

BABY BOOMERS

BABY BOOMERS is an exhibition created to reflect the lives of the generation from 1945 to 1964 through the presentation of artwork from their generation and from the silent generation who are parents of these people; how much did the silent generation influence ways of life?

The exhibition presents artworks created with a range of mediums. BABY BOOMERS has been curated into my grandmother's house. The exhibition is structured with themes of time and memory which the house reflects, dating back to the 1920's and every room may as well be untouched since my mother moved out in the early 1990's. The artwork in this exhibition paired with the site of the exhibition explores memory, time and tradition and provokes thought for important but forgotten events of the past 100 years. To create further unease, various music will play in different rooms throughout the house.

Artists presented in BABY BOOMERS include Leonardo Da Vinci, Nancy Holt, Barbara Kruger, Celine Marchbanks, Christian Boltanski, Frank Auerbach, Jackson Pollock, Marcel Duchamp and Lucy Gunning. The variety of artwork in terms of style and time aims to provoke familiarity and discomfort for the audience reflecting themes of defamiliarization.

My grandmother's house is full of physical memories that reflect countless lives. She was born in the early 1940s into the generation of baby boomers; her parents born in the early 1920's into the silent generation. My mother – her eldest child was born in 1973, and her youngest child was born in 1986. The house has remained the same for almost 60 years. BABY BOOMERS explores the consequences of time, memory and attachment and what influences generations of people change the way they live life.

Each room within the exhibition varies in the theme it reflects. Artworks have been chosen to relate to different generations in varying rooms depending on age and experience. Some artworks have been chosen in harmony to the atmosphere of the rooms; when something is familiar the audience will feel at ease in an unfamiliar place. This reflects the theory of attachment, developed by John Bowlby. In the kitchen are images from *A Stranger in my Mother's Kitchen* (2022), by Celine Marchbank. Celine Marchbank has created a book of photographs taken in her mother's house after her mother passed away. Marchbank writes on grief 'this house has a power over me, maybe it will make me feel like a child again.' the same experience can be felt walking into rooms of where people once grew up. Using the kitchen for Marchbanks work is important – the kitchen watches silently while its occupiers grow and is always the most used room in a house.

Memory impacts human existence in our actions and feelings. Political, social and environmental experiences of each generation form the people of the next. The front room in my grandmother's house is where she has spent much of her time as she has got older, as well as anyone visiting. Walking into the room feels like pushing your way through the thick air clogged with years of conversation, ghosts of something each visitor left. The decline in the decades old sofas that you almost disappear into when sat on. Displayed in this room is *Storage Memory* (2028) by Christian Boltanski. Boltanski's work presents themes of memory, time and attachment. The silent generation kept things for life: a house, a marriage, a job was not seen as

changeable. This influenced their children – the baby boomers and explains why my grandmother has had her sofas for over 60 years. It is the opposite of over consumption, but could it be seen as hoarding? Generation Z and X over consume. Storage Memory presents over consumption as presented to appear as rubbish, it looks like landfill. Seeing items that you are attached to presented as overconsumption and waste is discomforting. Despite this, each item in the pile stores memory, travel and story which is the same as my grandmother's front room.

Defamiliarization is the act of putting something familiar into an unfamiliar place. This presents throughout BABY BOOMERS and is derived from the theory of Art as a Technique by Victor Shklovsky. The entrance hall in the house creates an atmosphere of defamiliarization. Marcel Duchamp's fountain sits in the entrance hall of the house. There is little time spent in an entrance hall, yet it always looks presentable as it is the first impression of your home. As the audience walks into the exhibition, they will see the urinal and feel defamiliarized, whereas if fountain was in one of the toilets, it may be unobserved. My grandmother's home is surrounded by familiarity, but the house is falling apart. If all the sentimental objects and tables welded to the carpet with age were removed, it would defamiliarize the house.

Through entering the front garden, viewers will see *Convergence* by Jackson Pollock laying on the grass. *Convergence* has been presented this way to defamiliarize the artwork and the garden. the painting was created during the threat of the communism and the Soviet Union; convergence opposed this with expressive brush strokes and bold, bright and complex mark making. *Convergence* holds themes of revolution, freedom and expression whilst holding memory due to the time it was created – mid baby boomer generation.



Figure 1. Pollock Jackson, *Convergence* (1952)

The entrance hall presents Marcel Duchamp's fountain. Duchamp was revolutionary in creating artwork from found objects, influencing generations after him. The first generations to see the artwork were less accepting of it. The more that tradition is changed throughout generations, the more accepting the new generations become of the changes in terms of art and everyday life. What my grandmother perceives as artwork would not be fountain because of what the silent generation perceived as art. This reflects in her house, which she has lived in for nearly 60 years.

This is why change can be slow; people have attachment to tradition due to memory, grief and familiarity.

“You cannot define electricity. The same can be said of art. It is a kind of inner current in a human being, or something which needs no definition.” (Duchamp, M)



Figure 2. Duchamp Marcel, *Fountain* (1917)

To the left of fountain is the downstairs toilet. Performance artist Lucy Gunning created *Climbing around my room* (1993). The video is displayed on a television screen which has been placed in the sink to evoke a feeling of danger for the audience. *Climbing around my room* (1993) shows a dancer climbing around the edges of the room, not touching the floor, which is what most people want to do when they enter that toilet. The downstairs toilet of my grandmother's house has connotations of danger for me. The amount of people who must use it in comparison to how much it gets cleaned. The mixture of the sink taps with water near to the electric wires of the television create this atmosphere. The colour of the toilet and sink are beige with a bidet that everyone used to wash their feet – a bidet was the trend in the 1960's. The tap for the bidet hasn't been turned on for decades but the feeling it evokes when you look at it, the hundreds of feet that were washed when my mum was a child relates to the themes of memory because nothing has been changed.



Figure 3. Gunning Lucy, *Climbing Around My Room* (1993)

Opposite the toilet is the front room. *Storage Memory* (2018) created by Christian Boltanski has been placed in the corner of the room up against the bay window. It addresses the thing theory and the attachment theory. The only sentimental thing about the room is the memory.



Figure 4. Boltanski Christian, *Storage Memory* (2018)

In the Back Room, *The Last supper* (1495-97) by Leonardo Da Vinci is displayed. The dining table is in the back room, thousands of meals eaten with family around the table. My grandmother is Christian, and she would feel comforted and familiar with this painting. It fits the colour and atmosphere of the room unlike other artworks in BABY BOOMERS.



Figure 5. Da Vinci Leonardo, *The Last Supper* (1495-98)

A Stranger in my Mother's Kitchen (2022) by Celine Marchbank's is displayed as a miniature exhibition in the kitchen. All the photographs that Marchbanks took in memory of her mother and to remember her mother's kitchen how it was. The kitchen has watched my grow up from 20 years old and cooking, to being too old to cook. I am intrigued by the kitchen. There are children's drawings all over the walls and a soda stream that will not have been touched since the 1990's. Within the kitchen, the artwork displayed feels familiar, similarly to the Back Room. The feeling of comfort and familiarity is allowed to continue through the rooms.



Figure 6. Celine Marchbank, *A Stranger in my Mother's Kitchen* (2022)

Frank Aurbach's layers of paint reflect time and hold memory and experience. It is placed on the carpet of the playroom, which hasn't been replaced since my mother was born, and holds a lot of memory.



Figure 7. Aurbach Frank, *Tree in Mornington Crescent* (1991-92)

Lastly enter the utility room. It could be an art piece alone. Barbara Kruger's, *I shop therefore I am* (1987) is printed out on the ceiling, floor, all five fridge freezers and on the inside of a cupboard door. The room alongside the artwork reflects the consumer culture of the 1980's; advertisements were introduced, televisions became popular. When looking into one of the cupboards you will find fifty tubes of pringles with the 1990's packaging. No one dares to touch them. This reflects the theory of attachment and how it can be healthy and unhealthy. I think my grandmother would be upset if anyone touched anything in the utility room. This may come from not having much when she was a child. Or access to much. The generation before my grandmothers were stricter with anything, for example, rationing for war.



Figure 8. Kruger Barbara, *I shop therefore I am* (1987)

In conclusion, BABY BOOMERS explains the feelings of familiarity and defamiliarization, why change is important and presents different ways that various generations are attached to memory, experience and objects.



Front Garden: Jackson Pollock, Convergence

Entrance Hall: Marcel Duchamp, Fountain

Toilet: Lucy Gunning, Climbing Around My Room

Front Room: Christian Boltanski, Storage Memory

Back Room: Leonardo Da Vinci, The Last Supper

Kitchen: Celine Marchbanks, A Stranger in my Mother's Kitchen

Playroom: Frank Auerbach, Tree in Mornington Crescent

Utility Room: Barbara Kruger, I shop therefore I am

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Fig 2. Duchamp, M. (1917) *Fountain*

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Fig 3. Gunning, L. (1993) *Climbing Around My Room*

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Fig 4. Boltanski, C. (2018) *Storage Memory*

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Fig 5. Da Vinci, L. (1495-98) *The Last Supper*

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Fig. 6 Marchbank, C. (2022) A Stranger in my *Mother's Kitchen*

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Fig. 7 Aurbach, F. (1991-92) *Tree in Mornington Crescent*

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Fig. 8 Kruger, B. (1987) *I shop therefore I am*

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