

IN MY MOTHER'S HOUSE

Nocturnes

The universal relationship between mother and child is profound, complex and everlasting. More often than not we see our mothers through our own dependencies, which precludes the notion of mothers as individuals, with their own longings, talents and autonomy.

Since my mother died the interdependency I once felt shifts to a more abstract curiosity. I want to understand her desires, disappointments and fulfilment - how she saw herself; how she would define her identity. I am seeking to fill the void of her loss with a renewed regard.

The lengthy process of creating this exhibition enabled me the time and space to try to fathom the woman who was my mother and look more objectively at the intricacies of our relationship. I listened to the music she loved, I touched the objects she valued, and I sensed the emotions she felt.

Classical music was a huge part of my mother's history, she was a trained concert pianist in her birthplace of Poland. She was particularly drawn to the romantic piano compositions of her fellow countryman, Frédéric Chopin, whose music is described as "a tapestry of poetic paradoxes".

This exhibition is a three-part installation infused with poetic paradoxes and titled by Chopin's music genres. *Nocturne* is a white-clothed laid table, a symbol of festive communal dining, laden with my mother's collection of glassware. The process of display was like 3D drawing, working with time and gravity in a spontaneous and expressive way. I wanted to capture the visual sumptuousness and generosity of Mum's feasts, akin to those depicted in 17th C Dutch still life paintings.

Interestingly, clear glass on mass frustrates the eye - while you see it you also see through it which, ironically, prevents one from taking in the specific objects. *Nocturne* is seen as a whole; it is my mother's portrait in her cultural landscape. Tensions exist - the table is at once welcoming but inhibiting, it implies utility but is unusable, adding a sense of disquiet.

By jamming the table precariously full, as if a single touch could send it all clattering to the floor, a visceral image of accumulation is created. The excess expresses a longing for belongings, questioning our desire to collect things and what we choose to surround ourselves with. My mother loved modernist design and the glassware of the era, so much so that she eventually owned a business

that retailed them. These inanimate glass objects symbolise the transience of life; a life cycle that is temporal, precious and elusive.

Animating the inanimate with shadow movement was an important compositional element that allowed me to reflect on the idea of aura and the countless ways one can conjure presence from absence. It was a further reflection of the inescapable coexistence of light and shadow, the infinite possible interpretations from the projected images and the dark, less apparent side of even the most mundane everyday objects.

The objects themselves seem hard and still. While absorbing the white light they try to draw us in but the moving shadows override them and immerse us in a rhythmic flow that expands our vision to the architectural space. My mother's house is now a theatre of the past that takes us within its walls, as a shelter for memories. I look to the ideas of Bachelard who describes the house as an arena for daydreams, imagination and memories. The house can also be seen as a site for suppressed emotions, conflicts and control; a political dialogue of the traditional gendered role. The domestic space itself is charged with multiple anomalies.

The second part of the exhibition, *Fantaisie Impromptu #1,2,3,4* is the photographic representations of the projected shadows. In these photographs the objects are removed from their context to create something else again. By denying the materiality of the glassware, large-scale abstracted images invite a new form for imaginings and interpretation.

The third section, *Polonaise 1-6, Ballades 1, 2 & Waltzes* contrasts the chaos of the laid table with a singular glass. That glass vessel represents my mother. She is at once transparent and enigmatic; strong yet fragile; whole and broken. In this series of photographs I interact with 'her', acknowledging the ephemeral nature of our lives, the often uneasy dance we've lived through and the fragile character of memory itself.

I believe the remainders of a life, assembled in new form, never give back that life but establish a 'counter monument' of memorialisation - the shadows of the absent body in the field of objects.

Hedy Ritterman, April 2021