The Forgetting

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Abstract

"How is the body a vessel for memory?" and "How do the stories we recall and recount create who we are?" These are the questions explored in this thesis through the lens of memory loss and family, alongside an analysis of the challenges of representation. As I navigate the impacts of my parents' dementia, I explore the fluid nature of memory, how memories are made, stored and lost, and the importance of memory in the making of the self through the construction of a personal narrative. My experiences of the chaotic, fragmented and disorienting effects of memory loss are expressed visually through the development of a language based on line (in particular, blind contour line), the iterative process of layering multiple images, the use of concepts such as the unfinished, the fragment, the gap and trace, as well as the expressive use of colour. These elements are used to create a series of large oil paintings that reconsider the nature of portraiture. Rather than following a traditional format, this thesis document draws on stories and memories, fragments that weave together a meandering narrative that mimics the visual structure of the artwork. Memory loss opens up questions of identity, and through stories lost and stories told, ultimately leads to the question "what can we truly know of others and ourselves?"

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Acknowledgements

I owe a debt of gratitude to many…

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and to Dan

for everything…

for my parents, who were once seventeen

Prelude

I have decided to tell this to you as a story

It's not a simple story with a clear beginning and a definite end

It doesn't really have a start or finish

Nor does it follow a simple and direct path

Like the probing, searching character of a contour line exploring an idea

It's telling is a bit circuitous

meandering

It's not even a whole story really

but rather

just fragments

To be honest, I'm not even certain that it is true.

Paintings

In October of 1922, a wildfire devastated the Temiskaming area in northern Ontario. The fall had been preceded by a hot dry summer. As farmers carried out their annual burning, setting small fires to clear the land, hurricane-force winds on October 4th blew several small brush fires together, creating a massive, uncontrollable inferno. Still considered one of the country's worst disasters, the Great Fire of 1922 burned nearly 1700 square kilometres of forests, farms and towns in just two days (Plummer). As the smoke grew thick in a jack pine forest by a small lake in nearby Hudson Township, my great-grandfather dug a pit near the house and buried his wife's oil paintings in the sand.

Storytelling is one of the most ubiquitous activities in which people engage (McLean 4). In her book *The Co-Authored Self,* Kate McLean emphasizes the importance of stories that families tell in defining who we are: "…we use family stories above all others to create and understand ourselves" (7). The burying of the paintings happened years before my father was born, but it was a story he recounted so often that I do not recall its first telling. If there is an art gene; a gene that gives one an impulse to create with pigment and form, perhaps I got this from my great-grandmother. Or maybe, it was the *story* that planted the seed that told me that paintings are important, something worth making, something worth saving.

Bearing Witness

Shortly after beginning my MFA, the lives of my elderly parents began to unravel, their situation becoming more and more tenuous as memory failure and dementia became debilitating. Along with the practical challenges of trying to deal with their care and safety during a world-wide pandemic and lock-down, was also the realization that any stories that they had not already told could soon be lost. Stories and memory are intimately bound with identity and the construction of self. Using what is called episodic memory—the recollection of events in one's life—we string together narratives that tell us and others who we are (Klein and Nichols 681). The implications of memory loss then are profound. What happens when one can no longer recall their own story?

For months I made daily calls to my parents while they remained isolated in their home, and during these conversations we began to reminisce more and more about the past. I asked questions about particular stories that they had previously shared and even recounted stories back to them that they had already forgotten. "What is at stake in your work?" is a question that was put to us in the first summer at Emily Carr. It was apparent to me that *this* was something I needed to pay attention to. This focus on memory and stories was the impetus for the formulation of my thesis direction and methodology and these conversations became the source of much of my early collection of material and ideas. Hannah Arendt recalls the Greek notion of remembrance as "the mother of all arts," since without it "the living activities of action, speech, thought would lose their reality…and disappear as though they had never been" (Arendt 95). This notion underscores the importance of my role, first of all, of simply bearing witness.

I was also aware that despite their forgetfulness, my parents, for the most part and with some prompting, were continuing to carry out many of the physical daily tasks that they had done all their lives. We are embodied beings. In his book about Alzheimer's, David Shenk points out that memory is not just in our brains but exists throughout our bodies: "We are the sum of our memories—everything we know, everything we perceive, every movement we make is shaped by them" (11). A number of questions began to emerge. How is the body a vessel for memory? How do the stories we recall and recount create who we are? Arendt says that in order for facts and events to continue to exist, they must not only be remembered but also "transformed, reified as it were, into things—into sayings of poetry…into paintings or sculpture…" (Arendt 95). In this thesis project, I am pursuing the interrogation of my questions through a material art practice. Using drawing and painting as a method of inquiry, and

drawing from the recollection of stories, reflexivity and process-based techniques such as blind contour drawing and intuitive use of colour, my research involves transforming my investigation into a series of paintings.

What became apparent early on in this project was that I needed to develop a visual language that could effectively express the characteristics of memory loss and dementia that I was witnessing in my parents. A realistic style of representation was inadequate to convey the confusion and chaos, the gaps, repetition and fragmented thoughts that were becoming more and more evident throughout our interactions. The painting *Portrait of my Parents* (fig. 1) marks the beginning of this process as I began exploring ways of abstracting aspects of the image that no longer made sense when depicted in a purely representational way. Considering elements such as line, fragmentation, colour and layering, I was searching for ways to express visually what I was experiencing in the shifting reality of our changing relationship.

Figure 1: Suzanne Paleczny, *Portrait of my Parents*, 2020, willow charcoal, acrylic and oil on canvas, 140 x 110 cm.

Storylines

My father was a quintessential story-teller (fig. 2). It seemed that he was always recounting one story or another, about himself or various relatives, many of whom I had never or only rarely met. His stories were full of detail—places, dates, names—I could never keep them straight. At some point, about the time his memory began to fail, I realized that I had not been listening carefully enough, that I hadn't tried hard enough to sort out all the details, to connect the dots between place and time and the large cast of characters. I gave him an empty notebook and asked him to write down his stories and to my surprise over the next few months he did—filled the book with his loopy, barely decipherable handwriting, always in pencil because he is a terrible speller, and so, I suppose, always leaving open the opportunity to revise. What was surprising was that much of what he wrote was new to me. So while he documented a book full of stories, many of those that I recalled from childhood, which now are fragmented and incomplete, were not among them.

My mother, on the other hand, likes to talk but has been much more reticent about sharing stories about her early life. There are just a handful of memories that she has recounted about when she was young. She grew up on a dairy farm, a family of twelve in a two bedroom house. Her mother had a baby every year, so with the exception of the gaps for the babies that died, she and her siblings are all a year apart. She slept on a foldout couch in the dining room between two of her sisters, one on either side, their feet at her head. "Did they ever kick you in the face while you were sleeping" I asked. "No," she said, "it was cold. We usually had our legs tucked up in our nightgowns."

My mother has never had much use for punctuation. She uses it rarely when she speaks and never when she writes, so when she occasionally wrote letters it was up to the reader to guess where it might be appropriate to pause. It occurs to me that this is not unlike how she lives her life. Even with her recent illness. My father has had dementia for around a dozen years. Like his pragmatic character, it has been a gradual decline; a sort of slow editing that is progressively robbing him of his past and future. He still has filters. My mother has only recently been diagnosed with dementia, but her illness can be characterized as a wildly careening free fall (fig. 3).

Figure 2: Suzanne Paleczny, *Portrait of my Parents* (detail), 2020, willow charcoal, acrylic and oil on canvas, 140 x 110 cm.

Figure 3: Suzanne Paleczny, *Portrait of my Parents* (detail), 2020, willow charcoal, acrylic and oil on canvas, 140 x 110 cm.

Why tell my parent's stories? In an early discussion about my studio work, an instructor asked me "where are *you* in these works?" It was a fair question. As I began this endeavor I couldn't answer the question as to why I felt compelled to attempt these portraits over and over again. I have gained some insight on this through the examination of identity theories. In *The Constitution of Selves*, philosopher Marya Schechtman lays out 'the narrative self-constitution view' which claims that "a person's identity is created by a self-conception that is narrative in form" (96). In other words, a person thinks of their life in terms of a coherent storyline that moves from the past forward in a linear and logical way. Not everything in our life is remembered or included, but this allows the stringing together of seemingly unconnected events to make sense of who we are and even predict our future actions (Schechtman 125). Although this suggests that we author our own stories, she stresses that there are limitations; our story has to reflect reality, a reality with which others can, at least somewhat, corroborate (Schechtman

119). Our stories, therefore, are not constructed alone. In *The Co-authored Self* psychology professor Kate McLean goes further, noting that not only do we define ourselves in relation to others, but that others also define us (4). This is especially true in the context of the family since it is here that our earliest and often most lasting conception of self is formed (McLean 7). There are certain stories that families tell over and over again that set out particular expectations as to our role within the group (McLean 33). Interestingly, she notes that the stories that get repeated don't necessarily have to be true for them to persist (McLean 63). In terms of my instructor's question, McLean goes on to state that since they are with us from the start, "parents' stories hold a privileged place" (116). Children appropriate their parents' stories and weave them into their own in order to better understand where they've come from (McLean 108). Mclean describes parents' stories as like the DNA they gave us: "The stories of our mother and our father are braided together with our own personal stories to form a mature identity…*our parents' stories are also our own*" (102).

Northern Life

My great-grandfather's home was spared on that October day back in 1922, the fire petering out less than two miles away. He and the paintings he saved were fixtures in my grandmother's house when I was growing up. He was a small man. A bout of infantile paralysis (polio) as a child had left him with one small leg and so he always walked with a cane, although at the time I just thought it was because he was old. He used the handle of it to grab our legs as we kids ran past him sitting in the big armchair in the corner of my grandmother's living room. He had also lost the end of his index finger to a table saw and took great pleasure in wagging the stump at us. When I knew him he was in his nineties but as a young man he had hauled a boiler and other equipment hundreds of miles north to set up a saw mill in the bush. They got bogged down in the mud so never made the last 30 or so miles to their planned destination. He set up the mill on the side of a lake, far from any town, in the middle of a jack pine forest where he cut down trees and raised up four daughters, my grandmother the eldest of them.

His wife, my great-grandmother, painted still-life images of peaches and bananas, lemons and lemonade surrounded by perpetually un-melting ice cubes, as well as interpretations of the resurrection; angels whisking souls away through billowing clouds on Easter morning. Despite being married she always signed her maiden name to her paintings, which seemed rather progressive given that this was around the turn of the last century (fig.4).

Figure 4: Rilla Wilson, *Peaches and Bananas*, circa 1910, oil on canvas, 30 x 60 cm.

My thoughts about their story have evolved over time. As a child I marveled at the confidence it must have taken for them to set off to an area far more remote than they were accustomed to; amazed that my great-grandmother, with her oil paints and made-in-England china, would have even agreed to such a move. In light of what I now know about colonization and broken treaties, I realize that it was not just tenacity but also their privilege as people of European descent, which allowed them to acquire 'empty' land simply by occupying, cutting and farming it. The land on which my great-grandparents settled was not empty of course. It was the traditional territory of the Anishinabewaki, Cree and Algonquin peoples who had lived there for thousands of years. Although the rights and movements of indigenous people had been limited by the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850, settlers could apply for and be issued land grants; 160 acres could be acquired for private ownership, simply by taking up residence and making (so called) 'improvements' to the property ("From Grant to Patent").

Donna Haraway asks "how do we inhabit the histories we inherit?" (qtd. in Pauker Ideol). Personal stories and societies are shaped not just by what is remembered, but also by what has been intentionally 'forgotten.' And "stories […] are never innocent," notes Natalie Loveless in *How to Make Art at the End of the World*; "they always do certain things and not others" (22). Because of my great-grandparents' move, three generations of their descendants were born in that specific location. I have moved many times in my life, even living overseas in Egypt and Zimbabwe, but I never lost that attachment and have remained most at home in the north. As professor Magnolia Pauker emphasized "our goal as critical thinkers is not to absolve ourselves of ideology, but rather to acknowledge the ideologies that we are a part of, that we maintain, and to consider and act upon those that we prefer not to reassert" (Pauker Ideol). I can't change the story or the situation in the past that gave my father's family a particular advantage. But I can decide not to forget that not only was all of the land that is now Canada already occupied long before those ancestors arrived, but also that the situation perpetuated by colonization has had continuing and devastating consequences for indigenous people which are yet to be rectified. It is with this in mind that I acknowledge that I am creating this thesis project from my current home near Whitehorse, Yukon, on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dunn First Nation and the Ta'an Kwach'an Council.

Ironically, it seems my great-grandfather was not particularly concerned with ownership and never bothered to fill out the paperwork necessary to acquire the deed to the property. So despite living there for over 70 years, when he died at the age of 96, the land went back to the Crown.

Three Rounds and a Square

When my mother left home at the age of 17 to work in a department store in a town several miles away, she did not speak English, only French. But she could understand enough to know when to lie about it in the job interview. “Surely,” she says later, “they must have known.” They hired her anyway. She had no desire to return to farm life. In fact she dislikes anything that reminds her of it—barns, milk, cream, anything that smells or tastes of ‘cow’ elicits from her, even now, a face of disgust. She boarded and then later shared an apartment in town with her sisters. Every Saturday night, after the community dance, her father Pépère, would drive into town, gather up his daughters and bring them all home for the rest of the weekend. Just recently, on my last trip back to my hometown, my parents and I sat on the shore of Lake Temiskaming and they recalled those Saturday night dances. After work my mother and her friends would go down to the Spur Line to swim in the lake and then would dress up and head over to the hall. The community dance is where my mother and father first met and first danced together nearly 70 years ago. The pattern of the music was always the same: three round dances followed by a square dance.

The order of the music was a detail that I had not heard before. But as I picture them dancing together I can see the imaginary lines that they trace with their feet as they meticulously execute the waltz, the two-step or the fox-trot; making their way around the dance floor repeating the pattern over and over, occasionally adjusting their route slightly to avoid colliding with other dancers. I imagine the trace of their movement creating a mesmerizing maze of lines that is both defined by a repeating pattern yet also wandering like a wayfarer’s path. When I was a young child, they took ballroom dancing lessons and forever afterwards moved across the dance floor with incredible lightness, ease and grace. Even now, their feet retain the memory of each of those dances.

How does memory work? How is it possible that the feet remember even though the mind has forgotten? In *The Tell-Tale Brain*, neuroscientist V.S. Ramachandran describes three types of memory: episodic memory, which is used in the construction of the personal narrative and refers to the remembering of specific events that have occurred in one’s life; semantic memory which refers to one’s factual knowledge of things (for example that the sky is blue or that particular world events occurred in history); and procedural memory, which is the type of memory that one uses to learn a new skill such as how to ride a bicycle (284). What is interesting about procedural memory is that we can call it up

instantly whenever needed, and it does not require any conscious remembrance (Ramachandran 284). This is the reason why we do not forget how to drive a car, this is the reason my parents can still dance.

The brain consists of around a hundred billion neurons connected together by about a hundred trillion different pathways (Shenk 11). Memories are literally traces—engrams—electro-chemical pathways that thread their way through the brain. No two traces are alike, each one unique, each one a record of a specific experience, a particular combination of sights, sounds, perceptions, perhaps words (Shenk 51-2). What is important to note is that these memories are not fixed. Shenk stresses "…the single most important point to understand about memory [is that] every time a memory is recalled, new trails are made. New memory traces are laid down on top of a foundation of old memories and old memories can only be recalled in the context of recent experiences" (Shenk 55). The implications of this are profound. It means that every time we remember something, it has the potential to change. So the memories that we recall most frequently, that we think we remember most clearly, may well have changed the most. In "Memory and Truth", Sven Bernecker notes that many philosophers believe that "retrieval is almost always more a process of construction than one of simple retrieval" (51).

It is this imagery—the pattern traced by dancing feet; the repeated layering of intricate, complex pathways through the brain in perpetually varying patterns—that informs my artistic process. In my paintings I employ the use of blind contour lines to map out the figures. Blind contour lines are based on concentrated looking and as such are very descriptive. But because they are done more by feel than visually they do not necessarily retain a consistent scale and tend to stray. This makes the lines simultaneously accurate and fugitive. I was first exposed to the concept of blind contour drawing many years ago as I worked my way through Kimon Nicolaides' book *The Natural Way to Draw*. I have used the technique throughout my practice ever since, both as a teaching tool and as a way to focus my mind as I begin to work; as a method to facilitate deep and careful observation and prevent myself from resorting to the drawing of symbols. This method of drawing aligns perfectly with the way I envision engrams intricately carving their pathways through the brain. Nicolaides emphasizes the need to move slowly, comparing the process to climbing a mountain step by step (11). Most importantly in this technique is his insistence that one must "keep the conviction that the pencil point is actually touching the contour" (10). As I carefully record every bend and curve, every subtle change of direction—much like the way water creeps into every nook and cranny of the river's bank as it makes its way downstream—the drawing begins to take on the integrity of a map. This prodding, searching quality of line can be seen in the work of American artist Chloe Piene who is known for her charcoal works on

paper (fig. 5). The almost trembling quality of her deliberate and descriptive lines (lines that seem to start and end spontaneously), exemplify the character of contour lines that I find so engaging.

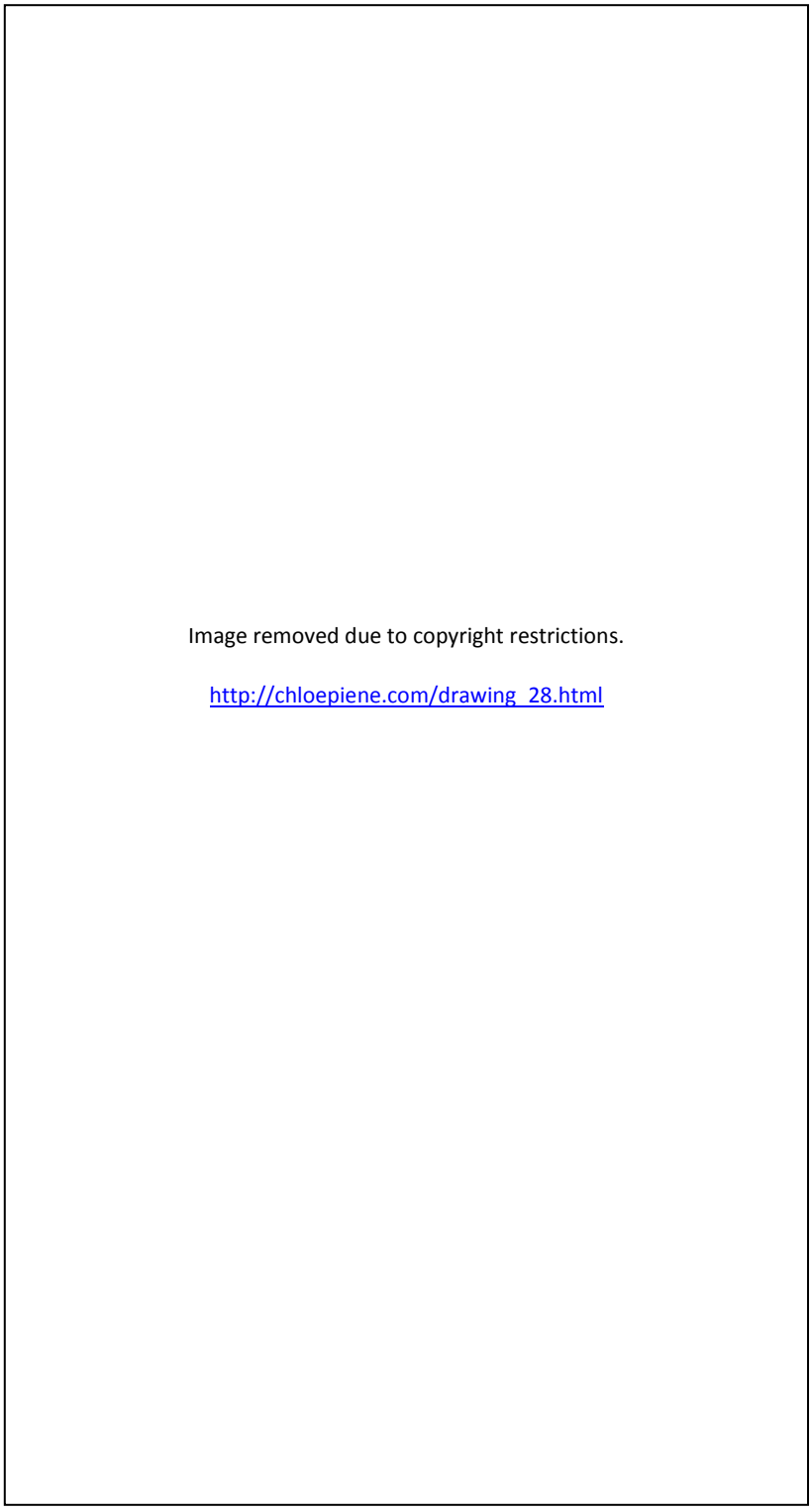

Figure 5: Chloe Piene, *Sleeper 02*, 2005, charcoal on vellum, 125.1 x 76.2 cm.

While in the past I have only used this technique as an exercise, in this most recent body of work, contour lines create the compositional foundation for each painting (fig. 6).

Figure 6: Suzanne Paleczny, detail of contour drawing for *My Mother, the Bull*, 2021, acrylic on canvas.

My process is also iterative as it involves the repetition and layering of multiple images one over the other. There are several motivations behind this layering. Inspired by the constant overwriting of memories or engrams, and the repeated pattern of dancing feet, I am searching for a mode of representation that accepts that truth can be found in 'the many', rather than attempting one 'correct' view. As Erwin Panofsky notes in his critique of linear perspective, "it forgets that we see not with a single fixed eye but with two constantly moving eyes…" (31). The cubists addressed this dilemma by depicting multiple views from a variety of angles simultaneously (Gombrich 574). In my work as I layer one drawing over another, I am attempting to account not only for movement and changes in perspective, but also to reflect the complexity and multiplicity of the human subject, the inconsistency and constantly changing nature of memory and changes that occur with the passage of time. In some

cases, such as in the work *What Gets Passed Down* (fig. 7), I have layered multiple people into what appears to be a single portrait, alluding to the resemblances that exist between members of the same family, even over multiple generations.

Figure 7: Suzanne Paleczny, *What Gets Passed Down*, 2020, oil on canvas, 140 x 115 cm.

British Columbian artist Ann Kipling uses a method of drawing that also incorporates multiple views in a single drawing. In her *Goats* series, created over a period of years when she kept goats as pets, it is not the individual animals that she endeavored to represent but rather the landscape-like quality of the group (Kipling Interview). White, black and ochre lines overlap and intersect in her work, giving an overall impression of complexity and vitality (fig.8, 9). The character and gesture of the lines tell us much more about the disposition and activity of these animals than any individual and fully rendered image could. It is this greater truth, found in the multiple, complex and seemingly chaotic form of representation, that I endeavor to find through this process.

Figure 8: Ann Kipling, *Goats*, 1990, pastel and Conté on paper, 70 x 102 cm. Marion Scott Gallery, Vancouver.

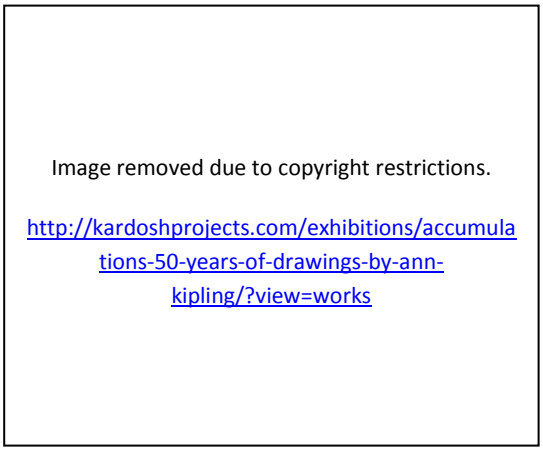

Figure 9: Ann Kipling, *Goats*, 1989, pastel and Conté on paper, 56.5 x 76 cm. Marion Scott Gallery|Kardosh Contemporary, Vancouver.

Family Resemblance

In the hiatus between the first and second waves of the pandemic, my husband and I packed up our car and drove the 5000 kilometers from our home in the Yukon to the small town in Northern Ontario where I was born. We spent the next two months sorting through a lifetime of possessions, emptying and selling my parents' home of thirty years and extricating them from the landscape and community of their youth and most of their eighty-some years, to relocate them to a home close to my siblings.

As part of that exercise, I spent days poring over and sorting old photos. Most of them were of my paternal ancestors. As a portrait painter I have a fascination with family resemblances. Looking at these photos is like looking at ghosts of myself. I know little or nothing about the personalities and lives of these people and yet there is something familiar in their faces. I recognize in them the shape of my own brow, or the bridge of my nose. My eyes, which are unlike anyone else's in my immediate family, I am able to trace from my paternal grandmother, to her father and then to his mother. The wedding photo of my great-grandmother could be mistaken for my niece if it were not for the clothing and hair style. I turn a page in an album and suddenly my four year old grandson stares out at me. The resemblance is uncanny, stunning. From the other people in the photo, I determine that this doppelgänger was likely my grandmother's cousin.

My mother used to laugh at my father as he talked about second-cousins-once-removed. None of her cousins are 'removed'— they are all just cousins. And everyone in town, it seems, *is* her cousin. The older she gets, the more everyone seems to be related to her, which is perhaps true. She is part of a huge family, good Catholics with many children, like the roots of a large tree, each generation spreading wider. In the collection of photos that I was sorting, there were few of my mother and her family. In fact there are no photos that date before her teenage years, so I have no idea what she looked like as a child or even what her parents looked like before they grew old.

Memory exists in our brains and muscles, but the memory that is responsible for family resemblances is present in every cell of our bodies. It is the biological memory that is given to us through our DNA—a type of genetic blueprint that has been passed down through many generations (Schulte, Hall 57). A person always receives fifty percent of their DNA from each parent, but the distribution from preceding generations is not necessarily so equitable. While in theory one should receive one quarter of their DNA

from each of their four grandparents, each parent doesn't necessarily pass on an equal share of genes from each of their parents (Adhikari). So in reality—more like a game of chance—siblings could each receive a very different slate of genes from their great-grandparents. This makes all the more fascinating the miracle that is two children, almost identical, born more than a hundred years apart.

Resemblances. The idea of achieving a likeness, the concepts of representation and mimesis, are very much connected to the genre of portrait painting; "[…] no pictorial genre depends as much on referentiality as the traditional portrait does" (Alphen 22). In *Painting People: figure painting today,* author Charlotte Mullins makes a distinction between portrait and figure painting: "the human form as subject" versus the human form "as the vehicle for communicating a broader or greater subject" (8). Into what camp does my own project fall? My initial instinct is to claim that my works are part of the second group. They are not intended as portraits of individuals, not meant to display a particular visual likeness or characteristics of specific subjects. Rather, more along French philosopher Hubert Damisch's conception of painting as an act of thought (Alphen 2), I see my paintings as evidence of my process, as a thinking or working through. The subject of the work is perhaps not even the person depicted at all, but rather could be said to be memory and its embodiment. Although I am largely using old black and white family photos as reference material, it is the memory embedded or inferred in these images that I am conjuring as I layer multiple map-like images over one another.

But however much I argue that the works are not portraits, there is also evidence that suggests otherwise. A unique feature of the portrait as a genre is that it is the coming together of two subjectivities, that of the portrayed and the portrayer. How do my paintings reflect the intimate relationship that I share with the subjects in my work? How much is my own memory at work as I transcribe what I think I see in the photos onto the canvas? Does my own knowledge or interpretation account for an excess of information that ends up in the work that cannot be accounted for in the referent?

Portraiture is also unique as a genre because it implies the existence of the person portrayed; we assume that the subject in the painting also exists somewhere out in the world. In *Painting Today,* Tony Godfrey suggests that this affects the way we respond to portraits: "Although representations of people are never the real thing, only echoes and traces, the response of the viewer to them is always as though to a person" (186). Possibly the earliest known human portraits are the thirty-thousand year old handprints on the cave walls of Chauvet and Lascaux in France (Mullins 7). Even though so much time has passed, when we see those human handprints still visible on the cave walls, we do not doubt that

those portrayed once existed. Despite the fragmentation of images, the layering of lines, and the subjective use of colour in my works, characteristic features of the specific human subjects come through. Those close to the family, recognize my father's hand, my mother's eyes and the curve of her back, the way they stand (fig. 10). Regardless of my intention, these physical or biological traits come through.

Figure 10: Suzanne Paleczny, *What Gets Passed Down* (detail), 2020, oil on canvas, 140 x 115 cm.

Research in recent years suggests that biological memory extends beyond simply the passing on of DNA. In "Echoes Across Generations," Patricia Schulte and Judith Hall describe two other types of biological memory. They note that due to the exchange of cells that occurs between mother and fetus during pregnancy, women often carry *actual* cells of their mothers, grandmothers, older siblings and children in their bodies (60). And through studying the effects of food shortages in Holland during World War II, researchers have been able to discover the way traumatic events in parents can alter gene expression in their off-spring (58). These epigenetic mechanisms can cause effects that persist for many generations even though those generations do not experience the trauma themselves (62). "The more we learn about biological memory through the study of epigenetics, the more we realize how profoundly our past experiences and even those of our parents and grandparents (and maybe beyond), can influence our lives" (Schulte and Hall 64).

This information has a profound impact on how I understand my own artworks. In the same way that a portrait suggests the fact of one's existence outside of the artwork, my familial connections go beyond appearances; I carry the fact of my ancestors' existence and potentially even traces of their experiences in my cells. Like the gesture of a hand pressed against a rock, I see my artworks as a form of evidence or documentation. Since the works are inspired by and created from memories, stories and old photos, the process involves a form of data collection and the works themselves speak to a reality that exists outside of them. They are records of people, places, time, conditions. The works are an expression of my desire to mark a presence.

The French that Doesn't Speak

My mother's parents had little in the way of schooling. Mémère had gone as far as grade two and could read but Pépère was illiterate. When he went to market he had a book with charts in it so that he could look up how much someone owed him depending on how many pounds of meat or produce they were buying. Eventually, my mother tells me, he no longer needed the book because he had memorized it all. Their house always had a faint, lingering smell of cigar smoke. When I was young there were often gatherings there. My mother and her sisters would cook while the men drank and smoked and played music. When dinner was ready they would call all the men in and they would fill the table and their plates and eat with gusto as us kids stood on the sidelines watching enviously. When they were done, the women would clear and wash the dishes and reset the table. And then all of us kids would sit and eat. When we were done the women would clear the table again, wash the dishes and reset it. And finally they would sit and eat. If they minded this order of things, they never said. There was always much laughing and talking going on. But, being a girl, I worried that this would be my lot once I grew up.

Pépère had a stroke from which he was warned that he would never walk again. But he did walk again. Once he felt better he stopped taking his medicine. And so he had another stroke from which he did not walk again. Instead, he lay paralyzed for seven years while his wife who had borne him thirteen children now cared for him. This is how I remember him most vividly, lying in his large chair, the party going on around him now, thin, still, always with tears as we kids greeted him (a ritual that was non-negotiable) by taking his hand, which was incredibly smooth and soft for a farmer's hand. His speech was jumbled and unclear, but even if I could have heard the words, I would not have known what he was saying because I did not speak French.

My mother did not teach us her vernacular. We spoke only English at home. I had thirty-some cousins, as well as aunts and uncles and grandparents that I could not communicate with. My younger brother, who even as a small child understood that this was something that must somehow be accounted for, used to tell people that he was half French, but that only his English half spoke. When the opportunity came for our family to move away to a city, my mother was happy to go. She loved the anonymity of city life, loved living somewhere other than her hometown. By not speaking to us in her mother-tongue, a rupture was established. We were apart from the rest of the family. Outsiders. Different. I sensed that this suited her. She had truly left the farm behind and had moved up in the world. When my father

retired he wanted nothing more than to return to the place of their youth. She did not want to return. She did eventually agree to go back, but she went kicking and screaming.

In Schechtman's self-constitution view, not everything is remembered. She stresses that the "individual incidents and episodes in a narrative take their meaning from the broader context of the story in which they occur" (Schechtman 96). In other words, there is a form of editing that is always taking place. In fact this editing or forgetting is precisely what allows us to prioritize and retain information (Shenk 60). Shenk explains it as "the brain eliminat[ing] trees in order to make sense of, and remember, the forests" (60). Or put more emphatically by McGill researcher Oliver Hardt, "[w]ithout forgetting, we would have no memory at all" (qtd. in Chawla). If we remembered everything, our brains would be totally inefficient and unable to function (Chawla). While there has been extensive research in the last several decades devoted to understanding how memories are made and stored, it is only recently that attention has been turned to the mechanism of forgetting (Chawla). What researchers are discovering is fascinating. Forgetting is not a passive occurrence; memories do not just fade away or degrade naturally on their own (Chawla). Researchers have found evidence that neural systems *actively* remove memories, that "our brains are constantly editing our recollections, from the very moment those memories first form" (Chawla).

I see a relationship between the notion of the brain's 'active' forgetting and the deliberate editing that takes place in someone's personal narrative. While unimportant details get edited automatically, one can also choose to disregard the memories that do not fit with one's self-conception. Like my mother, a person can actively go about leaving parts of their history behind in order to embrace a different narrative. By discarding the French and rural aspects of herself she was recreating her and her family in a way that reflected where she wanted to go; she was creating herself in a new image. Thinking about this brings to mind portraits from the Renaissance in which the subjects are painted alongside their emblematic *accoutrements* to indicate their social status; portraits in which a true likeness was less important than making a good impression (West 22).

In his essay "The Portrait's Dispersal," researcher Ernst Van Alphen looks at the contemporary portrait and the way in which it has become a problematic genre in twentieth-century art (Alphen 25). He explains this in terms of the breakdown of the sign. "The portrait embodies a dual project" in that it "gives authority to the portrayed subject as well as to mimetic representation" (25). But this only works if one believes that the signified and signifier come together in the sign (25). In the post-structural scenario, that no longer holds. Instead, as put forth in "Myth Today," Roland Barthes proposes a second

order of signification in which signifiers don't produce the signified; they just produce an endless line of signifiers (691). For Barthes, the question of meaning is never settled. Meaning is always being made and is never complete (691). According to psychoanalysts Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva, the post-structuralist human subject is also a split subject; split between the accessible mind and the unconscious. They propose that this split is caused by our entrance into language, a development that requires us to distinguish the "I who has spoken from the I who speaks" (Pauker Psych). The subject is no longer conceived as "whole, stable or at the origin of meaning" (Pauker Post), but is rather a liminal subject with multiple roles and identities, who is produced through social relations mediated through language. In fact Kristeva posits that through language, the subject reconstructs itself each and every time it speaks (Kristeva 79). The subject, according to Kristeva and Lacan then, is constantly unfolding. Like Barthes endless line of signifiers (or my mother's move to the city), we are always in the state of becoming—we are perpetually re-made.

Figuring out how to deal with this contemporary subject in my paintings presents many challenges. The perpetual-state-of-becoming suggests that a representation can neither be finished nor can it ever be fully resolved in the present. One way I have attempted to deal with this is to leave portions or much of the artwork in an unfinished or unresolved state. This is achieved both through working loosely and by stopping work on a piece before it has been over-finished (fig. 11).

Figure 11: Suzanne Paleczny, *Unforeseeable Lines of Flight* (detail), 2021, acrylic and oil on canvas, 198 x 122 cm.

In other instances, such as in *Portrait of my Grandmother*, the unfinished effect is achieved through actually deconstructing elements of the work after the fact (fig.12). This openness of the work allows for multiple readings.

Figure 12: Suzanne Paleczny, *Portrait of my Grandmother* (detail), 2021, acrylic and oil on canvas, 174 x 116 cm.

The concept of the split subject, divided between the conscious and unconscious selves, alludes to the idea that not everything is necessarily visible or accessible to us. A strategy to suggest this involves adding hidden or elusive content into the composition. American artist Ranu Mukherjee sometimes uses a technique in which she digitally alters images from the news until they become abstract colour patterns (fig. 13, 14). Although the original image is no longer decipherable, by including these patterns in her work, the content and meaning is still present. She asks "do we really know what we are seeing?" (Mukherjee).

Figure 13: Ranu Mukherjee, *A Bright Stage*, 2018, wall paint, linen, silk, pigment, inkjet print, 9 channel digital animation. Commissioned for Wilsey Court, de Young Museum, San Francisco. Photo used by permission of Ranu Mukherjee.

Figure 14: Ranu Mukherjee, *A Bright Stage* (detail), 2018, wall paint, linen, silk, pigment, inkjet print. Commissioned for Wilsey Court, de Young Museum, San Francisco. Photo used by permission of Ranu Mukherjee.

By layering multiple versions of my subjects over and over, information gets covered over and lost, although it still exists, embedded in the work. There is also no complete version of the figure available in a single view; you can never see all the figures whole at once, but rather, only as individual and/or fragmented subjects (fig. 15).

Figure 15: Suzanne Paleczny, *Perpetual Dreaming* (detail), 2021, charcoal, acrylic and oil on canvas, 179 x 122 cm.

These strategies of concealment, similar to the notion of deliberately editing ones story, could be considered processes of erosion. In his essay “It doesn’t reveal itself,” artist and academic, Christian Mieves, considers how the work of contemporary artists challenge traditional concepts of visibility in the image (206). He “explores ways in which artists utilise the trope of ruin in order to break up the visual image…” and notes that surprisingly, “practices of erosion [often] conceal and reveal at the same time” (206). He is challenging the idea that images are intended to be transparent and the meaning apparent, claiming that “image content is often willfully excluded from recognition” (207). By layering and fragmenting the images in my paintings, by leaving parts unresolved or destroying finished sections, or by Mukerjee’s embedding of information that we can no longer decipher, the reading of the image is no longer straight forward. But if what Mieves posits is true, these incomplete images could potentially become revelatory–“site[s] of an unveiling and uncovering of the invisible” (210).

Hands

One of the most defining features of my mother is her hands (fig. 16). They have always been rough and dry, prone to spitting and bleeding in the winter, with a touch like sandpaper. When she was a child at school, the kids teased her about being dirty, because the cracks in her hands held stains, likely from doing chores in the barn or helping in the kitchen. Perhaps this explains her compulsion to clean. She has a work ethic like no one else I have ever known, a standard so high that attaining and maintaining it took everything. Her hands are arthritic now. As she gets older they seem to have gotten bigger. Is it possible that hands, like ears and noses keep growing? Or maybe it is just that she is shrinking around them. They have within them their own memory, can still perform tasks, like rituals, that she has repeated over and over throughout her life, sweeping, folding, dusting, scrubbing, even though she no longer needs to do these things. I picture them like fluttering wings, actions, gestures, judgement, now without a place to settle, land, rest. Still searching for dirt to exorcise.

Figure 16: Suzanne Paleczny, *When I Dream of You…*(detail), 2021, oil on canvas, 170 x 100 cm.

We are embodied beings, a fact which is responsible for the way we encounter and understand the world. This embodied experience is exaggerated in the current lives of my parents since procedural memory somehow persists even when other types of memory have become compromised. Despite their

inability to make new short-term memories, physical tasks are often performed automatically and with ease.

This seemingly 'automatic' function is very much a part of the art-making process and this embodied aspect of art-making has been explored by various artists and philosophers. In "Eye and Mind," Maurice Merleau-Ponty quotes Paul Valery's statement that "the painter takes his body with him," and then continues, "indeed we cannot imagine how a mind could paint. It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings…that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement" (162). Expanding on the work of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger before him, Merleau-Ponty put forward an extensive philosophy of phenomenology in his seminal work *Phenomenology of Perception.* In it Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that we experience that world directly through the lived body, which involves a pre-reflective and instantaneous appropriation of an object or situation (67). We experience the things around us, not as a collection of separate objects, but as a whole in which each object is related to and affected by others around it (Merleau-Ponty Phen 45). He refers to what we see as 'a figure on a ground'—as I move my attention searchlight-like from one object to another, what is figure and what is ground continuously shifts (Phen 26). This underscores the idea that, as we are always situated in the world, perception must take place from a particular perspective—there is no view from nowhere (Merleau-Ponty Phen 95).

If we are to think about this in practical terms, it is impossible to imagine creating art without considering the way in which the body is involved. Everyone, if only as children, knows the sensation of dragging a pencil or smearing paint across a paper. South African artist William Kentridge emphasizes the importance of the relationship between physical making and thinking, describing the hours spent creating an artwork as a slow motion version of how we appropriate and understand the world (Kentridge). Barbara Bolt explains this relationship in her reflection on Heidegger's notion of 'handlability.' Citing the example of using a hammer, Heidegger emphasizes that we cannot understand how it works, simply by thinking about it. It is only through using the hammer that we gain understanding; "we come to know the world theoretically, only after we have come to know it through handling" (Bolt).

This insight explains the emphasis that many artists place on material exploration. Throughout my MFA, I have been encouraged to try different media, to "let the materials lead," to enter into the process without preconceived ideas of any particular outcome. As Kentridge notes, ones studio should be a place in which there is space for uncertainty (something he refers to as "necessary stupidity") as well as

the suppression of judgement. Art is something that emerges as a revealing, something that can neither be known in advance nor predicted (Bolt).

In the past two years I have worked with a variety of materials, beginning with an exploration of textiles in the first summer's Alt-Method studio project. In this first project, I was intrigued by the way in which the particular properties of fabric forced me to create differently, and the way in which the scrap fabrics I used added an additional layer of meaning into the work. Although I continued to explore other ways of working with textiles, as well as other media such as willow and yarn, I kept returning to paint, incorporating more and more of it into my work. In a piece called *House Dress* (fig. 17) I designed and sewed a dress out of decorator fabrics, signifying the domestic or familial space. I had been experimenting with painting on unprimed fabrics but was unhappy with the effect. So instead, I painted multiple images of my mother's hands (as she worked in the kitchen) onto primed canvas, and appliquéd them onto the dress.

Figure 17: Suzanne Paleczny, *House Dress* (front and back view details), 2020, drapery fabric, oil on canvas, zipper, buttons, tulle, 122 x 82 x 82 cm.

A subsequent work, the *Great Mother Dress* (fig. 18), was stitched entirely out of canvas and the whole dress surface covered with paint.

Figure 18: Suzanne Paleczny, *Great Mother Dress* (left side and front views), 2020, canvas, acrylic and oil paint, Velcro, wire, 167 x 80 x 80 cm.

It was at this point that I realized that the benefits that textiles and other materials offered in terms of innovative working methods, could not make up for or replace the desire I had to paint. I needed to find a way to access or incorporate a more embodied way of knowing into my painting practice. That breakthrough came through the use of blind contour lines.

When working with representation, memory forms a key part of the process. Derrida calls it the "disappearing apparition," […] "the invisible at the origin of drawing in the gap between the artist's gaze and the hand's inscription" (qtd. in Malbert 64). As soon as the artist looks away, whatever the artist has been looking at disappears. As painter and sculptor Alberto Giacometti notes, it is only the 'residue of a

vision' that remains, which one must then "attempt to preserve and represent" (qtd. in Malbert 14). By incorporating the use of blind contour drawings into my works, I achieved two things that were essential in terms of how my work has been able to evolve. First of all, because I am not looking at what I draw as I work, I have quieted the critical voices that Kentridge warned of, the voices that are constantly evaluating what I am doing before I have barely begun. And secondly, by not looking at the canvas as I draw, I have eliminated the memory gap that Derrida speaks of. Working in this way, I need not remove my eyes from the referent; I don't need to recall, but rather am able to feel my way across the canvas (fig 19).

Figure 19: Suzanne Paleczny, layered contour drawing on prepared canvas as preparatory step in creating the work *What Gets Passed Down*.

In much the same way that my parents' brains bypass the faulty neurons in order to get up and move, dust, sweep, get dressed or dance, blind contour drawing allows my other senses to take over and take care of this initial stage of my work.

There might seem to be a contradiction between this discussion of an embodied practice and the way in which I have portrayed the subjects in my works. The hands of my mother in the *House Dress* and all of the figures in the contour portraits appear to be disembodied; existing without the context of setting or surroundings (fig. 20). There is not even the hint of a horizon but rather the subjects seem to float in the non-space of the canvas. This disconnect is deliberate and speaks to the nature of memory loss and dementia. I am witnessing that the more memory fails, the more one loses the grounding of one's position. While my parents can recall the motions necessary to carry out familiar functions, they do not necessarily know where they are or recall the circumstances or context of their actions. Merleau-Ponty's notion of a figure on a ground becomes more tentative, the figures set adrift. People, events, even generations, no longer tethered to a particular location, time or space.

Figure 20: Suzanne Paleczny, *When I Dream of You…,* 2021, oil on canvas, 170 x 100 cm.

Perpetual Dreaming

I visited my parents in the spring before my mother's memory loss became apparent. She told me a story that I had never heard before, which was unusual, because once you've known someone for a long time, you tend to know all their stories. She told me about going to a religious event with her godmother, Mrs. Valley. This would not have been an unusual occurrence. Mrs. Valley lived on the farm next door and as she had no children of her own, my mother spent a lot of time at her house. She was only six or seven years old at the time and she wore a yellow dress to this event. She recalled that it was a nice dress, store-bought, but that it was dirty because she had been wearing it. But her mother put it on her anyways and sent her on her way. But later, she tells me, the nuns confronted Mrs. Valley, chastising her for bringing this child along in her dirty dress. They spoke directly to Mrs. Valley without looking at or acknowledging my mother's presence, as if she wasn't there or couldn't hear them talking.

Within a few months of her telling me this, my mother's dementia became apparent. She began to mix up her night-time dreams with daytime reality. She could not distinguish the two and often told me about people she had seen or things that she had done that I knew could not possibly be true. And so I began to wonder if this story too had been a dream. There were dream-like qualities to it, like the way the nuns talked about her as though she were not standing there. It made me think again about Merleau-Ponty's notion of the 'figure on a ground,' and the way it shifts depending on where we place our focus—subject and ground, awake and dreaming, eclipsing one another in an unstable and evanescent world. This notion is explored in the painting *Perpetual Dreaming* (fig. 21). Using imagery from my mother's description of sleeping three to a bed with her sisters, the orientation of the figures is ambiguous; there is no clear sense of what is up and what is down. And like the shifting of consciousness between dreaming and awake, there is also no clear indication of foreground and background. The decorative pattern of the canvas' surface appears to be both in front of and behind the figures, fragments of both figure and pattern surfacing intermittently throughout the painting.

Colour is also an important element of this work. In her memoir about memoir, *I Could Tell You Stories,* Patricia Hampl recalls the famous phrase of Russian novelist Vladimir Nabokov, "caress the detail, the divine detail" (224). "It is the humble detail," Hampl continues, "which commands memory to speak" (224). When we remember an event, we don't remember it in its entirety, but only certain specific details about it. I notice how often in my mother's reminiscing she mentions the colour of something, especially as it relates to clothing. Her yellow dress. The beige coat with brown velvet trim. I regard

colour as one of the most important elements to consider as I work. There are many studies that have demonstrated the physiological effects of colour on the body. Bright red excites, muted blues and greens calm. I am particularly interested in the notion that colour can also affect viewers on a psychological level.

In his book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Wassily Kandinsky claims that "colour is a power which directly influences the soul" (25). Along a similar (although perhaps more secular) line of thinking, Julia Kristeva considers the relationship between colour and the unconscious. In her essay "Giotto's Joy" she considers the Padua frescos painted by 14th century Italian painter Giotto di Bondone, and provides an interesting insight into the power of colour to affect viewer response. She notes that due to the physiology of the human eye, blue appears relatively brighter in low light than any other colours, thereby causing the solid blue backgrounds of Giotto's frescos to seem to glow in the low light of the chapel in which they were painted. Kristeva describes this effect of colour in terms of psychoanalytic theory. She interprets the way the eye perceives blue in low light as a decentring experience (since the cones in the centre of the eye do not work in low light but only the surrounding rod cells) that recalls the initial breaking away of the human subject from instinctual dependence (208). She is describing a pre-symbolic association with colour. In other words, the colour blue can be seen as directly accessing the unconscious. What I find particularly interesting, is that this theory suggests that the colour is overriding the narrative or didactic aspect of the fresco images; that the meaning of the work is not necessarily tied to the representational content and may thus affect the viewer in ways that might not be anticipated.

I am also familiar with the strength—the persistence—of the blue wavelength above all others that Kristeva describes. It is why, in the dead of winter in the Yukon, when the sun barely clears the horizon, the whole world is awash in a blue hue. It is also the reason why, as the light fades at the end of each day, what we see becomes increasingly blue until it too fades to shades of black and gray. It was this twilight effect that I was after in *Perpetual Dreaming* as I coated the entire painting with an indigo blue glaze (fig. 21).

Figure 21: Suzanne Paleczny, *Perpetual Dreaming*, 2021, charcoal, acrylic and oil on canvas, 179 x 122 cm.

I have studied the work of colour theorists Josef Albers and Faber Birren that describe the optical effects that can be created through the mixing or juxtaposing of colour and have applied their insights to my work. I must also admit, however, that my colour use is not entirely theoretical but, perhaps in line with Kristeva's insight, often feels more intuitive than planned. Colours can elicit in me an emotional response, although I cannot say for sure whether this is because they are associated with memories or cultural meanings, or if I am simply reacting to the physiological effects of a particular light wavelength. But knowledge of this effect informs my working method in that I do not treat colour as subordinate to form but actually begin with colour. I do not start with a white surface, preferring instead to begin each painting on a field of colour/s that has been prepared with loosely applied paint, often in random patterns. This sets the tone for each piece and, since, as Albers emphasizes in his *Interaction of Colour*, "colour is the most relative media in art" (8), determines the effect of every subsequent colour applied. I am drawn particularly to saturated colour and while my hue choice may not be entirely subjective, I often exaggerate the intensity of a colour I see in nature. In my recent work I have been applying the paint in various ways, sometimes laying down blocks or fragments of solid colour, other times modelling with gradations (fig. 22).

Figure 22: Suzanne Paleczny, *My Mother, The Bull* (detail) showing patchwork-like blocks of solid and graded colour.

I see an affinity between the way I am currently working and the Orphism or "Simultanéisme" of Sonia Delaunay (fig. 23). Her work can be seen as evolving out of cubism but she employed bright colours and was focused particularly on colour relationships. Delaunay also described her own approach as being intuitive (Cramer, Grant). She saw the geometric shapes she used not as representing specific objects but simply as "vessels for colour" through which meaning could be communicated (Barcio). While my own work is not devoid of mimetic representation, I see colour as equal in importance as form. And, in focusing on colour relationships, my paintings evolve organically as each new colour is laid down.

Figure 23: Sonia Delaunay, *Electrical Prisms*, 1914, oil on canvas, 250 x 250 cm. Photo by Martin Beek. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

At the end of her story about the yellow dress, my mother told me that Mrs. Valley had defended her against the nuns. But then she said in a voice that was small and hurt, “I don’t know why my mother would have let me go out in a dress that wasn’t clean.” All my life, I had perhaps mistakenly taken my mother’s fussing and impossible standards as something that she was imposing on me because my failures would reflect poorly on *her*. But maybe that wasn’t it at all. Whether or not this event actually took place, or whether it was a simply a fear or insecurity that she harboured, in her mind her mother had somehow let her down, opened her up to ridicule. Perhaps she was just trying to protect me from the same. It occurs to me that even dreams have their own truth. And so I trust that there is also some truth to the unconscious or intuitive use of colour. If, as Kristeva’s essay suggests, viewers respond to Giotto’s work, not because of the content of the images but because of the colour’s effect, we can conclude that the body knows things, even if the mind might not be able to explain what or why. And, I am willing to accept that truth comes to us in many different ways.

Portrait of my Grandmother

There were two things that were basically forbidden in our house when I was growing up—fat and dirt. Both could readily be found at the home of my paternal grandmother. I was a featherweight—all sharp edges, all elbows and knees. My mother too was full of sharp angles. My grandmother, however, was smooth and soft and I can recall the smell and feel of her body as she hugged us or when I sat next to her. She had grown up in the bush, beside a lake in a jack pine forest far from any town. There are photos of her and her three sisters in their turn-of-the-century frocks, playing in mountains of shavings and sawdust from their father's sawmill. I always imagined her home in the forest as an idyllic setting for a child to grow up in. Perhaps it was this environment that fuelled her sense of creativity. She was a free-spirit, different than anyone else that I have known. Everything in her home was handmade. My grandfather had made furniture out of wood and she had a loom and had woven the fabric for this furniture as well as all the curtains in the house. She made beautiful hooked rugs from scraps of wool fabric that covered the floors, and the walls were filled with paintings that she and her mother had painted. In the dining room there was a bay window filled with various species of cacti. I was fascinated by their strange and exotic shapes and threatening spikes, and even more so by how the dust was allowed to live undisturbed among them. She was my favorite person in the whole world.

My father's parents did not attend his wedding. It was not a welcomed union; no one in either family would consent, my mother being French and Catholic and my father English and Protestant. But my grandmother's absence had been attributed not to this but rather to a vague reference to illness. The act of remembering and forgetting are intimately connected. Memory loss can sometimes have the opposite effect than what might be expected, and lead to accidental revelations. This is particularly true in the case of a lie. It was only as my parent's memories began to fail and they could no longer recall the story they had concocted to explain my grandmother's absence—some sixty or so years after the event—that the real story came out. Shortly before their marriage, my grandmother had taken my father's .32 caliber handgun and shot herself in the chest.

I am stunned.

My mind reels backwards. I begin to reinterpret everything I thought I knew through the lens of this new information. What did I truly know of her? I know I am being morbid, but I even wonder about the scar.

The damage must have been substantial as the bullet exited through her back. Did I touch this scar as I wrapped my skinny, kid arms around her? What does it mean to love someone fiercely, all the while unaware of their fragile gaping holes?

The idea of representation is fraught. It is the impossible task of re-creating our perceptions visually, perceptions which in themselves cannot be fully grasped. Western philosophers, all the way back to Plato's allegory of the cave, have expressed doubts that reality is actually knowable. Added to this is the question of the other. What can one truly know of another person?

This crisis is exemplified in the work of Swiss sculptor and painter Alberto Giacometti. Art historian Leo Costello describes Giacometti's creative process as one marked by an endless cycle of making and destroying; "gradually building up an image on the canvas only to erase it and begin again" (Costello 64). Costello claims that Giacometti harboured "a profound sense of doubt about the most apparently basic artistic transaction, that of looking carefully and representing what he has seen" (63). This struggle is viscerally apparent in his work, his painted portraits showing layers of lines built up over scrubbed out traces of multiple attempts (fig. 24).

Figure 24: Alberto Giacometti, *Caroline*, 1961, oil on canvas, 100 x 82 cm. Photo by Bob Ramsak. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

A similar struggle can be seen in the works of German-British painter Frank Auerbach. At first glance Auerbach's paintings might be mistaken for works that were whipped up in a great rush, thick globs of paint applied with energetic brush strokes (fig. 25). But in reality they are the result of a painstaking process. Working from life, Auerbach paints the same sitters on a weekly basis for years, often decades. At the end of most sessions, unsatisfied, he scrapes down the whole surface (Auerbach). He says "I want everything in the painting to work, that is, every force, every plane, every direction to relate to every other direction in the painting" (Tate). He describes the process of painting as "almost impossible" (Auerbach). In the end, every one of his portraits is ultimately completed in a single sitting, but that may only come after as many as "20, 50 or perhaps 200 separate versions that are judged not good enough" (Tate).

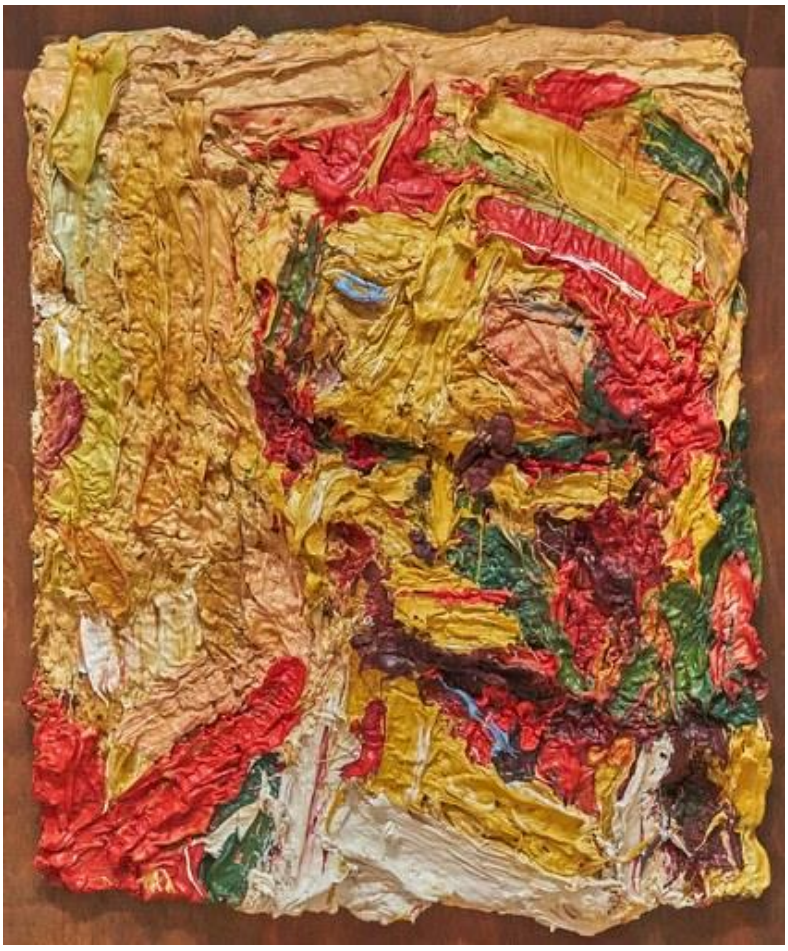

Figure 25: Frank Auerbach, *Head of E.O.W.,* 1960, oil on wood, 43.3 x 35.5 cm. Tate Collection. Photo by GOC53, CC BY 2.0.

Why even engage in such an impossible task? In an interview with BBC host Stephen Smith, Auerbach notes that as witness to much death and destruction as a child during the war (who lost both his parents to Auschwitz) he understood early on that life was short and dangerous; that anyone could go at any time and that one's life may be gone without a trace. So he set out to leave a trace and, he states "the only trace I could think of was art" (Auerbach). A trace is defined in the Meriam-Webster dictionary as "a mark or line left by something that has passed; a sign or evidence of some past thing; a vestige; an engram." The conception of the trace is commonly expressed visually in the work of art, in fact art has its own term for it: *pentimento*. Derived from the Italian verb *pentirsi* (to repent or change one's mind), *pentimento* refers to visible marks or traces of previous iterations in a work made by the artist during the process of painting (The National Gallery).

The challenge of representation and the concept of the trace come together in Jacques Derrida's semiotic analysis called deconstruction. Derrida's deconstruction theory is a way of understanding the relationship between text and meaning (Pauker Post). Although Derrida is writing about language, his insight is relevant to other modes of expression. In his project Derrida is challenging the binary oppositions that exist in language and the implicit meanings and hierarchies that they contain (Pauker Post). Within his theory he talks about the 'trace' and claims that 'there is nothing outside the trace" (Derrida x). As Judith Butler explains in her introduction to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, "the usage of the term is unsettling, since we expect that where there is a trace, there is something prior to it that has left it…"(qtd. in Derrida x). But Derrida is suggesting that the trace is not only marking the absence of something, but also the impossibility of its existence in the first place (x).

Two aspects of deconstruction theory are particularly relevant to my endeavor to paint my grandmother. First of all, it raises for me the question of whether hierarchies also exist in visual language; is there also a hierarchy between line and colour? The line is associated with language, writing, calculations, map-making, or in other words, information. Colour is associated with emotion. What did I actually know of my grandmother beyond the impressions and emotions that her memory elicits? What happens when I efface the line and give priority to colour? What is left is the faint trace of the lines below, lines that describe something that is perhaps incorrect or might have only existed in my imagination (fig. 26). In his theory Derrida also uses something he calls *sous rature* (translating to 'under erasure') in which he crosses out a word to indicate that it is inaccurate, but at the same time leaves the crossed out word in the text, since constraints of our language offer nothing better to replace it (Derrida xxxii). Necessary yet inadequate could well describe the visual artist's dilemma of representation.

Figure 26: Suzanne Paleczny, *Portrait of my Grandmother* (detail), 2021, acrylic and oil on canvas, 174 x 116 cm.

What can one truly know of oneself or another? In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler explores moral philosophy and asks what it means to lead an ethical life. But in the pursuit of the answer to this she must first untangle the problem of self-knowledge. What she discovers is that there are limits to what one can truly know. And that "moments of unknowingness about oneself tend to emerge in the context of relations to others" (20). Similarly, Costello suggests that Giacometti's struggle is actually one related to alterity (70). He draws a correlation between Giacometti's relationships with his sitters and French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas' conception of the Other; a stance in which he "accepts the distance between Self and Other as unbridgeable and refuses to attempt to circumscribe that alterity into any kind of unity" (Costello 66, 70). Given the gulf that exists between my limited knowledge of my grandmother and her actual life, what can I hope to achieve in a portrait of her? I painted over my first two attempts and while the initial lines are still visible, I did not see the need to cover them further. They are my *pentimento*, traces of what may not have even existed. It is the colour that remains—bright pinks and greens, her in her market flower garden, or surrounded by colourful tubes of paints, by strips of bright coloured wool rags for rugs, or threads for weaving. The painting represents my impressions in colour, but everything is speculative. There is nothing precise in the work, not even a clear delineation of where my grandmother begins or ends on the canvas (fig. 27). I had intended to keep working on it, but in the end I abandoned that idea. Not out of frustration but out of the realization that I preferred the work in this particular stage of its undoing, and like Derrida's suggestion of the "inadequate yet necessary" tools of expression, what remains is perhaps the best that I can hope for.

Figure 27: Suzanne Paleczny, *Portrait of my Grandmother*, 2021, acrylic and oil on canvas, 174 x 116 cm.

My Mother, the Bull

There is only one game I remember my mother playing when I was a child. That she played with us at all is of note, because I grew up before the time when parents read stories or helped with homework. But very occasionally, my mother would get down on her hands and knees, pretend to be a bull, and chase my sisters and I around the kitchen. That the bull was the scariest animal that she could think of, attests to her experience growing up on a dairy farm, where the bull was kept separate and fuming in its own paddock. But I still think that it's funny that she did not choose to be a lion, or bear, or dragon. She would furrow her brow and make frightful bull sounds. When she assumed that expression she was utterly transformed and as she chased us around the kitchen we would scream in terror. We would try to run around behind her and clamber onto her back where we would be safe from 'the face.' I must have been only two or three years old at the time, because I was the youngest of my sisters, and all of us fit together on her back. Although it was a game, the fear we felt was real. The whole game was terrifying really. Yet we begged her to play it with us.

My mother's bull face filled my childhood dreams (fig. 28). In every dream I can recall of her, I would encounter her first from behind. And as she would turn to face me, it was always the bull expression that she wore.

Every time.

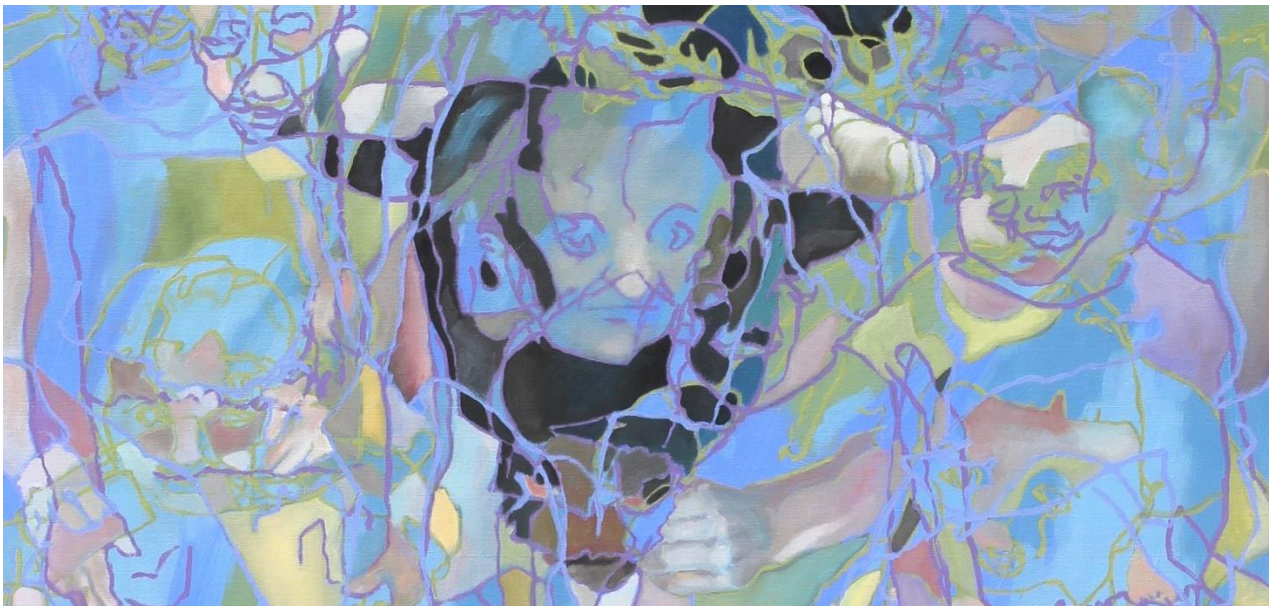

Figure 28: Suzanne Paleczny, *My Mother, the Bull* (detail), 2021, acrylic and oil on canvas, 178 x 110 cm.

While thinking about this it occurred to me that I never dream of her anymore, haven't for years, despite the details of her life consuming much of my daily time and thoughts. And then, in November, out of the blue, she showed up in my dreams. She did not wear the bull expression. She was docile, tacit, diminished. Her hair was not dyed as it has been now for over forty years, but was its natural white, dishevelled. In the dream she was sitting next to me. Ever so slowly she started to lean towards me, until her head eventually lay in my lap. And I began to pick tiny white moths out of her hair…

I had no idea what the moths could mean, but after the dream, when I reworked a painting of her, I added a few small moths into it (fig. 29).

Figure 29: Suzanne Paleczny, *When I Dream of You…* (detail), 2021, oil on canvas, 170 x 100 cm.

Several weeks later I was introduced to the work of French Philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman and through him, art historian Aby Warburg. And I felt my hair stand up as I heard for the first time, the story of Warburg's interactions with moths. In 1921 Warburg suffered a mental breakdown and spent three years in Ludwig Binswanger's neurological clinic. Transcriptions from the hospital's archives describe his unusual behaviour: "He practices a cult with the moths and butterflies that fly into his room at night. He speaks to them for hours. He calls them his little soul animals and tells them about his suffering" (Michaud 171-3). Were the moths in my dream telling me something about my own mother's suffering?

The motif of the erratic flight of lepidopteran resonates with the scattered and fragmented effects of dementia. Unlike the flight of a bird, their movement is seemingly chaotic. Researcher Vlad Ionescu describes the effect of this:

> "Butterflies are distressing apparitions on all levels of human experience. From a phenomenological perspective, they signal a perplexing movement that disturbs the viewer's attention. When looking at butterflies, we perceive highly irregular sensings that make it difficult to distinguish the continuity of their forms and movement. From a phenomenological perspective, consciousness perceives flying butterflies as unforeseeable lines of flight" (6).

Didi-Huberman often uses the insect as metaphor in his work, comparing the 'image' itself to a butterfly in flight, "whose movements are grasped together in a perpetual motion of opening and closing, appearing and disappearing, systole and diastole, inhaling and exhaling"(qtd. in Ionescu 7).

As my parents' thought processes become more and more fragmented, looping in shorter and more unpredictable ways, I cannot know what that feels like. But if I try to imagine a visual image of their condition, the motif of the erratic flight of moths and butterflies comes to mind. I picture disconnected fragments of colour, meandering lines with unpredictable patterns, images that flicker and change as one's eye moves across them. I am using the 'fragment' as a visual device to express the mixed up memories, the truncated thoughts, conversations that trail off as the train of thought dissolves, the chaotic circling of our conversations. In *My Mother, the Bull* (fig. 30) or Unforeseeable Lines of Flight (fig. 31), it is not possible to follow or make out any complete figure; the images can only be read by piecing together bits and pieces. Likewise, the meandering contour lines of the paintings mimic these unpredictable flight patterns as reflected in our conversations that move in repetitive and unexpected ways, stopping and starting, changing direction.

Several years ago in Ottawa, I stumbled across an exhibition by Toronto artist Christine Davis. In it, Davis had created a huge screen made of brilliant blue and iridescent butterflies, onto which she was projecting ethereal images of clouds and stars (Davis). Notwithstanding my initial shock and distress at seeing all the dead butterflies, I have to admit that the effect was mesmerizing. As the projected image reflected off each wing, light and colours scattering in multiple directions, the screen was transformed into a shimmering, trembling, living tapestry. In Nathaniel Dorsky's book *Devotional Cinema* he describes the way film is not solid but has an intermittent quality that can be compared to the way we, as humans, experience the world (28). He states "life is full of gaps. We try to make the whole thing seem

continuous and solid, but it's actually more intermittent than we often want to admit" (Dorsky 29). This intermittent quality that Dorsky describes speaks to me of our experience of memory. And while it is perhaps exaggerated by the effects of dementia, if I have learned anything through this investigation, it is that *all* memory is fragmented and shifting—full of gaps created intentionally or not—the flickering, intermittent, tentative nature of memory is true for us all. And while I am working in paint rather than film, it is this trembling, tentative effect that I aspire to recreate in the solid surfaces of my canvases—a chimera-like quality that can't be pinned to a single reading.

Unforeseeable lines of flight.

Figure 30: Suzanne Paleczny, *My Mother, the Bull,* 2021, acrylic and oil on canvas, 178 x 110 cm.

Figure 31: Suzanne Paleczny, *Unforeseeable Lines of Flight*, 2021, acrylic and oil on canvas, 198 x 122 cm.

Bloodlines

My father used to tell us that of his four grandparents, two were Scottish, one was English and one was Irish. Although they had immigrated to Canada several generations before, he could also tell us from precisely which region of each of those countries his ancestors had come. My impression was that this heritage was something to be proud of. Even the dubious activity of some of our Irish relatives, which suggests that we are perhaps descended from horse thieves, did not seem to sully this view. On my mother's side there was no such talk of a long line of ancestors. All of her grandparents came from Quebec. Full stop. I'm not sure what my mother knew of her paternal grandparents, for they remained far away in Quebec. But her maternal grandparents had moved to Ontario when Mémère was a teenager, and had a farm in the next town over from where my mother grew up. Mémère, my mom and her siblings would often drive over and visit the grandparents on Sunday afternoons, one of my mom's older sisters driving too fast in the pick-up truck while all the kids stood, hanging-on-for-dear-life, in the back. Everything I know about my mother's maternal grandparents can be told in a few short lines. Her grandfather was very quiet, more apt to sit and listen than participate in the conversation. The one story that my mother relayed of him was of his church-going habits. Every Sunday he would dress in his Sunday best and climb into the car/sled with the rest of the family. But before they would make it to the end of the driveway, he would feign some excuse, hop out and tell them to go ahead without him. The same thing apparently happened every week, so as far as I know, he never made it to church. Her grandmother was a tiny woman with a rounded back (something my mother was loathe to inherit but did so none-the-less); she got married at the age of thirty, had ten children and always said that she had gotten married ten years too soon; she lived to be quite old and died one day while lighting the stove. And, my mother's maternal grandparents were Ojibway. Or part Ojibway.

This last point was not something that was often talked of. In fact it is not something that my mother ever talks about unless pressed. When I ask, she tells me that both of her maternal grandparents were half indigenous, and so her mother, Mémère was also half. That would add up. Although it occurs to me that my mother's use of the term 'half' might be as fluid as her use of the word 'cousin.' So I don't really know. I presume that they had lost their status, were enfranchised, for they had left their home in Quebec and owned and worked their own farm in Ontario. Beyond the name of the Quebec town from where they'd moved, I know nothing about the lives of my maternal ancestors. Unlike on my father's

side, there are no photos that document their story. Save for the few anecdotes that my mother relayed, there are no stories at all that have made their way to the present generation.
I can't help wonder how societal conditions might have contributed to the discrepancy I perceive in my parents' attitudes towards their family histories; a discrepancy that appears to deem one past worthy of remembering and the other not.

In his book *The Life of Lines*, anthropologist Tim Ingold posits a theory that names lines and knots as the organizing principles of life and society. Most lines, he claims fall into one of two categories: threads or traces (64). Threads get laid down, woven together, they set out directions, map a journey; traces are the marks left behind by that journey. Our genealogical lines are threads, weaving patterns of relations binding us to our past. During the early days of the pandemic when I was talking to my parents constantly, I devised a line system to document our conversations. I drew patterns of lines— straight, wavy or looping in circles—continuously while we talked, marking coherent versus nonsensical conversations, and indicating each repetition (fig. 32).

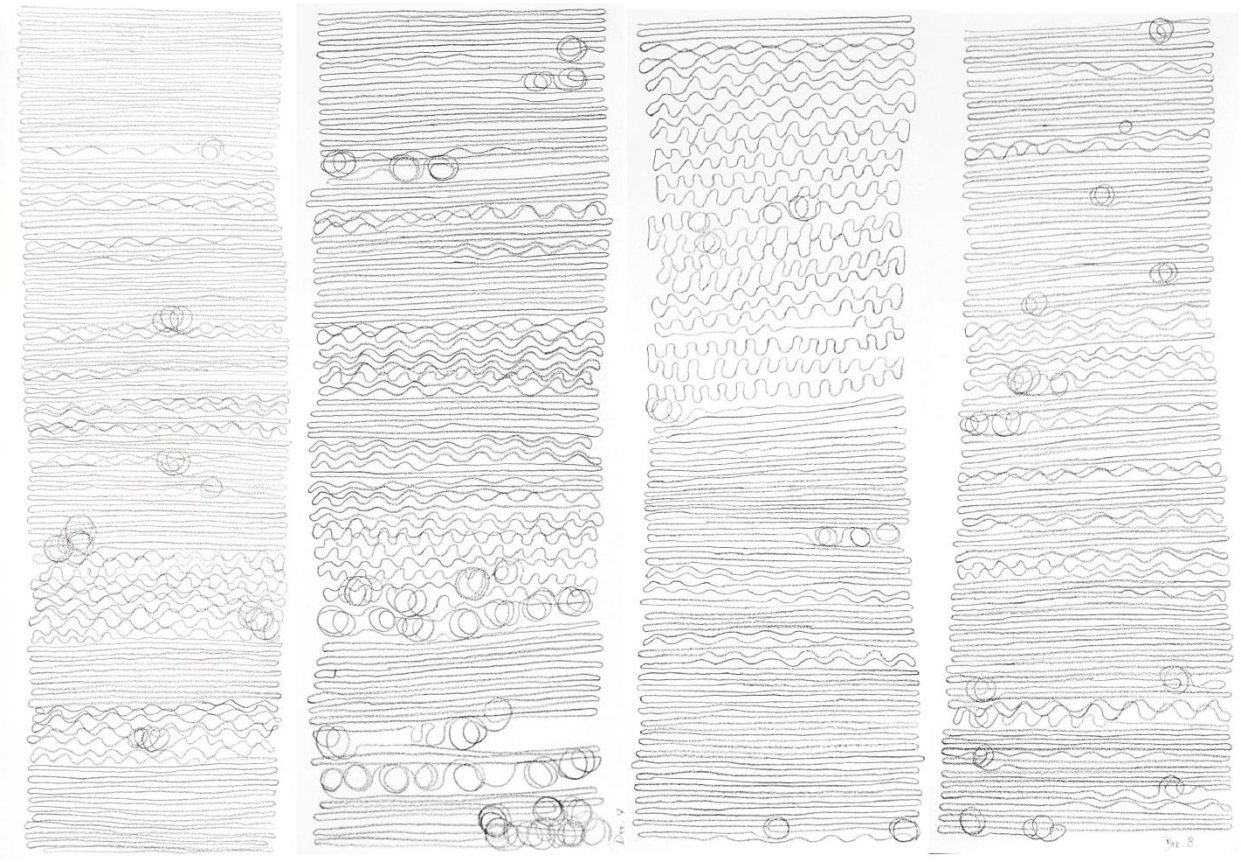

Figure 32: Suzanne Paleczny, Line Language Drawings, 2020, oil base charcoal on paper.

This vocabulary of lines was neither writing nor drawing, neither entirely threads nor traces, but something in between. And these patterns of our conversations were in some ways very beautiful. But the process felt wrong, exploitative, like I was betraying them somehow. I cannot explain why I would feel this way about these lines but not about the painted portraits, except perhaps that the translation was too direct, each change in the line a form of judgement. I continued for a while and then gave it up. But recently I decided to 'draw' one more conversation. I was appalled at the change, so obvious when translated visually. It was immediately apparent how short and confused our conversations have become. The fear that I articulated at the beginning of this thesis project, that my parent's stories might soon be lost is bearing out. Whatever I need to know from them, I needed to have already asked.

Like the meandering lines of my conversations and drawings, in my exploration of memory, the way is wandering, sometimes confused; there is no clear picture to be found. The gaps from memory loss are mixed with deliberate gaps and omissions. The dilemma in representation, in painting as well as narrative, is that we want one true, correct version. I want to gather up all the bits, before any more disappear, to try to force the fragments into something that is whole. But whatever I gather is never enough. In Thomas King's book, *The Truth about Stories*, he tells a creation story about how the earth "floats in space on the back of a turtle" (1). Listeners want to know what is underneath the turtle. King tells them there is just another turtle below, and another below that. In fact, "it's turtles all the way down" (2)[1]. The same is true as I try to craft a coherent story of my parent's lives. At the beginning of this investigation, I noted Kate McLean's claim that our parent's stories are our own. Judith Butler also notes that we are formed in the context of our relations to others, but goes on to say that this may in fact be what is responsible for our inability to know ourselves (20). What can I truly know of my parents' stories? And without that knowledge, what can I truly know of my own? The one is contingent on the other, each layer of knowledge built on what came before. I can never hope to know it all. It is turtles, all the way down.

[1] The phrase "it's turtles all the way down" that King uses in his book *The Truth About Stories* was not coined by King but rather, has a long, if somewhat uncertain history. In his book *A Brief History of Time*, Stephen Hawking attributes it to the response of a skeptical woman in the audience of a lecture by philosopher Bertrand Russell, who had been describing the earth as round and orbiting around the sun (1). Russell himself describes a similar story in his 1927 lecture "Why I am Not a Christian" although in this case the explanation is attributed to a Hindu man and involves an elephant resting on the back of a tortoise (Russell). While it's origin may not be certain, the meaning of the saying refers to an explanation that cannot be resolved because it always rests upon something previous. This is referred to as an infinite regress, "a series of appropriately related elements with a first member but no last member, where each element leads to or generates the next in some sense" (Stanford). It is one of the classic arguments used to justify the existence of God (Oxford). What is common in all cases is that one can never get to the bottom of it.

My parents each approached their life in a very different way and I cannot know the motivations behind the decisions that they made along the way. My father could be described as a traditionalist, with an idealized view of the past. But despite his stories and old tin photos as evidence of his family's existence and resemblance, possessions and escapades, I have come to realize that his view of his family is a bit like that of a dead language; like Latin—romanticized, unchanging, part of a past that is over. After his grandfather and mother passed away, there seemed to be little attachment to any of his other relations. It was the land itself that he was attached to, the jack pine forest and the lake where he had spent his childhood at the elbow of his grandfather. My mother, on the other hand, was perhaps a true modern, forging ahead leaving a discarded past in her wake. She was the only one of her many siblings to break away and carve her own path. She eschewed her small-town roots. From what I can see, she did not want to be small-town, French nor indigenous and through her decisions made sure that her children are none of these things. But in the process, we lost out on all those relationships we might have had with cousins, aunts and uncles, grandparents and the cultures that went along with them. Despite my mother's willingness to embrace even the most distant relative as her cousin, it occurs to me that it is my siblings and I who are 'twice-removed.'

What does it matter what our genealogical line is? I suppose my appeal to it is an attempt to counter the 'forgetting', to make up for the loss I feel each time I talk to my parents and recognize them less and less. Early on in the thesis, I asked "what happens when one can no longer remember the narrative that defines who they are?" Our genealogical line is the thread that cannot be lost or broken. It is the fact of who we are even if we never knew or can no longer remember our own story. I have been ruminating on two statements that I encountered during my investigation that I find troubling. The first one comes from Hampl's book about memoir. "What is remembered," she says, "is what becomes reality" (32). The second comes from Thomas King: "The truth about stories is that that's all we are" (2). Although I don't doubt the veracity of both of these statements, I want to disagree. I hope it isn't true. Some stories get forgotten, some never get told. I want to believe that those absent stories are still a part of us. I want to believe that we are also the feet that dance, the French that doesn't speak, the shape of our brow, the cultures that never got passed down.

I dreamt of my mother again recently. It seems a floodgate has been opened. In this dream the two of us are walking through a large warehouse-like building. And overhead tiny birds, panicked, are flying about, hitting the walls, trying to get out. My mother is wandering around, searching for Mrs. Pape (fig.33).

Mrs. Pape is a life-long friend of my parents. She was also my elementary school teacher and so, despite my age, I cannot bring myself to call her by her first name. When the pandemic first began and my parents were isolated in their home, my siblings and I far away, it was Mrs. Pape who showed up regularly at their doorstep, bringing them home-made soup, muffins and biscuits. In the dream, as my mother searches, I am overcome with grief. I am weeping and weeping. I don't know what for. Is it for the past I'll never fully know? For the future that's full of uncertainty? Or perhaps it's for the panicked flight of tiny birds I don't know how to free.

Figure 33: Suzanne Paleczny, *Searching for Mrs. Pape*, 2021, charcoal, acrylic and oil on canvas, 198 x 122 cm.

In the year 397 in North Africa, Catholic Bishop, Saint Augustine, penned what is considered to be the West's first autobiography—"my confessions in thirteen books" (Hampl 166). But as Hampl explains, in the course of writing this work, Augustine made a surprising discovery. "He makes the central, paradoxical, discovery of autobiography: Memory is not in the service of the past; it is the future that commands its presence" (Hampl 180). Scientists researching memory have come to the same conclusion. The same episodic memory that is used to remember events in the past and create identity is also critical for the construction of an imagined future (Schacter and Madore 245-6). If we cannot remember the past, we cannot imagine a future. In Ingold's theory of lines, he describes the way we move forward in life, not separate from, but rather merged with the medium in which we are immersed. We are literally taking the atmosphere into us as we move through the world, leaving the trace of our path in our wake (Ingold 65).

> "The living being…alternately forges ahead along its lines of propulsion, and pulls up behind in its absorption of the medium. Inhaling the atmosphere as it breathes the air, on the outward breath of exhalation it weaves its lines of speech, song, story and handwriting into the fabric of the world. […] The movement of animate life, then, is held in the alternation between pushing out and pulling up, or in other words between anticipation and recollection" (Ingold 87). "*All imagining is remembering*" (Ingold 141).

My story is on-going, unfinished. As Ingold says, "there is no point at which the story ends and life begins" (Ingold Lines 93). We are created through the stories we are told and the stories we tell, stories that emerge through a process of editing, fragmentation, reassembly—a process that involves forgetting, both wilful and unintentional. The ways of working that have unfolded through this project also involve a forgetting of sorts. The erasing, effacing, erosion, retracing, the breaking apart and reassembling of images mirrors the breaking apart of the story. To refuse to be tied to one "true" perspective or version opens up new possibilities for recording others (fig. 34). Truths are complicated, layered and evolving, as is identity. Through my project, I am attempting to establish a process that accepts that we live in a world in which memories are continuously created and lost. Memory is fragmented, shifting, often unreliable, but we rely on it none-the-less, for in many ways, it is all we have. One needs memory to hang onto what's most precious and to imagine what comes next. And if I am to learn from the painstaking approach of Alberto Giacometti and Frank Auerbach, it seems that one's task as an artist is to not give up. In art as in life, one must simply keep trying. One must simply put a line out ahead and move forward along it, while letting the world pass through.

Figure 34: Suzanne Paleczny, *The Family*, 2021, acrylic and oil on canvas, 198 x 122 cm.

Coda

We had an unusually mild winter in the Yukon this year, with the exception of three weeks in February when the temperature dipped down to -40. During this time it was too cold to ski, but we would still get out each day for a walk, often heading out onto the Takhini River which is only about a kilometre from our house. On this day the wind is whipping down the valley and it is bitter cold and I am keen to head back. But my daughter has lain down on the path and won't be hurried. She says she can feel the river flowing beneath the ice.

Fine.

Mostly to get out of the wind, I too lay down.

In this position, my hood completely covers my face and inside this cocoon I lay still and listen.

After a few moments I hear the pulsing sound of liquid moving.

I know it is my own heartbeat I am hearing, my own blood moving through my veins

but I picture the water flowing beneath me

flowing like paint

like the blood of all my ancestors

perpetually moving

on an unending

meandering

journey…

Postscript
August 2021

A period of time transpires between the making of the work, the writing of the supporting thesis and then the actual presentation to a wider audience as the work goes out into the world to be viewed by colleagues, other artists, professors, examiners and—at least in non-covid times—the general public. This presentation of the work, as well as the scrutiny the project receives through the defense process provides an opportunity for growth that I did not wholly anticipate. When the work was done, I thought the work was done. And yet it is this last leg that has opened up so many thoughts, questions, and possibilities for future work that I am anxious to get back to it despite barely finishing. What I see from this slightly more distanced standpoint are the questions that have not been wholly answered, new questions that have arisen from discoveries made and the possibilities for more in-depth investigation. What I have begun through this thesis project, truly is only a beginning.

Emerging from this process, I have an enhanced understanding of my practice as a work in progress—as built on a number of core principles, yet also part of an evolving trajectory. Over the last two years I have moved further and further away from work that is strictly representational, but I cannot imagine totally abandoning the human form as subject nor methods based on practices of looking, even if these features are not evident in the finished work. My attachment to practices of looking comes from my conviction that there is incredible richness in the world around us from which to draw upon through observation and investigation. Through my research into the mechanisms of memory and the brain's workings I discover evocative patterns, images and metaphors from which to develop my work. On the other hand, earlier in this document I also appeal to the use of intuition, dreams and the unconscious as spaces of decision-making, especially as it relates to colour use or methods of altering the viewing experience. I cannot fully reconcile these contradictions, but perhaps it is possible to work in a space that embraces incongruities of all sorts. In a recent conversation with Ranu Mukherjee, she stated that she does not understand nor accept the binary between representation and abstraction—an attitude that I find refreshing. I can see that my working methods align with the intense scrutiny employed by the drawing practice of Ann Kipling as well as the practice of Mukherjee, who uses traditional media and methods but whose work defies clear categorization. However, I see how my work could also be positioned among non-visual practices such as that of memoirist Patricia Hampl. Hampl's exploration into the ephemeral quality of memory and the inescapably autobiographical nature of creative work reflects my own experience. My artwork could be considered a type of visual memoir—an attempt to bear witness, to render an existence as something that matters and needs to be preserved.

While I have an increased appreciation of what motivates the direction of my practice, there are many questions that remain as I move forward. In the defense discussion, questions were raised as to whether the use of blind contour lines truly allows rupture in the work or only an *appearance* of rupture. What does it mean to truly create rupture in a work? By layering an excess of information over and over, I fragment the subject and disrupt what is actually available to the viewer. And by drawing lines and then covering them, I also limit what can readily be seen. But does rupture need to occur materially through the literal scraping or erasing of work to be effective? Or is it the notion of control that is the real question? Am I letting the work happen without censoring what emerges in the process? As Rebecca

Brewer pointed out, the discomfort that I felt when producing the 'phone-conversation' drawings but not the paintings, is telling. Am I, in essence, controlling the outcome of the paintings in order to protect the identity or integrity of my parents? Or, for that matter, to protect myself from the reality of a situation that is too painful to contemplate? She has perhaps landed on something of significance, for how can I outwardly grieve the loss of my parents when they are still here? These observations are cause for reflection and open up many questions about my intention and the effectiveness of my process.

In the discussion, questions about the viewer and the reception of the work were also raised, which is important in terms of thinking about how the artwork functions as an entity separate from me. In this post-modern period, when the viewer is also seen as the author, how much work should one leave for the viewer to complete? "Were the viewers," Brewer asked, "completing the transit that I was hoping to create?" Referring again to the question of true rupture versus the appearance of rupture, Brewer also asked: "how does one *provide the experience* for the viewer, rather than simply showing?

And finally, there is the question of how the writing and visual art work together. Early on in this project, my advisor Lindsay McIntyre asked me if the writing was part of the artwork; she wanted to know if the one functioned without the other and how they informed each other. While I might have initially considered the writing as tangential to the painting, I have begun to reconsider that. In the same way that the painting process serves as a working-through of ideas, I found the writing to function in the same way. Now that I have experienced how the writing drives or propels the direction of the painting and vice versa, I am more inclined to consider the two, not as separate but rather, as co-constituents of the work as a whole.

From the presentation of my artwork through the exhibition and the thesis defense process, conversations have emerged that are allowing me to think critically about the work I have produced, to think about it in ways I might not have on my own. It has in some ways produced a roadmap for me to follow as I go forward. While this roadmap may not present a clear indication of where I should or will go, it provides a framework that suggests some of the questions I may want to ask along the way.

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