

HOMEMADE HOME:
CREATING IN THE FACE OF THE NOSTALGIC IMPULSE

Hannah Reeves

Dr. Josephine Stealey, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Nostalgia is a pervasive and widely accepted form of dishonesty. Throughout American history, people have made and collected objects, upheld traditions, and revered styles and forms of past eras with the aim of recreating or re-experiencing some past good, but omitting large portions of the history surrounding the sentimentalized object or idea. That nostalgia is an ongoing and thoroughgoing fixture of American life is not surprising, considering the comfort that many of its practitioners claim it yields. The promise of comfort in the face of the difficulty and isolation of individualism may even seem so appealing as to elicit a potent pang of nostalgia that is nearly compulsory. This initial nostalgic experience, if indulged, can become a practice of reliance on the familiar and denial of the unknown, for the sake of comfort. The cost of this perceived comfort, however, is the honesty required for self-creation. Idealization of the past, faulty remembering, and the blind acceptance of traditions all create the illusion of comfort and prevent an understanding of reality.

A large number of contemporary artists address issues related to the experience of nostalgia, such as idealization, memory, tradition, and the meaning embedded in found objects. The artwork discussed in this document, including that of the author, deals specifically with what will be termed “The Problems of Nostalgia,” and contains commentary on the aforementioned issues.