Kelly Winter

Adviser: Leslie Bostrom

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Welcome Home!!: An Examination of the Intersection of Domestic and Digital Space

"Our world is becoming more and more digital." This statement would be considered, in debate jargon, a tight case- there exists so much evidence to support it that disputing it would be a fool's errand; it is, in a word, obvious. I am constantly reminded of this statement, though, in both my applied math classes and in my life outside of class. It manifests itself in very clear ways, such as the way email, texting, and Facebook-ing dominates communication, but it also takes on decidedly more subtle modes. It is when one begins to think less about the literal hardware and user interfaces more about their underlying skeletons, the algorithms that power them, that the statement takes on a less obvious meaning.

My GPS tells me where to go; I hardly even think about that anymore. Netflix recommends me movies based on an algorithm. Online dating, which is based more on algorithms than one would like to believe, is becoming increasingly popular. A new company called Art.sy even seeks to recommend art to its users based on what artwork they already like. Even our Google searches depend on personal browsing history factors; as Eli Pariser describes in his talk "Beware Online Filter Bubbles," the first hits for a simple search like "Egypt" could differ radically from one user to the next. The implications of this are that we are receiving information in a way that is based on our past preferences; we are seeing only what we want to see. John Cassidy, author of "How Markets Fail," also points out that the fact that we base

economic models on past data, assuming that our future will be more of the same, is where such models fundamentally fail.

The point is, by applying this concept to so many small aspects, we are moving towards a weirdly automated life. It is trendy to apply algorithms to just about every aspect of our life. And although an artist has the option of applying them to his art, *he does not have to, nor will he ever*. The analog is preserved within art because of the very nature of Art itself- *it has no rules*. Maybe your taste in art does, as Art.sy implies, but art itself does not. Throughout my time at Brown, my work has certainly evolved, but one thing has remained constant: I have always had an affinity and appreciation for the handmade because it is something that is becoming increasingly difficult to justify in other courses of study.

My work draws a great deal of inspiration from artists such as Rauschenberg, Elizabeth Peyton, Mickalene Thomas, and Larry Carlson. Although seemingly disparate artists, they all hint at a certain aesthetic that I admire. My work is meant to be light, colorful, funny, and decidedly hand-crafted, a response to the precision that exists everywhere else. If you look at any of my art, you know right away that someone made that.

I started creating work with this intention in mind two years ago. I knew that I was interested in domestic space and digital space, so I decided to combine the two in an effort to represent the inherent tension between the two. I was also making prints that addressed femininity and how it fit in with digital space. But it wasn't until a year ago that I began thinking more in terms of textiles and the implication of using textiles in my work. I began thinking about the speed and the ephemeral nature of the Internet and the slow, almost sensual process associated with embroidery and sewing. My Honors project began with a simple concept:

embroidered pop-up windows. The idea was deceivingly simple, and it expressed all of the thoughts that had been swimming in my head in ways that, at the time, I could not articulate.

Where words failed me, my senior project and thesis exhibition, *Welcome Home!!*, stepped in. The idea underlying this project was to take concepts specific to computing and computer use and manifest them through various physical means. My work explores the ways in which the digital and domestic collide and the inherent tension that exists between them. It does so by looking at this tension in four ways: by noting the presence of hardware in the domestic space; by remaking objects, like banner ads and pop-up windows, that only exist and are useful within a digital space; by using algorithms to create items used in domestic space; and by focusing on love and communication and how it exists within the domestic space versus the digital.

The first part of my project manifested itself in the form of drawings questioning the introduction of hardware and computers into the domestic space. Originally, the user experience was supposed to reflect the user's domestic life- terms such as "desktop," "folder," "file," and "homepage," speak to this. What begins to happen, though, when the digital begins to dictate domestic experience? The first stage is the integration of hardware into the space. I began this investigation using drawing as my medium, rendering a processor suspended in lace as well as a piece of the face of a computer dangling from a voluminous blanket. I wanted to represent the aforementioned tension between the digital and domestic, and did so initially by literally juxtaposing fabric and hardware.

The next iteration of my project was creating physical versions of digital imagery. I continued with my interest in creating banner ads with fabric, but the pieces instead took on the

form of throw pillows, a semi-useless, primarily decorative object: the physical manifestation of a banner advertisement. The juxtaposition of materials speaks to the complications when the digital is suddenly manifested in the domestic. Things get lost in translation, and purpose and aesthetic are filtered into a new object. These pieces speak to the childlike magic and wonder of glitter, sequins, craft, and the "magic" behind computing. Removed from their original space, the advertisements become fundamentally wrong, and the objects are useless, lopsided pillows. The combination of materials also reflects the barrier between the domestic and digital that cannot quite be breached.

The third stage of integration of the digital into the domestic is allowing algorithms to dictate the creation of physical objects. I do not mean this in the sense of machinery of 3D printers, but rather in the sense of applying these algorithmic concepts to situations that are fundamentally inappropriate. The piece, "YOU CAN READ THIS WITH THE PROPER MACHINERY!! Or, The Binary Quilt," is 12 feet long, and is composed of white and colored squares that, when translated into zeros and ones, spell out its own title in binary. This piece was largely inspired by traditional crazy quilts, which were composed of scraps of fabric and embellishments. Instead of following the "crazy" pattern, however, the scraps that I used followed a dictated orderliness, deviating from the traditional aesthetic almost completely. The result was a quilt that no longer served a human purpose- a quilt that was just a little bit "off." There is no place for it- it is suspended to appear as though it is on a bed, but all that is below it are leftover embellishments, such as sequins and glitter. The quilt is composed of 360 squares, which are made up of two triangles, and 34 different fabrics that I have collected since the 3rd grade. This quilt represents a mix of the deeply personal and profoundly impersonal, which forces it to sit in a strange, unfamiliar space.

The final piece manifestation of the immersion of the digital into the domestic occurs in how we communicate and how we express love, two fundamental qualities that make us human. These pieces speak to how much attention we pay to the famous in terms of how often we read or speak about them. Handcrafting things for other people has always been a way that I expressed love and gratitude. What happens when I direct that energy to these people that I do not know?

The materials used again reflect the process of the digital emerging into the domestic. The crafted nature of these portraits reflects the time and careful attention to detail I paid to these celebrities, who often disappear from Yahoo! Trends as quickly as they appeared. No image is too sacred, and the crafty, embellished nature reflects my disregard for the distance between the average human being and the famous. These celebrities are just like a family- a collective family dictated by the collective hive-mind of the Internet.

The reverse process, the process of the private seeping into the public, is equally as intriguing. With this in mind, I began a mini-series of portraits of abstractions of the images of my family members. These portraits were created by downloading their images from Facebook and reopening them in Microsoft Word, which results in 2-4 hundred pages an indecipherable code. I took both the code and original image and abstracted them. Suddenly, the images of those that I love have been lost; they are merely remnants of what has been. I have lost something in the process of living my private life publicly and bringing the public back to my own private space. These pieces are hung with the celebrity portraits, not separately, to convey my reflection on familial love and empty infatuation.

These four parts all came together for my exhibition, the crux of my thesis. The objects in the space, which are reminiscent of a blanket, pillows, family portraits, and decoration, no longer function as the objects they were once derived from. The materials are not cohesive; everything is flashy but static. The imagery is personal yet generic. There exists a pace and an energy, but nobody is living here. It is a space that references private domestic life, but is just a little bit "off", a space that sits between being a reflection of the public and private, and points to the strange intersection between the domestic and digital that is becoming increasingly central in our lives. Through this work, I hope to create a dialogue, inspire others, and raise the difficult questions that we so often frame as the obvious.