpose; therefore, it created responses to its controversy, further illustrating instability of contemporary domestic identity.

Collapsing of Physical Place

Break Down explores how internal possessions that form the identity of a person tie us to a specific space (Landy, 2001). Landy removes the autobiographical objects of his personal domestic space. Following Sudjic’s concept of objects as autobiographical, defining home through what is no longer in our possession (Sudjic, 2009).



Figure 9: Micheal Landy, *Semi-Detached* (2004)

Freud substantiates the doom of the suburban spectacle of the contemporary home (Freud, 1919). The placement of home has become uncomfortable due to displacement, recapitulating the connotations of home being subverted to the material itself. In *Semi-Detached* Landy created a reconstructed replica of the outside of his semi-detached home – typical of British suburban architecture - and moved it into a gallery (Nesbitt and Slyce, 2004). This created unfamiliar context but disproving the traditional need for conventional spaces for the placement of home. Class aspiration is embedded into the architectural form; semi-detached houses represent conformity and reiterate Gill Perry's theory of domestic spaces being political (Perry, 2004). Landy emphasises our connection with familiarity and memory, as when we feel familiarity, we experience an unconscious sense of familiarity, therefore creating the feeling of home.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Home is presented through contemporary artwork materially and emotionally. Artists Whiteread, Winstanley, Landy and Woodman present how contemporary home sits within a modern landscape. Bachelard, Debord and Freud's writing interlink to the modernisation to the meaning of home and what it means. Contemporary art reveals the shifting ways in which we live daily.

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