

Ghosts of the Home: Unfolded Pasts & Traces of the Old Country

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By

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Abstract

Ghosts of the Home: Unfolded Pasts & Traces of the Old Country is a project that encompasses material and conceptual research regarding the realities of people with cross-cultural identities. The core of this thesis work relies on my own Polish-Canadian identity, the material exploration of paper through printmaking, the Polish folk art called *wycinanki* and installation. Nostalgia is present in the work as I reference my early childhood, which is a time when I felt the strongest connection to my Polish heritage and before I began to assimilate into Canadian culture. It is through artmaking that I bridge the gap between my identities. The tactility of the repetitive actions of printmaking and paper cutting allows for my mind to remember the place of childhood.

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Dedication

Dla moich rodziców Anety i Grzegorza, mojego brata Michael, oraz moich dziadków Lidji i Tadeusza. Kocham Was wszystkich, dziękuję za wsparcie przez te dwa lata.

To my supervisor Diyan, thank you for your support, wisdom, and kindness. This work would have not been completed without you.

To my best friend Sam, thank you for being my metaphorical shoulder to cry on these last two years over the phone.

To the MFA 2020 cohort, thank you for being one of my continuous inspirations and for your endless encouragement on our short but tremendous journey together.

Dla babci Gieni i dziadka Władka. It's been so long without you both but I feel your presence daily.

And finally, to all the *ACCKs* who long for a home and belonging.

“Truth is what is left out as well as what is included. As a writer you work constantly to select and reject material. Memory works in the same way but with a different purpose. We are all time travellers in our own lives.”

- Jeanette Winterson *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

“In contrast to the utopian images of intimacy as transparency, authenticity and ultimate belonging, diasporic intimacy is dystopic by definition; it is rooted in the suspicion of a single home, a shared longing without belonging.”

- Svetlana Boym *The Future of Nostalgia*

Past & Present

I will take you back to the beginning; it's the late 1990s, and we are in my childhood red brick home in the suburbs of Mississauga, Ontario, which is named after a subtribe of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Indigenous peoples of the same name. Here, a trace¹ of Polish culture, created by my parents was born.

The first four years of my life are entirely in Polish as my parents, grandparents, and closest family friends are all Polish immigrants.² My parents like many other immigrants came to Canada in the hopes of guaranteeing a better future for their children. They created a Polish community of lifelong friends here to feel more connected to the home they left behind at the ages of twenty-two.

According to writer Elspeth Cameron, "Much of Canadian identity is tied to the land itself" (Cameron, 9). I am an uninvited guest on the unceded lands of the Coast Salish Territories; the traditional and ancestral territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, where I live and have studied for the past two years. This thesis work is influenced by childhood memories but they are not the core of the artistic practice. I was struggling to find a writing voice so as a part of my research I read some memoirs to understand how others were honestly and genuinely writing about their own experiences. In addition to the reading I began to journal memories that I referenced when making artwork. The personal writings in this document are entries that I have nurtured; they describe my Polish upbringing

¹ Trace is my chosen word to describe my experience of Polish culture. As a verb, it can be used to discover something through investigation. Additionally, it is an act of copying by drawing over lines on an overlaying piece of transparent paper. As a noun, in relation to my printmaking practice, it is the ink remnants left on the printing matrix to create a ghost print, a faded and less legible version of the first print. This is a metaphor for the passing down of Polish culture from my elders.

² We are Canadian immigrants *and* settlers on stolen indigenous lands.

that contributed to the creation of longing and nostalgia³ in my work. To represent my navigation between two languages in the everyday, Polish words will be found in the personal writing with their English translation in the footnotes.

I have never felt entirely Polish or Canadian⁴; I have been negotiating my own cultural identities and the inability to claim full ownership of Canadian and Polish culture. “Canadian culture” needs explanation because it lives in an ideological limbo (Cameron 9). The Nation was founded upon harming Aboriginal peoples and stealing their lands. Both the English and French forced the Indigenous peoples to assimilate into settler culture but ironically there is a clear divide between the two colonies (Cameron 14-15). Canadians take pride in both internationalism and regionalism. The term internationalism is used to describe how immigrants can maintain strong connections to their homelands because assimilation is not expected upon arrival (Cameron 16). Regionalism is used to specify which province or territory of Canada one lives in. The Canadian culture I experienced is in English, from the Greater Toronto Area⁵, where there was an abundance of Polish immigrants to influence my upbringing. My experience, history, and roots in Canada are relatively new, and have always been intertwined with the presence of Polish culture; my work, and this document is a response to this.

The co-author of *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds*, Ruth E. Van Reken, coined the term *Cross-Culture Kids (CCK)*. She defines it as people “who live in or meaningfully interact with two or more cultural environments for a significant period of time during the developmental years of childhood (up to age 18)” (33). I define myself as an *Adult Cross-Culture Kid (ACCK)* as I am a child of Polish immigrants and experienced Polish culture first at home and later assimilated into Canadian culture when I started kindergarten. I bridge the gap between

³ See Nostalgia Chapter on page 7.

⁴ I acknowledge that “Canadian” is not neutral but a colonial term.

⁵ The lands of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee people.

my cultural identities through artmaking by exploring the materiality of paper in printmaking and traditional Polish folk art⁶. My Polish-Canadian identity is key to this body of work as it asks first, how art making grounded in paper can depict the experiences of cross-cultural identity, and second how printmaking and working with paper can become a way of connecting past and present cultural experiences. I create prints, cut-outs, and installations that reference the domestic spaces of my early childhood.

This document will examine three artworks. The first: *Instinctive Wycinanki Print Series*, unfolds the tradition of *wycinanki*, as well as the role of metaphorical languages in printmaking. A print from the series *Wiele Tesknot – Multiple Longings*⁷ will explore intangibly and legibility through the processes of embossing and silkscreen. Finally, the installation titled *Drugi Język – Second Tongue* where wheatpasting on the gallery wall suggests domestic spaces of both past and present.

In addition, each chapter will also address the importance of the handmade as it allows me to feel more connected to my Polish identity and grasp both physically (tactility through making) and mentally (the headspace while creating) to a time that does not exist in the present but to my early childhood where I felt most connected to my Polish identity. The muscle memory in both paper cutting and printmaking lets me enter a state of a rhythmic concentration

⁶ As author, Frances Drwal states in *Polish Wycinanki Designs*, ordinary people create folk art with everyday tools and accessible materials. Their functional or decorative art depicts their activities and what surrounds them. “Most folk artists are country folk, and their art is enjoyed only by them and those close to them. It could be lost to the rest of the world, were it not for people who discover, or rather uncover, it and make it known to others” (1).

⁷ According to Svetlana Boym, who was a Professor of Slavic and Comparative Literatures at Harvard University argues, “Diasporic intimacy can be approached only through indirection and intimation, through stories and secrets. It is spoken of in a foreign language that reveals the inadequacies of translation” (252). Titles of the artworks are in Polish with their English explanations to commemorate words that get lost in translation.

to become most reflective and allows for my mind to wander to some of my earliest childhood memories.

Nostalgia

In my art practice I am still trying to understand the role of nostalgia. The term can be problematic as it often romanticises a past and reconstructs it to be more favourable than the present, even if hardships and atrocities are attached to this time. My goal is not to idealize the domestic space of my childhood that inspires my artwork. Rather, it is a reference point that represents a time where I belonged more closely to my Polish heritage and before the two cultures began to fuse together. This period of my life was entirely in Polish amongst the Polak community my parents established here in Canada. Home will always hold the language and traditions of Poland. My fused identity seeps into both the domestic and public spaces. My Polish identity that is mainly practiced at home slips into public spaces and performing “Canadian” will stumble into the realm of the home.

The concept I am referring to is called *reflective nostalgia*. According to Svetlana Boym (1966-2015), who was a Professor of Slavic and Comparative Literatures at Harvard University, personal experiences become a part of migrants’ collective memory of a longing for the motherland. “Through such longing these nostalgics discover that the past is not merely that which doesn’t exist anymore, but, to quote Henri Bergson, the past ‘might act and will act by inserting itself into the present sensation from which it borrows the vitality’” (50). These acts of longing are fuelled by the emotions of the present and are conditions of living in a society where migration and diaspora have been a significant part of human history and will continue to be prevalent in the globalized world⁸. Andrew Sobel Professor of Political Sciences at the Washington University in St. Louis writes that more people will continue to move around the

⁸ Sobel defines globalization has “consist[ing] of multiple processes by which people in one society become culturally, economically, politically, socially, informationally, strategically, epidemiologically, and ecologically closer to peoples in geographically distant societies” (1). This alone is figuratively shrinking the world where one nation increasingly spills into and influences others.

globe for personal choice because of the declining travel costs to outsource work and opportunities across national and international borders (1). Others will be forced to migrate for survival to safer environments from war and climate crisis disasters. The longing for home will prevail in the present where deliberate and involuntary mobility will continue to increase.

Boym defines two types of nostalgia in the book *The Future of Nostalgia*. *Restorative nostalgia* differs from *reflective nostalgia* because it tries to rebuild a lost home and fill in the memory gaps to recreate a product of truth. “Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in a total reconstruction of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in dreams of another place and another time” (Boym 41). My artistic interests lie in the struggle to recreate a past where I felt most connected to my Polish heritage. I know that this past is in ruins but I hold on to it to try to strengthen the connection to my identity in the present.

It is very common to feel out of place from our cultural identities because of the mobility of the world we live in today. In addition to feeling out of place, *ACCKs* also experience hidden losses like never becoming fluent in the languages of their parents and the loss of the home that their parents once knew (Van Reken 42).

These losses drive both memory of what can be recalled and relies on imagination to fill in the gaps in the process of remembering. This is what, professors of the Department of Social Sciences from Loughborough University, Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering call the *mnemonic imagination* and it allows for individuals to sustain a sense of self-identity by drawing from past, present, and future into a cross-temporal pattern (8). In the present, the use of the past helps explain the longing for a home that one has never experienced. This will continue to be a reality for future generations of people with cross-cultural identities.

Diasporic intimacy encompasses the coming together of all these concepts. This feeling thrives in the state of living in-between; it is both haunted by the homeland and keeps the pleasures of the new country secret (Boym 252). Home holds relics and reminders of the homeland that my parents left. Through objects, language, and traditions our connection to Poland is present in the domestic space, but the reality of my parents leaving their birthplace for better opportunities always lingers. My Polish-Canadian identity is formed by my past experiences of Polish culture in childhood. This is recalled in the present to feel closer to my Polish heritage now that I have assimilated into Canadian culture.

Despite the losses that *ACCKs* share, I believe that *ACCKs* have tremendous gifts to offer the world, through our knowledge of multiple languages and different experiences of many cultures, traditions, and customs which can lead to a more openness and understanding of many people. My upbringing by immigrants and living in the Greater Toronto Area for most of my life has attributed to my appreciation of different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups.⁹

⁹ *ACCKs* are often the cultural bridges between groups of people, which is useful but can come with a burden of emotional labour.

U nas w domu, po naszemu – In our home, in our way (Our home is ours)

Imagine that you've been welcomed into my grandparents' first apartment in Canada. Once my mother immigrated, she put together the long and laborious paperwork to have her parents join us in the new country my family began to call home. We spent countless days with my grandparents while my mother and father worked long hours at multiple jobs. Both my babcia¹⁰ and dziadek¹¹ became our second parents.

We're in the dark brown building of their one bedroom apartment. We've entered through the front door and there is a large living and dining room area with a gigantic window and door to the balcony on the back wall. To the right of the main living spaces is a narrow hallway that leads you to the bathroom and bedroom. You can smell sautéed onions coming from the closed-off kitchen space on the left side of the room. My grandma is preparing them to accompany the homemade ruskie pierogi¹² she is making for lunch. The afternoon sunlight and the gentle spring breeze swarms into the room from the windows covered by the delicate white doily lace curtains. We're eating at the ornate wooden dining table that is covered by a white doily runner. The table sits on the burgundy-patterned rug placed on the golden brown parquet pattern puzzled across the floors of their apartment.

The apartment is a space where three generations of people came together.

My grandparents spent their childhoods in Poland after World War II, and then later

¹⁰ Grandma in Polish.

¹¹ Grandpa in Polish.

¹² Potato-cheese pierogi in Polish.

raised their children during the era of communist Poland in the mist of the Solidarity Movement. Soon after Poland became a democratic country, they left their homeland for Canada.

My brother and I are the youngest generation. He is almost two and I'm about to be four. We don't have a care in the world; we're just spending time with our babcia and dziadek playing with Legos on the parquet floor that will forever score my memories. We were too naïve and bright eyed to truly understand what my grandparents and parents lived through and abandoned to come to Canada. The apartment was a hopeful gathering place where the sacrifices and hardships of our elders didn't matter because they knew that they were providing the best lives for Michael and me.

Instinctive Wycinanki Print Series

According to the authors of *Folk Art in Poland*, Ewa Frys-Pietraszkowa Anna Kunczynska-Iracka, and Marian Pokropek, before paper emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century, in rural Poland, people would paint the walls, furniture, and cupboards of



Figure 1. Painted walls of a folk home in Poland.

Frys-Pietraszkowa, Ewa, Anna Kunczynska-Iracka, and Marian Pokropek. *Folk Art In Poland*. 1988, Translated by Jerzy A. Baldyga. Publishing House Arkady, pp. 50.

their homes with decorative flower patterns, animals, and scenes of domestic life (fig. 1) (73). The author of *Polish Wycinanki Designs*, Frances Drwal, states that the folk art cut-outs called “wycinanki” (pronounced *vih-chee-nahn-kee*) comes from the verb “wycinąć” which translates to cut (1). They were made by folding paper and cutting the edges with sheep shears to create symmetrical floral shapes that are not from nature but from imagination. These paper-cuts were predominantly made by the folk women and pasted on freshly painted walls and ceiling beams on the interior and exteriors of village homes for Christmas, Easter, and wedding celebrations¹³ (Frys-Pietraszkowska et al., 73-74). Writer of *The Polish Cut-Out Design Book*, Romana Jablonski writes that at the turn of the twentieth century the Polish government had to sponsor competitions and exhibitions to keep this art form alive once the country became more urbanized (22).

Wycinanki follow two principles of symmetry, which are either vertical, when the paper is folded in half (this could also be done on a longer piece of paper and folded into an accordion to create decorative borders) or concentric, when a square is folded into a triangle many times to create star patterns (Frys-Pietraszkowska et al., 74). The two main districts of the cut-outs come from Kurpie (fig. 2) and Łowicz (fig. 3). The Kurpie region made single coloured *wycinanki* that were folded once or several times over. Here the most common subjects were of spruce trees and birds. In Łowicz, multi-coloured cut-outs were pasted together to create floral medallions and hens (Jablonski 20). In my art practice I borrow motifs and techniques from both regions to create prints and installations.

Today these colourful *wycinanki* patterns can be seen on many Polish souvenirs. I follow the *wycinanki* tradition to feel more connected to my Polish ancestry. This is a secondhand experience of their original makers. To quote the poet and critic Susan Stewart, “Rather we need

¹³ The dominant religion in Poland is Roman Catholicism.



Figure 2. Kurpie region *wycinanki*

Frys-Pietraszkowa, Ewa, Anna Kunczynska-Iracka, and Marian Pokropek. *Folk Art In Poland*. 1988, Translated by Jerzy A. Baldyga. Publishing House Arkady, pp. 62.



Figure 3. Łowicz region *wycinanki*

Jablonski, Ramona. *The Polish Cut-Out Design Book*. 1976, Stemmer House Publishers, pp 23.

and desire souvenirs of events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative... It represents not the lived experience of its maker but the ‘secondhand’ experience of its possessors/owner” (135). The narrative begins in the old country of Poland when the cut-outs were pasted on the walls of village homes. The *wycinanki* patterns move through time and space to the new country of Canada in the homes of immigrants on curtains, tablecloths, and doilies. These old and new stories embedded in these cut-out motifs are how *reflective nostalgia* functions. As Boym argues: “Reflective nostalgics see everywhere the imperfect mirror images of home, and try to cohabit with doubles and ghosts” (251). The *wycinanki* arrangements in both the cut-outs and textiles reference Poland but they are put into new homes in Canada, where they function as ghost and doubles of the homeland.

I want my art to insist on folk art's validity in the art history canon because it has always been seen as an outsider form of art. The chief of the Historical Survey for the New York State Museum Kenneth L. Ames, writes about the dangers of the hierarchies and dichotomies between Western Art and Outsider Art. Folk art is of the people, it is not limited by academia or the constraint of what we have been taught "art" is in institutions. It can be decorative or functional. Ames states that if we look past the surface, and "...make an effort to see through the clouds of mystification that surrounds them [outsider artists], we will find that they are often very interested in the matters of the world" (255). Polish folk people were making *wycinanki* with accessible materials that depicted the world around them; this mirrored a simpler time before the country became urbanized. Ironically, the government needed to intervene later to keep this art form from disappearing. I am using the floral motifs to depict my childhood and to retrace the history of these forms. Adopting this traditional practice is also crucial because I often feel like an outsider when I compare my cultural experiences with Canadians who have fully assimilated.

The *wycinanki* tradition has entered my printmaking practice as a way to create monotype prints. Monotypes can include a combination of painting and printmaking techniques on a matrix¹⁴ to create one unique image (with the exception of a ghost print, where the residue ink from the first print is left behind on the plate and a printmaker can pull a duller or ghostly version of the first image). A printmaker is unable to make an edition with the monotype print process. The inability to create an edition allows me to be guided by the last print pulled from the press, which leads to the next one in a series. Monotype printing has allowed me to become a more of an intuitive printmaker. Previously, when I was making editions of prints, I would also

¹⁴ The general term for the base from which a print is made, this can be a lithography plate, lithography stone, copper plate, woodblock, linoleum, etc.

print an abundance of artist proofs¹⁵. These prints were different from the edition to see all the possibilities I could achieve with one matrix that held the same marks. The seriality and learning through repetition in printmaking is still present in the monotype printing process but the compositional possibilities of the image are endless unlike an edition. The array of possibilities often causes me to work in a frenzy-like manner and produce a large series. It is an attempt to get the right print and grasp to my childhood where I was more connected to my Polish identity.¹⁶

Instinctive Wycinanki Series (fig. 5) is a series of twenty monotype prints on Stonehenge paper that are each 8.5 by 11 inches and installed in a grid, evenly spaced out in five rows and four columns. A cool colour palette of blues, black, white, and grey were used with a combination of printing methods to make a variety of configurations in the series. The colours were inspired by the stark black background of the medallion *wycinanki* of the Łowicz region (fig. 3) and I then chose to limit the other colours to shades of blue. The blurred shapes were inspired by the times I spent playing with shadows of the *wycinanki* motifs.

Another artist of Polish descent that uses the *wycinanki* tradition is Maria Flawia Litwin. She spent her most formative years in Poland and Australia and travelled extensively in young adulthood before she settled in Canada. According to her artist statement, “her serial immigrant status fuels her need to analyze the shifting nature of institutional structures and their impact on the individual” (Belgrade Art Studio). In addition to Litwin’s installation practice, she also works in sculpture, textile, video, performance, and fiction writing that surround ideas of her identity. In *The Lowest Relief II* installation she uses the *wycinanki* technique to create narratives based on her own memories, social history, symbolism, and mythology. *Aqua-cide* (fig. 4) is part of the installation where she has created an underwater scene that is stylized and simplified in the paper

¹⁵ Artist proofs are trial prints that are still in process by the printmaker.

¹⁶ Grasp to the place of childhood; physically through the tactility of making and mentally in the headspace entered while I am in the rhythmic concentration of printmaking.

cutting tradition. We both use the folk art to make work that alludes to our Polish identities, however she uses the paper cutting to depict stories. I am referencing the floral motifs as the decorative elements that I remember in my own childhood.



Figure 4. Maria Flawia Litwin, *Aqua-cide*, 2014, paper, 32 x 40"

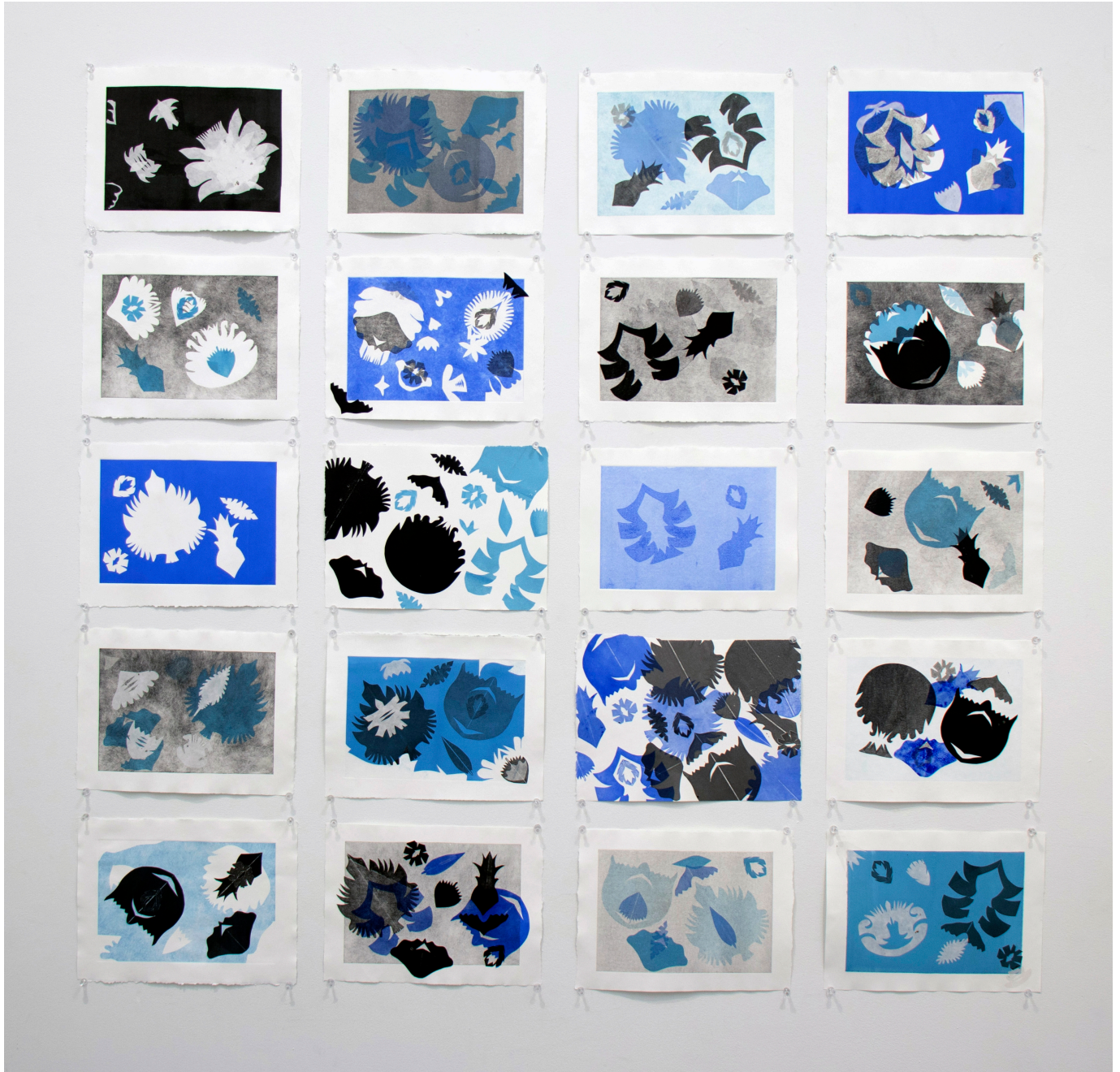


Figure 5. *Instinctive Wycinanki Print Series*, 2019, twenty monotype prints on paper, 8.5 x 11" each

In *Instinctive Wycinanki Print Series* the backgrounds were made by wiping a rectangular PETG¹⁷ plastic plate with tarlatan¹⁸ to create atmospheric textures (fig. 6) and ink rollovers with

¹⁷ PETG is a polyethylene terephthalate glycol plastic plate used in printmaking as an alternative to polycarbonate plates. In addition to its monotype printing possibilities, it can also be used for intaglio printing because its soft surface is easy to scratch.

brayers to get solid colours (fig. 7). Mathematician Frieder Nake states, that the matrix has a material memory; once it is inked and wiped up it creates a faithful reversed representation of itself on to the paper (178). The softness of the PETG matrix allowed for marks of the hand to be left on its surface. Remnants of past gestures are left and can be inked up for the next print. The longer you print with the same sheet of PETG, the accumulations of previous actions are left behind, creating a history of its making. Ironically these past gestures are left on the plate but also begin to fade over time the longer you print with the same matrix. Nake also writes that the printing plate is similar to memory because “...it wears out materially through use... In a manner of speaking, longterm use makes the printing plate ‘forget’ (the impressions fade)” (178). The plate is in a constant flux of remembering the hands’ past actions and forgetting them the longer the matrix is used. This is similar to how memories change and fade every time they are recalled.

One summer afternoon, the sun is in perfect position for one of my favourite games. My curious mind can be entertained for hours by the shadows that the floral patterns of my grandmother’s doily curtains cast on the parquet floor of the living room.

I remember lying on the honey brown wood floor, my hands running through the shadows of these flower forms. I can feel the warmth of the sun kissing the back of my hands where the knotted lace-work is sparser for light to come through. The glossy surface of the floor is under my palms that glide over the floor. I interact with the shadows that sway with the draft, sharpen with the sun, and lengthen over time.

¹⁸ Tarlatan is an open weave, heavily starched fabric mainly used in etching to wipe off excess ink off of plates.

I am fascinated by how the shadows engulf my hands leaving them slightly cooler in temperature than when they were previously exposed to the sunlight. Face down; I'm planted to the floor. Nose to the ground, I smell the fresh and crisp cleanser babcia used to clean the house earlier that day during my nap.

There's a knock on the door and I snap out of a daze. I jump from the floor while my grandma walks towards the entrance. My mom is standing in the doorway and my small legs are in a quick scramble to get to her. She has finally gotten off from work and is here to pick us up to go home. We hug and kiss babcia goodbye but we won't be gone for long, we'll be back tomorrow morning when mum drops us off again, and the curtain's casts will captivate me once more.



Figure 6. Detail of print from *Instinctive Wycinanki Print Series*, 2019, monotype print on paper, 8.5 x 11"



Figure 7. Detail of another print from *Instinctive Wycinanki Print Series*, 2019, monotype print on paper, 8.5 x 11”

The traditional folk art shapes seen in the foreground, were all cut by my hand and either inked up with mylar shapes (opaque black shapes in fig. 6), blocked out with paper, or collaged on to the paper through the process of chine-collé, a printmaking technique used to fuse *washi*¹⁹ on to rag paper with rice paste and the pressure of the press (white shapes in fig. 7).

In the work, I played compositionally with the cut-outs and the series was created by using the by-products of a previous print. It allowed for decisions to be made intuitively in the studio in the moment of printing and making decisions directly related to the last piece that was pulled from the press. If I inked up the mylar shapes and printed it, I would use the same shapes

¹⁹ *Washi* is thin Japanese archival paper made of natural fibres. Its absorbent qualities are ideal for printmaking. It can be used alone or fused together with heavy rag paper to reinforce the work.

to print its ghost double on a different sheet of paper. This can be seen in fig. 6 where the small black form in the right corner was printed and then its ghost was used in the top left corner of fig. 7.

The relationship between printmaking and memory is knowledge that has been passed down from Ancient Greece. As artist and lecturer in Printmedia at the University of Newcastle Deidre Brollo writes, “Words such as ‘imprint’ and ‘impression’, terms reminiscent of the fundamental language of printmaking, create a sense of the past remaining visible in traces left behind, of experience literally leaving its marks upon us” (196). She further unpacks this in the chapter “Untying the knot: memory and forgetting in contemporary print work” when referencing Socratic dialogues with Plato, “where memory is conceptualised as a print made onto the soul” (196). The metaphorical possibilities of printmaking and memory are not new and can also be used to point to the experience of cross-cultural identities.

I use the terms *trace*, *ghost*, *residue*, and *legibility* to depict the longing and intangibility of having a connection to Poland but only outside the homeland through Polish-Canadian immigrants. *Trace*, *ghost*, and *residue* also describe how the *wycinanki* matrixes are left on the paper once they have been run through the press. The Curator Emeritus of Prints and Drawings at Yale University Art Gallery, Richard S. Field writes, that printing allows for layering information, which embodies traces of past acts (70). Layering in printmaking alludes to the *traces* of the history of its making. The background, middleground, and foreground come together and each reference the time in which they were added. Additionally, it is the *traces* of the patterns from my childhood or my own personal history. Moving further back in the timeline, it is the *traces* of *wycinanki*, recalling a time when they only existed in the folk villages and

relate to the larger cultural history of Poland. This exemplifies how the motifs have moved through time on both the personal and cultural levels.

The *ghost* from the floral matrix is printed with the *residue* ink of the first print and can be seen as another layer that has been furthered from its history of making. I see this as a metaphor for how I understand my upbringing as a *trace* of Polish culture. The first print is how my parents experienced Poland directly while they were living there; the ghost print is how I have experienced it in Canada through the Polish community. Ghost prints solely rely on the transference of ink from the original and will always appear more faded. It is the last remnants of the ink that can be shifted on to the paper when it is run through the pressure of the press, before the shapes' embossing is all that is left. The legibility of the image is compromised when both ghost prints and embossings begin to enter the work.

Wiele Tęsknot - Multiple Longings

Wiele Tęsknot - Multiple Longings (fig. 8) is one monotype print from a series of seventeen that was an investigation of embossing inspired by the days I spent with my grandparents. They were made on pieces of white Stonehenge paper that are each 40 by 26 inches. The series takes on a sculptural element, as the paper does not lie flush to the wall because it was soaked in water and did not dry flat. Its minimal colour palette was inspired by the installation *Drugi Język – Second Tongue*²⁰ (fig.12) (fig.13). The ephemeral qualities of the white *wycinanki* against the white gallery wall in the installation were further explored in printmaking. The camouflaged white floral forms against the white backdrop are a visual metaphor for how my Polish culture is not always seen in my every day when I present Canadian and speak English without an accent. The print from *Wiele Tęsknot - Multiple Longings* was made up of three layers; first the *wycinanki* cut-outs, then the embossed textiles, and lastly the almost invisible, silkscreen white-varnish ink layer of more floral forms.

Hand cutting and scanning paper cut-outs into the laser cutter program created acrylic *wycinanki* shaped matrixes for this print series. Upon closer inspection, the imperfect quality of the hand comes through in the matrixes; a computer did not generate them. The floral forms were used to create a multitude of compositions. These off-white coloured shapes are evenly spaced out between each other and can be seen starting from the edges of the paper on the bottom right corner to about two-thirds up the print (fig. 8).

²⁰ See Chapter *Drugi Język – Second Tongue* on page 30. The Print series *Wiele Tęsknot – Multiple Longings* was made after the installation.



Figure 8. *Wiele Tęsknot – Multiple Longings*, 2019, monotype on paper, 40 x 26"

The acrylic matrixes' embossing possibilities were tested on smaller prints before printing on the larger paper. Embossing is when soaked paper is laid on top of plates or other forms and then run through the printing press to get its indentations. It relies on the strength of paper and its abilities to capture objects' depth when it is run through immense pressure.

Through this experimentation, I discovered that I lost some of the details from the first embossing layer when the second was run through the press. I agree with Professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics Richard Sennett's argument, "Technique develops then, by a dialectic between the correct way to do something and the willingness to experiment through error" (160). Experimentation in printmaking is what has kept the process interesting and asks what can be further discovered. I uncovered that the first layer of the print needed to be a rollover mixture of lithography varnish²¹ and etching ink to produce the opaque white forms to prevent the information from disappearing once the paper was run through the press a second time.

For the second layer the paper had to be soaked in water and blotted so that its fibres could expand to capture all the details of the textile pieces. Three textile pieces are seen in this work, a large star pattern doily, a smaller circular doily, and a large rectangle tablecloth (fig. 8). Both the small and rectangle textile escape the edge of the print. I used my grandmother's traditional Polish handmade tablecloths and doilies. She obtains and bargains for these objects at the market whenever she visits Poland or asks relatives to haggle for her and mail them to Canada. These are newer versions of the original textiles pieces I remember from my childhood.

²¹ Lithography varnish can be mixed into ink to change its viscosity and gives it a glossy finish when dry.

Soft white yarn and the skills of Polish artisans made the lace doily curtains that cover the room's windows and the runner placed on the table. I remember my small and clumsy child hands tugging at the flimsy fabric while we eat meals like czerwony barszcz z uszkami²². Meals that stained the white surface, with bright pink-red splotches on the days I was too grumpy to eat. I can also recall hiding behind the almost see-through curtains while we played hide-and-seek with my dziadek. Undoubtedly, the thin-knotted material did not disguise me but as a child with child-like logic, I closed my eyes and believed that he too was unable to see me. He was a good sport. He played along until he "found" and chased me through the apartment leaving the curtains fluttering behind our swift movements.



Figure 9. Detail 1 *Wiele Tęsknot – Multiple Longings*, 2019, monotype on paper, 40 x 26"

²² Red beet soup with meat dumplings in Polish.

The textiles leave the traces of objects from the past in the paper, locking them into the present. I return to Brollo's description about memory being a print made onto the soul, from the previous chapter, as it can also relate to embossing's power to preserve the textiles into the paper before the memory of the object disappears (196). Printmaking and monoprinting are intuitive processes as the quirks of the matrixes, paper, and press are learned in both the experimentation and the final print series. While printing on the bigger sheets of paper, I learned that the embossments are less visible in areas where ink sits on the surface of the paper (fig. 8) and that I can get two depths of embossing when I wrap the textile around the front and the back of the paper (fig. 9).



Figure 10. Rachel Whiteread, *House*, 1993, concrete cast, dimensions variable

Wiele Tęsknot - Multiple Longings print series was inspired by Rachel Whiteread's casts of domestic objects and interiors that surround issues of memory and collective history. Her work *House* (fig. 10) was a cast of the air of an abandoned Victorian row house from an East London neighbourhood that became a controversial public sculpture. Uros Cvorc, a Lecturer in Art and Design at the University of New South Wales, writes that *House* raised questions, "...about the articulation of memory as a displacement of past into the present, the tracing of absence, and the dialogue between the viewer's body and the materiality of the object" (55). Similar to Whiteread, I am interested in the domestic space, and preserving time through the materiality of paper. Our works differ as her work is life sized, sculptural, and questions the body's relationship to space and architecture. My work is more intimate in scale, using paper to record traces of objects and actions, focusing on the intangibilities of trying to recreate a time where my tie to Polish culture was stronger.



Figure 11. Detail 2 *Wiele Tęsknot – Multiple Longings*, 2019, monotype on paper, 40 x 26"

In Whiteread's work when the viewer spends more time with it, the details of the interior spaces are noticed because they have been made external through the casting process. In my series the viewer is rewarded when more time is spent looking closer and at different angles to uncover all the intricacies. The paper attempts to grab these forms before they begin to fade away. I see this as potent metaphor for the hidden cultural identities that are always there but not noticed, seen, or communicated upon first inspection.

Adding a silkscreen white glossy layer of more *wycinanki* shapes created the last element of the print. This detail is difficult to capture with photography but they are found on the bottom left corner of the print (fig. 11). Initially, I tried producing the glistening layer with the lithography varnish that was mixed into the etching ink for the rollovers on the acrylic matrixes in the first layer. After many experiments of mixing ink ratios, it was not possible because the white ink is so opaque. These floral forms can only be seen when the light catches parts of the print at certain viewing points. It asks to be looked at longer, closer, or at different angles to uncover more of the print. The print's legibility is questioned because there is an inability to see the whole picture, a piece of my history and cultural identity that is always there but not at the forefront.

Drugi Jezyk – Second Tongue

For the interim thesis show, the opportunity to glue *wycinanki* shapes directly on the walls like the original village people did in the 1800s presented itself, resulting in *Drugi Jezyk – Second Tongue*. I pasted beige, black and white tissue paper on the gallery wall with a rice glue and water mixture to create an installation that suggested a nostalgic domestic space, an imagined place, inspired by the folk homes of the *wycinanki* and the decorative elements of my grandparents' home.

The installation consisted of three walls, divided into two spaces. The first space was the left wall, which was solely made up of large white and beige paper floral cut-outs that were evenly dispersed out on the white paint (fig. 12). White forms on the gallery wall can be seen up close (fig. 13) but at a distance they begin to camouflage within their white backdrop. The right (fig. 14) and centre wall (fig. 15) made up the second space. The top of the doorframe on the far right created a guideline for all the top trim. All the beige borders were cut using the accordion folding tradition to create their repetition. Floating an inch above or below each of the trims there are medium sized, beige and white flower cut-outs. On the right wall there is trim along the bottom that carries over into a small portion of the centre wall. The same principle was used for the top border on the centre wall where it also bleeds into the right. Two black vases are found on the far left and right. The vases are symmetrical in their arrangements and both feature layered white and beige cut-outs onto their black bases. Balanced flower arrangements hover over the vases in the same colour palette. A white chandelier sits at the top of the centre of the right wall.²³

²³ The center of these walls had wooden panels of collages made of monotype prints and more cutouts but they will not be discussed in the thesis.



Figure 12. Installation Photo 1 (left wall) *Drugi Język – Second Tongue*, 2019, installation of washi paper glued to wall, dimensions variable

Flower forms, wall trim, and cut-outs of everyday objects like the vases and chandelier are found in the installation. Both the traditional floral *wycinanki* and those that mimic everyday objects are ways to suggest a domestic space. Decorated walls of Polish folk homes inspired the borders but they also remind me of the trims of the doily lace curtains from my childhood. The traditional cut-outs hint to their original history in folk homes and the more modern everyday objects can be found in contemporary houses. Although the vases and chandelier refer to domestic décor of the present-day, following the vertical symmetrical folding and cutting tradition simplifies the objects. This allows them to aesthetically fit in with the more traditional floral forms and wall trims. These forms begin to blend the past and present.

Ideally, the glued wall cut-outs are meant to be temporary to further evoke an impermanent fleeting moment. A time in childhood where I felt the strongest connection to the Polish community that will never be able to exist in the present because of how my Canadian and



Figure 13. Installation Photo of detail of left wall, *Drugi Język – Second Tongue*, 2019, installation of *washi* paper glued to wall, dimensions variable



Figure 14. Installation Photo 2 (right wall) *Drugi Jezyk – Second Tongue*, 2019, installation of washi paper glued to wall, dimensions variable



Figure 15. Installation Photo 3 (centre wall) *Drugi Jezyk – Second Tongue*, 2019, installation of washi paper glued to wall, dimensions variable

Polish identities have begun to intertwine. New cut-outs would be made to fit their new environment in the next iteration; in a continuous cycle of recreating a longing for a distant past that yearns to be felt in the present. Boym argues that:

“Diasporic intimacy is belated and never final; objects and places were lost in the past and one knows that they can be lost again. The illusion of the complete belonging has been shattered. Yet, one discovers that there is still a lot to share. The foreign backdrop, the memory of past losses and recognition of transience do not obscure the shock of intimacy, but rather heighten the pleasure and intensity of surprise” (255).

The short-lived installation encompasses the idea that *diasporic intimacy* can vanish again and that belonging will always be harder for immigrants who have strong ties to their homeland. These bitter feelings are worth sharing because they depict the realities of cross-cultural identities.

I am a white woman that speaks English with no accent; this is a part of performing “Canadian”. I use English in both private and public spaces, as it is now my default language because I have been in the Canadian school system my whole life. I speak Polish and practice Polish traditions mainly at home with my family and the Polak community. The performativity that I am referencing is similar to what philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler, calls the performativity of gender identity and how it is “constituted in time- an identity instituted through *stylized repetition of acts*” (519). As an *ACCK* the repetition of the English language has contributed to what Van Reken describes as the hidden losses of never becoming fluent in Polish and the loss of the home that my parents once knew (42). The creation of the suggested domestic space of my childhood is a way to bring my Polish heritage and the hidden losses into the public realm of the gallery. The dichotomies of the private and public begin to fade to express the slippage of both my identities in the present.

Creating the installation by cutting the shapes and gluing them to their supports is an embodied experience. Both processes were time consuming and the tactility of their making allowed for my mind to enter what Sennett calls rhythmic concentration.

“Doing something over and over is simulating when organized as looking ahead. The substance of the routine may change, metamorphose, improve, but the emotional payoff is one’s experience doing it again. We all know it; it is *rhythm*. Built into the contractions of the human heart, the skilled craftsman has extended rhythm to the hand and the eye.” (175)

The time spent doing the repetitive actions of cutting and then gluing paper allowed for my mind to wander.

As I was standing on the ladder high above the ground or sitting crossed-legged close to the gallery floor my nose was almost touching the wall. I spritzed water and applied diluted rice paste with a paintbrush to adhere the paper to the wall. The messy residual mixture is left on my hands as their pressure smooths the material to the surface. Pages of childhood imagery begin to turn and unfold in my mind. Memories that are often only recalled when my hands are making as if they are trying to reach for something that can no longer be grasped. The ghostly images of the view from the balcony of my grandparents’ apartment as my tiny body sat in dziadek’s lap or the faint voice of babcia saying “Idziemy do parku!”²⁴ while she dressed Michael and me for our outdoor adventure. Their content isn’t important because some of the void between my identities is filled. Fuzzy childhood memories

²⁴ “We’re going to the park!” in Polish.

become crisp for a split-second before they begin to fade back into the present and the gallery wall is staring back at me.

The rubbing of my Polish identity into the space and following the *wycinanki* tradition is a way to experience through touch a time and place where I was most Polish.

The embodied experience of creating is also present in Do Ho Suh's work *Rubbing/Loving* (fig.16). Suh's artistic interests question the boundaries of his Korean-American identity through the malleability of space in his installations in both the materiality and metaphorical manifestations. *Rubbing/Loving* is a paper work that covered his New York apartment, which was his home and studio for eighteen years. The paper allowed him to create a rubbing of the space with coloured pencils. In his video interview with Art21 he explains how the process was a way to remember and memorialize the space. He wanted to capture the apartment in another way that was somehow lacking in the previous fabric renditions. Suh says,



Figure 16. Do Ho Suh, *Rubbing/Loving*, 2016, mixed media, dimensions variable

“When I discovered it by rubbing it just brought the memories associated with those details.”

The gestures of the hand (with or without a drawing medium) unlocks parts of the minds to re-enter the past. We are both depicting the domestic space through the lens of immigrants.

However, our experiences are different, he is an immigrant and I am the child of immigrants.

Suh still inhabits the space of home that is Korea, while I do not have this direct tie to Poland.

Living in Canada where my elders have passed the Polish language and traditions influences my idea of home.

Present & Future

This document has looked at three pieces from a body of work that depicts the experiences of cross-cultural identity. Printmaking, paper-cutting, and creating installations were used to connect past and present cultural experiences. The MFA program has provided me with the time and space to create monotype prints and *wycinanki*. However, I have only just begun exploring the possibilities of paper spatially in both installation and sculpture. The methods used to expand paper to fill space and simultaneously camouflage it in the gallery can still be pushed further to emphasize the complexities of *diasporic intimacy*.

In my most recent work I found a wooden French door which became the centre piece for the installation *Wyobrażony Dom - The Imagined Home*. Doors are the barriers between the private and public spaces. The door both separates and blurs boundaries as I move through both the spaces of home that keeps my culture hidden and the outside world where I have always tried to fit into “Canadian culture”.

The door was hinged to the gallery wall and covered entirely in medium sized white and beige *wycinanki* cut-outs (fig. 17). Covering the found door in the motifs associated with my home and cultural heritage is a way of making it my own. “To feel at home is to know that things are in their places and so are you; it is a state of mind that doesn’t depend on the actual location” (Boym 251). I think that ACCKs carry the connection to their homeland and this longing is reflected in the spaces they inhabit. The door already had a history before it fell into my hands. Immigrants make new homes by adding their personal touches and narratives to the objects and spaces they encounter in the new country to make them familiar and their own.

The door’s glass window panels allows for light to pass through to create shadows on the white wall (fig. 18). The shadows are ephemeral, unstable, and intangible. The material



Figure 17. Installation Photo 1 of the door from *Wyobrażony Dom - The Imagined Home*, 2020, installation of *washi* paper glued to wall, monotype prints, and found door, 78 x 32"

investigation of *wycinanki* began with a print then a ghost print, which was followed by embossing and now shadows create another layer further from its origins. They are all inspired by my own memories of the floral forms and cultural memory of Poland when they were once only pasted in village homes. The shadows can change, move, sharpen, and lengthen depending on the lighting in their environment.



Figure 18. Installation Photo 2 of the door and its shadows from *Wyobrażony Dom - The Imagined Home*, 2020, installation of *washi* paper glued to wall, monotype prints, and found door, 78 x 32"

For the *Imagined Home* installation I made monotype prints that are shaped as *wycinanki* in a natural colour palette of white, cream, and brown (fig. 19). They are displayed with magnets and come off the wall slightly to also create shadows. The series escapes the rectangle of paper and the folded line is visible. I was always hesitant to fold and cut *wycinanki* as the support for my prints because the folded mark is visible and breaks an unspoken printmaking rule. For this series I moved past this to show both the process of their making and to emphasize paper's ability to hold the memory of the fold needed to make symmetrical cut-outs.

I introduced brown to my limited white colour palette to bring back warmth that was inspired by the found wooden door and also reminiscent of the furniture and parquet floors that I vividly remember in my grandparents' apartment. The white colour palette camouflages with the white surrounding environment to suggest how I blend into the public sphere of Canadian



Figure 19. Installation Photo of the monotype prints from *Wyobrażony Dom - The Imagined Home*, 2020, installation of *washi* paper glued to wall, monotype prints, and found door, dimensions variable

culture, but it can make the work feel cold and clinical. These are not the feelings that I associate with the domestic space of my childhood. In the retracing of *wycinanki* through time and space in the MFA program, I started my journey by mimicking the bright colours of the folk art tradition in *Instinctive Wycinanki Print Series*, then removed colour in both *Wiele Tęsknot - Multiple Longings* and *Drugi Język – Second Tongue*, and now I reintroduced the warm brown to suggest a lived-in and warm place.

With the introduction of shadows, folds, and a warmer palette, the work became more delicate and vulnerable in its materiality. This new element of the work was eventually going to present itself because my Polish culture was passed down carefully to me. My grandparents and mother spent a lot of time and hidden labour to make the home a safe, inviting, and warm environment for both my brother and I to learn the traditions of our Polish heritage. The tender space of the home and the care of my culture's elders have kept the Polish language and customs alive through learning, practicing, and repeating its traditions. I hope that the key elements of care and repetition are evident in both the processes of papercutting and printmaking and in the artwork.

When I first wrote this document I was thinking of time in the linear; past, present and future, because that is how I understood it. Now that I completed my defence and the MFA program I understand that my process and sense of time in relation to my work is more complex. The inspiration for my work in the present draws on my own past, the past of my elders' trying to recreate the homeland here in Canada, and a past of Poland. This is fuelled by a longing for my childhood home where my connection to my Polish identity is strongest. Boym writes that *diasporic intimacy* is an, "object of longing, then, is not really a place called home but a sense of intimacy with the world; it is not the past in general, but that imaginary moment when we had

time and didn't know the temptation of nostalgia" (251). My art practice focuses on yearning in the present to recreate a past that never existed then, and is still unattainable now. It exists in the in-between spaces of past and present, home and public, and Canada and Poland. This gray area where time and place collapse to become unstable and intangible. It is where people with cross-cultural identities belong, where my artwork is situated, and where I myself feel most at home. This is how *mnemonic imagination* works; remembering and imagining come together to create a cross-temporal pattern so that we can understand the past, present, and future to continuously form and maintain our identities.

I am excited to continue to uncover the possibilities of paper as I have only recently discovered that it can be a keeper of my Polish-Canadian culture. I would like to continue expanding my work with paper in sculpture and installation, and exploring the space of the in-between through my practice. Additionally, I would also like to explore the possibilities of artist books within my art and personal writing practice.

Last summer my family and I had the opportunity to travel to Poland. I was in the fifth grade the last time I visited and was too young to appreciate experiencing my family's roots. During our short trip I got to see where all my grandparents grew up and the town where they raised my mother and father. I hoped that this family vacation would fill in the gaps to my Polish heritage; perhaps a fix-all-cure for a longing that I felt in recent years, but it wasn't that simple.

Walking through the stare miasta²⁵ of different cities, noticing the citizens' distinctly Polish facial features, and listening to my first language spoken everywhere caught me in a dreamy haze. Small children that spoke the language so well

²⁵ The oldest parts of a city in Polish

bewildered me and relatives that commented on my “Angielski akcent”²⁶ were a bother for stating obvious facts. Of course my Polish isn’t perfect, I only practice it with my family at home, English is now my default.

What was most surprising was when aunts and uncles would ask my parents if they would ever move back home. My mom always answered: home is Canada. My parents have now spent more time in Canada than they have in Poland. This trip made me appreciate the connections I have for my elders’ homeland but it also helped me realize that I will also never be able to call it home. Canada is my home and the place where my Polish culture has been retraced. My dad, without fail always says: “Wszędzie jest dobrze, ale najlepiej jest w domu,²⁷” whenever we walk through the door of our suburban home in Mississauga after returning from a trip. Last summer I finally realized that maybe living in the in-between spaces of my cultural identities is where I will always belong and where the pull to Poland will forever be normal.

²⁶ English accent in Polish.

²⁷ The equivalent of “There’s no place like home.” Literal translation: “Everywhere is good but the best is home.” in Polish

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