





# **Home by Mourning: Craft as Sentiment**

**Flora May**

HONOUR  $\frac{1}{3}$  LOVE

→ ADORNMENT

EMBELLISHMENT

→ UNASHAMED

PIECING IT ALL TOGETHER





## *Dedication*

This body of work was possible because of the lasting impressions and nurturing of Steve Glavin, Stephen Chubbs, and Cindy Fry, who are all missed beyond the power of words.







*Figure 1.* Dad on the coast of Labrador..

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## *Thanks*

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# Introduction

*Home by Mourning: Craft as Sentiment* is a multidisciplinary approach to creating furniture in response to grief. My goal is to represent how a craftspeople can honour the deceased, while creating an environment that facilitates conversations around grief, life, and love.

As craftspeople, working creatively can guide us through grief, provide us a way to honour our loved ones, and act as an outlet to express our emotions. Through an exploration of furniture making and textile art, my capstone will investigate the way(s) grief and loss intersect with creativity.

When my dad passed in 2020, we had already been estranged for years. The immediacy of his passing was the hardest part - there was no time to heal our relationship. I have this feeling of needing to mend things about our history - not in a revisionist sense, but in a way that celebrates our lives and shared interests. I hope to reveal a sense of the both of us over the course of this document.

As artists, we are in a unique position to create work that opens a dialogue with the deceased. I want to reexamine the perception that the grieving process culminates in a necessary detachment from the deceased. A healthy resolution to grief could include a continuing bond with the loved one who has passed. Whether we create to honor the deceased, to express our feelings to or about them, or to carry on their work in life, there are many reasons artists turn to their work to express grief and loss.

Finally, an important aspect in my work is creating community around craft. In the environment created by *Home by Mourning*, users feel safe and welcomed to share in storytelling of their own experiences

with loss. In Guy Cools' *Performing Mourning* he defines the importance of "witnessing mourning" as, "Mourning in front of an audience of witnesses allow emotions of grief to be fully experienced and expressed, helping those who are grieving to not become stuck in a static state of grief".

When I began to think about the form that this collection would take, I asked myself: How does the bereaved allow themselves to escape the staticity of grief? Specifically, how can a craftspeople let their creativity guide them through grief? What shape would this take for me? I found the most helpful tool in beginning this research was to start with *why*.

# The Crafting of Grief: Theoretical References

## Why We Make

*The Crafting of Grief: Constructing Aesthetic Responses to Loss* is a text of resistance against the dominant narrative of grieving, the narrative that one must strive to go through the stages of grief to finally “get over” what happened. Instead, this text invites the artist to open up space for finding inspiration, meaning, and optimism while we grieve. They write,

**“Relationships should be celebrated and honoured and no longer excluded, simply because death occurred. It is through the crafting of such connections that intricate meanings are invited that can enliven experience, rather than intensify suffering. They can even allow for rituals of beauty to be performed that embody a sense of transcendence over death.”**  
(Hedtke & Winslade, 2017.)

This passage and the ideology proposed in *The Crafting of Grief*, kickstarted the inspiration behind crafting a body of work

in honour of my father; a body of work that could be imbued with honour, delight, and remembrance.

Craftspeople and artists use their medium to work through thoughts and emotions in a tangible way. A material process may feel like we're able to truly express ourselves where words can feel limiting - we let our medium represent us or speak for us. Author Guy Cools calls this process “performing mourning”.

In *Performing Mourning: Laments in Contemporary Art*, Cools defines the difference between grief - which is a “static state” of emotions following a loss - and mourning, which is a “fluid, cathartic state” that includes outward expressions of grieving.

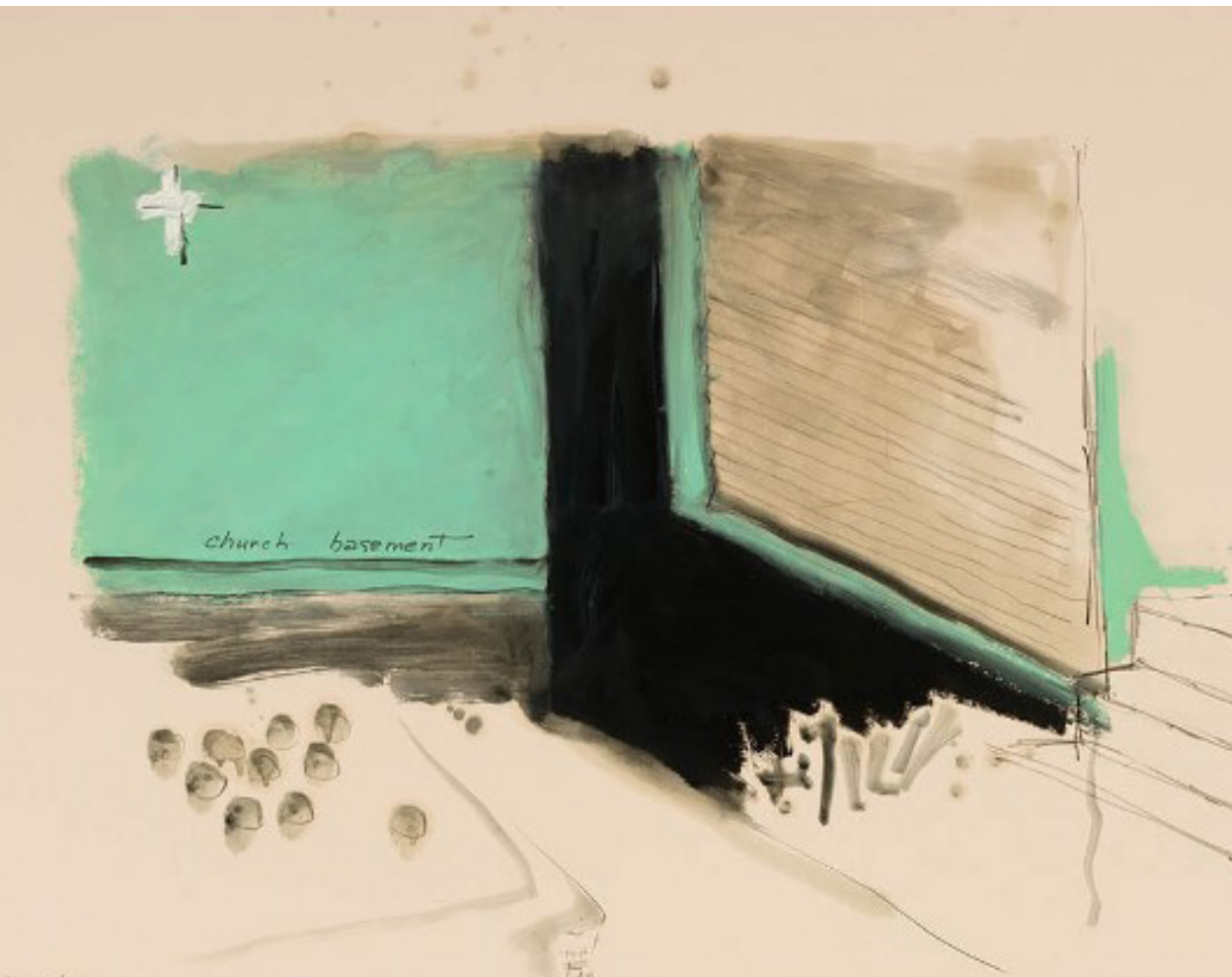
Cools states that craftspeople's have a compulsion to create these expressions of grief in tangible objects. He references poet Robert Bly, “objects invite us into our own psyches”.

In Figure 1, artist Robert Houle was triggered by a dream to sketch scenes from his time at residential school. His works are created using swift motions with oil crayons, a medium that allows him to build colour and shape quickly and freely. The work reflects the compulsion artists feel to release traumatic emotions or memories. After his dream, Houle said, “so I went back to Toronto two days later and decided once and for all that I was going to deal with this.” (Madill, n.d.)

“While creating the work, as his memories came to him, Houle spoke in Saulteaux and immediately inscribed those words in pencil on the drawings. Houle considered a drawing finished as soon as the memory of an experience left him. The completion of each drawing meant pahgedenaun, “letting it go from your mind,” which for him was a more meaningful concept than forgiveness.” (Madill, n.d.)

A major challenge while grieving





*Figure 2. Houle, Robert. (2009) Sandy Bay Residential School Series*

is coming to terms with loss while grappling with the realities of the memories, meanings, and identities connected to the deceased. Compounded with loss, we also face the inability to change the past - relationships to the person or the experience come to a conclusion. Psychologist Peter Marris wrote, "In [healthy] grieving, this despair impells a restless search to recover meaning". Marris argued that a grief process that "turns one's back on the meanings, investments, and so on of a significant relationship will block one from investing in other relationships and will make for a meaningless life". Reading Marris' and Houle's descriptions of psychology and art, I understood the positive impacts of acknowledging the entirety of our relationships - emotions, memories, trauma - in order to validate the past and recover meaning from it.

I had an incredibly difficult relationship with my father. In researching visual art such as Houle's and in reading the work of psychologists, I also felt propelled to revisit all parts of mine and my fathers relationship to create this body of work. I hope to not be bound by the staticity of grief, but to transition to the creative, fluid state that is mourning.

**“The clothes belonged to her husband, Nathaniel, who died in 1941. Missouri’s daughter Arlonzia describes the quilt: “It was when Daddy died.**

**Mama say, ‘I going to take his work clothes, shape them into a quilt to remember him, and cover up under it for love.’”  
(Collins, 2015.)**



*Figure 3. Pettway, Missouri. (1942)  
Work Clothes Quilt*

**“Pain needs to be  
acknowledged and  
meaning made from  
the challenges that  
grief brings.**

**Death presents some of the most challenging aspects of life and achieving these glimpses of beauty need not be left to chance. They must be constructed out of memories and dreams.”**

**Lorraine Hedtke & John Winslade**

***The Crafting of Grief: Constructing Aesthetic Responses to Loss***

## Personal Connection

I discovered the necessity for artists to create while grieving, now I felt the need to make my work personal. On the previous page, Gee's Bend quilter Missouri Pettway made a quilt (Figure 2) from her late husband's workclothes to honour him and provide comfort to her family. The result for Pettway was a process that allowed her to work through her grief, and a piece that was significant for her family.

I began to think about processes that would allow me to honour my father and imbue personal significance into my collection. Steve - my father - was an incredible artist who taught me how to use a sewing machine, made leather bags and jackets, oil painted, and had stacks of printmaking screens lined up in our basement. Fabric craft is such an important part of my life that was gifted to me by him, and I hope to tell this part of the story through the textile elements in this collection. Drawing from his visual art and craft-making will embody our relationship and provide me a way to honour his life and expression.

Sculptor Dominic DiMare works in response to his father's death in the series *Mourning Stations* (Figure 3). I felt very inspired by his words around repetition and feeling connected to his father through his work. He states,

"Much of my process has to do with how it makes me feel. Braiding is like working with the fishing line. It sounds repetitious, but I love it. The feeling is like a long line. As I was preparing these bundles, I remembered my father taking huge lengths of string and knotting the ends, then wrapping them in



Figure 4. DiMare, Dominic. (1981)  
*Mourning Station #4*

news-paper with just the ends showing. I am doing exactly what my father did; there is no difference between him and myself." (Park, 1982.)

On a micro scale, the details in *Home by Mourning* should represent stories of my father's life and my own experiences in mourning, but on a macro scale, I hope users are able to identify and relate to the themes of lamentation, and joy in the face of grief.

## Community Connection

I created these pieces to live amongst the history of craft surrounding death and mourning. When I began the Fall 2022 semester, I was not expecting to find so much respite in researching craft made about - or while - grieving. It was very powerful for me to see the sheer amount of work created in the same vein, exploring many universal and time-honoured emotions, themes, and reactions to loss. I hope to create an environment with this collection where the users feel safe and welcomed to share in storytelling of their own experiences with loss.

In Cools' *Performing Mourning* he defines the importance of "witnessing mourning" as, "Mourning in front of an audience of witnesses allow emotions of grief to be fully experienced and expressed, helping those who are grieving to not become stuck in a static state of grief".

In 1987, the AIDS Memorial Quilt Project was displayed for the first time at the Lesbian and Gay Freedom Parade in San Francisco, USA. Each quilt block displayed the name of a loved one who died during the AIDS epidemic, and were around 3' x 6' to represent the size of a coffin (Hawkins, 1993). 5 years later, in 1992, the official quilt block count exceeded 20,000. "The reading of the names, the signing of the names on the quilts, the walk around the demonstration, these were all ritual orchestrations" (Hawkins, 1993). All of these actions allowed community members to witness and to have witnesses for their mourning.

Another rich example of community-building in craft are the bentwood boxes of the

northwest coast of what is known as Canada. The boxes usually display relief woodcarving or paintings that tell a story or honour a spirit or animal. Stories and symbols are often community specific and can tell the story of a certain family or area - called creation stories.

Coast Salish artist Luke Marston created a bentwood box for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that travels around "Canada" collecting items from Residential School Survivors relating to their personal journeys (University of Manitoba, 2017). The event of placing these personal items into the box, gave the survivors a place to go to where their stories were heard. They had a place to go that's purpose was to share and acknowledge their experiences of loss and trauma. This tribute offers a healing space.





*Figure 5. Cambridge Cares About AIDS (n.d)  
AIDS Quilt Panel*  
Each star displaying the name of a life lost to the AIDS epidemic.

**“Made from old-growth western red cedar, Marston says, “We believe that when we cut down one of those old growth trees - or any tree - we give it a new life into something else. It’s still a living thing, it still has it’s own spirit.””**

**(Marston, 2020.)**



*Figure 6. Marston, Luke. (2009)  
Bentwood Medicine Box*

# The Crafting of Grief: Visual References

## Symbolism

Both the AIDS Memorial Quilt Project and Marston's bentwood box are rich in symbolism. The Encyclopedia of Art Education (n.d) describes symbolism as, "Not content with using only colour and shape to communicate their feelings, symbolist artists inject their compositions with messages and esoteric references. It is this narrative content which turns a work of art into a symbolist work of art". Each Memorial Quilt panel tells a personal story about the departed; some are easily understood as expressions of grief, such as the "the presence of that absence is everywhere" panel (Figure 4), while others contain imagery that only friends and family might understand as having been important in the deceased's life. In my research and sketches I have been exploring how I might add imagery and symbolism onto my furniture pieces.

While researching symbolism in furniture and applied arts, I found that many pieces were described as "art brut". Art brut is most often made by artists with no academic training (ArtSpur Magazine, 2020) - also dubbed "outsider art", intersecting with "folk art" - and follows the artists instincts rather than pre-concieved notions about style or value. Art historian Lucienne Peiry writes about the symbolism in art brut,

"Sometimes unaware of social conventions, resistant to cultural rules, they transgress established codes and invent highly personal symbolic universes. Outsider artists invent subjects, modes of representation, systems of perspective, and technical means, often resorting to used, humble, or discarded materials."

These art brut furniture pieces are most often described as such because of painted details or surface embellishments such as carving or textile art. My dad was an oil painter, screenprinter, and talented sewer. I have my own background in textile art education and love of craft imbued by generations of family members. Because of this, art brut furniture pieces became apparent visual references in my ideation.

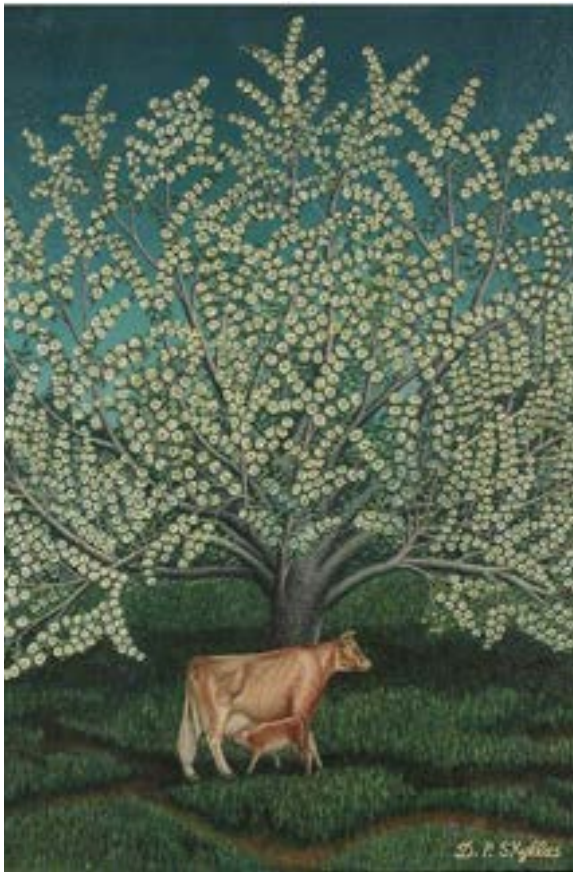
"These artists express their vision with paint, clay, wood, tin, bottlecaps, and wool as they sculpt, weave, and carve a world at once fantastic and familiar. They speak of the joy and freedom they find in creation, and the compulsion to express themselves." (Patterson, 2001.)



*Figure 7.* Ashevak, Kenojuak. (1960) *Hare Spirits*

Right: *Figure 8.* Drossos, Skyllas. (c. 1950) *Tree of life with cow and calf*

*Figure 9.* Hunt, Peter. (c. 1945) *Stools with shells and shooting stars*



## Economy of Form

I began by sketching forms with simple, planar components that were easy to imagine surface decoration being applied onto. These forms were influenced by my appreciation for “country furniture”. In the same vein as folk art, country furniture pieces were imaginative forms that had an “element of expediency, making use of salvaged wood from packing cases or houses as well as of whole elements from discarded furniture” (O’Dea, 2006). This straight-forward, economical approach to construction allowed me to envision spending more time and care on textile and painted details.

Country furniture made by early Canadian settlers is referred to as “pre-confederation furniture”. *A Guide to Pre-Confederation Furniture of English Canada* defines this period as such, “The earliest of these settlers - United Empire Loyalists, members of British Regiments, Mennonites, and Germans - had to literally carve their homes out of the wilderness, with its forbidding great pine forests, using only the primitive tools they had brought with them”. They cite the forms as “essential, primitive articles” such as blanket chests, tables, and chairs, while more “sophisticated objects like desks or cupboards” did not come until much later. To me, these pieces are durable and utilitarian in nature, but were also created with the notion to add warmth and decoration to the home. Their visual durability ensures these objects are kept in the home for generations, honouring the history of craftsmanship in the family. In Figures 8, 9, 10, and 11, decorative flourishes were added to hearty forms, such as scalloping, carving, and tapering.



Figure 10.



Figure 11.



Figure 12.



*Figure 13.*



*Figure 14.*



*Figure 15.*

Back home in Newfoundland and Labrador, and in many Indigenous communities across Turtle Island, utility is also at the centre of furniture and homeware design. There is also lots of interest in the decorative arts - growing up I was surrounded by wood and stone carvers, weavers, quilters, and rug-hookers. Because there was no culture of import until very recently, furniture and craft are unique to the community, or the maker. In O'Dea's article on country furniture, he says of decoration, "As a consequence [of the marginal economy and no culture of import], Newfoundland retained earlier forms and construction techniques but applied to those forms a range of decorative treatments that speak of a strong and vigorous visual imagination". He continues,

"Real imagination can be found in outport furniture, whether homemade or made by a local carpenter. In such pieces as washstands and benches, the whole repertoire of decorative treatments - eg, chip carving, applied motifs, spindles, chamfers, moldings and arches - was exploited in inventive combinations augmented by strong colours in the paintwork". (O'Dea, 2006.)

**I felt pulled to explore these concepts in my ideation for their nostalgia, visual durability, harmony with textiles and other craft, ability to become heirloom objects, and their imaginative, intuitive designs.**











## Gothic Revival & Reformed Gothic

Following Confederation, the east coast of Canada was hugely impacted by customs and culture brought from overseas, such as the English design movement of Gothic Revival.

In the 18th century, a growing spirit of Romanticism led to a revival of Gothic styles in Britain (Massey & Maxwell, 1994). The Romanticism of the late 18th century was an artistic view that idealized nature, focused on human connection in the face of industrialization, and that often sought to garner intense emotion (Galitz, 2004). Inspired by Romantic literature, architects and craftspeople sought to recreate an atmosphere of spirituality, adventure, and nobility. They rediscovered this “penchant for the dramatic” in the dark themes of the Gothic era (Massey & Maxwell, 1994).

The resulting Gothic Revival was a “striking counterpoint to the calm symmetry of classicism” that featured organic shapes, ornament, “asymmetrical and picturesque roofs, arches, towers, and oriels” (Massey & Maxwell, 1994). The natural world could be found symbolized through-out the house - floral and animal shapes were carved into columns, printed onto wallpapers, and stitched onto bed linens - in both “realistic and surrealistic forms” (Massey & Maxwell, 1994).

Previous Pages:

*Figure 16.* Unknown.  
(n.d) *Early Ontario log cabin furniture.*

*Figure 17.* Simms, Adam. (n.d) *Cabin Series.*



*Figure 18.*



*Figure 19.*



*Figure 20.*



*Figure 21.*

**“Repeating geometric patterns, metal strapwork, and polychromed detailing were applied to plain construction, creating what was dubbed Reformed Gothic.”**

**(Coleman, 2019.)**

Gothicism began to take on a more nuanced and domestic style when architect Philip Webb began transforming Gothic references into bolder, simpler designs. These shapes were easy to translate from the earlier stone carvings into simple wooden cut-outs; the style of which would spread quickly across timber-rich America. Stone tracery became wooden “gingerbread” shapes, in an approachable and fun style now called Carpenter Gothic or Reformed Gothic. The furniture became more accessible too, as less expensive woods could be brightly painted or upholstered without compromising artistic flair. “Even people who did not live in Gothic Revival houses were likely to own a piece or two of furniture in the style” (Massey & Maxwell, 1994).

The painted furniture of the Middle Ages were also revived in this era. Artists wanted to paint chests and cabinets like those depicted in Pre-Raphaelite paintings. Interest in medieval furnishings led to the foundation of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co., where Gothic Revival met the Arts & Crafts beliefs of William Morris (Coleman, 2019).



Figure 22. Webb, Philip.  
(1897) *Altar Table*

**Much like the imaginative and resourceful nature of country furniture, John Maass writes in *The Gingerbread Age*, “Inside, [Gothic homes] have a happy, hide-and-see quality of surprise”.**

## Arts and Crafts

“The picturesque romance of the Gothic opened the way for other trends, notably the Aesthetic Movement (“art for art’s sake”) and the English Arts & Crafts Movement (which looked to pre-Industrial artisans’ guilds). Back in 1849, John Ruskin had published the *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, his influential treatise on the morality of Gothic architecture. Nature, wrote Ruskin, should be the basis for all ornament, and truth to materials was in fact a moral requirement for good design. This struck a chord with many, including William Morris and other neo-Gothic tastemakers who would father the Arts & Crafts Movement.” (Coleman, 2019.)

During the 1860’s, Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co. was a manufacturer and retailer of decorative furniture and fine craft. The founders decried themselves as “fine art workmen” who denounced industrialized fabrication and turned to time-honoured art processes in their work (Ward, 2022). In addition to furniture and interiors, they experimented with tiles, tapestries, embroideries, printmaking, and stained glass.

The Arts & Crafts style was not as heavily adorned as Gothic or it’s successors. Morris said the groups work was often inspired by the “romantic ideals of their youth” (Ward, 2022), and so held onto similiar use of symbolic imagery. Arts and Crafts is also a more difficult style to gauge visually, and is often refered to as a philosophy or way of working more-so than an aesthetic alone (Vertikoff 2020). Although Morris and his followers had inconsistent ideas about machinery, they generally insisted the artist should be working by hand. Hand-work could better reflect the individual artisans’ interests in their craft, and

reflected the artists’ idiosyncrasies and diverse backgrounds. Because of the interdisciplinary and far-reaching nature of the Arts and Crafts movement, a rich tapestry of hand-adorned items was made, and continues to be revived today.

**“Fine art is that in which the hand, the head, and the heart of man go together.” (Ruskin, 1870.)**

Both Gothicists and Arts and Crafts designers advocated truth to material, structure, and function. I’m attracted to their steadfast belief that the objects should bear the unique artistic personality of the designer, while remaining utilitarian in nature. The prominent imagery or intricate detailing invites storytelling and whimsy.



Figure 23. Ashbee, Charles and Voysey, Charles. (ca. 1900) *Lovelace Escritoire*

# Song of Myself

What do you think has become of the young and old men?  
And what do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere;  
The smallest sprout shows there is really no death;  
And if ever there was, it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it,  
And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.

All goes onward and outward—nothing collapses;  
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier.

## Walt Whitman

Whitman's sentimental writings on the metaphysical, the natural world, and death are all elements that made him an acclaimed Southern Gothic writer.





*Figure 24. Morris, William  
(1870) Tulip and Trellis*

# *Home by Mourning*

## Design Brief

My capstone is a multidisciplinary approach to creating furniture in response to grief. My goal is to represent how a craftsperson can honour the deceased, while creating an environment that facilitates conversations around grief, life, and love.

### Design Goals

To design a collection where I can use methods that allow me to express grief, such as mending, restoring, expressive painting, and meditative stitching through quilting.

I want those who use my furniture to be able to identify and relate to the themes of lamentation, and joy in the face of grief.

### Physical Goals

To create a collection of furniture including a blanket chest to store heirloom textiles, a corresponding quilt, and seating. The pieces should be built with durability in mind, while showcasing careful hand-work and ornament.

I am interested in using traditional and accessible materials through-out such as cotton, wool, and pine.

The collection should a sense of narrative through illustration, colour, pattern. This can be achieved through painting wood, in the quilting process, and/or embroidery.



*Figure 25.* Newbery, Jessie. (ca 1900) Silkwork cushion with inscription after William Blake. Newbery was one of the artists known as the Glasgow Girls in the Arts and Crafts movement.

## Connection to Theme

Referencing the Gothic Revival and Arts & Crafts movements inspires me to create furniture that is both sentimental, ornamented as well as functional and durable. Because these pieces are about the connections we hold through life and death, I want them to be able to last generations. Ornamental touches like painted imagery allow me to showcase themes of grief and mourning.

# Materiality

## Textile

My father was an incredible artist who taught me how to use a sewing machine, made leather bags and jackets, oil painted, and had stacks of printmaking screens lined up in our basement. Fabric craft is such an important part of my life that was gifted to me by him, and I hope to tell this part of the story through the textile elements in my capstone collection. Because of my own training in textile arts, most of my initial ideation (pictured right) featured upholstery, tassels, dyed and embroidered fabrics, and quilting.

I also noticed that my dad & I share a love of process. He was attracted to the nature of raw material, how you can work with it and alter it. He had a fascination with colour and pattern on fabric, and started fabric dyeing and Batik at an early age (see page right). I knew I wanted to work with my fabric and create that deeper connection, with the added benefit of mixing colours that have depth and are able to perfectly match my chosen palette.



Figure 26. Pen and ink sketches.

Figure 27. Ottawa newspaper clipping.

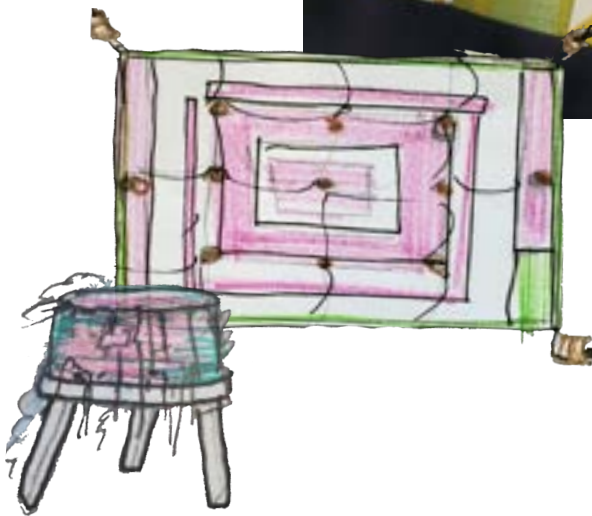


## Really big batik

Earl of March High School students Steve Glavin (left) and Hawley have set a national record when they created 22.86 square meter (256 sq. ft.) batik.



*Figure 28. Quilted cotton cushion experiment.*



*Figure 29. Textile ideation in coloured pencil.*



Figure 30. Textile ideation in coloured pencil.

Some initial textile “sketches” where I focused on experimenting with colour palette and intuitive quilting. Intuitive quilting is a technique in the art of quilting where shapes and colours are arranged during the sewing process, instead of starting with a defined plan or pattern.

Through trial and error I also learned a lot about fabric suitable for furniture. Using an 100% cotton pieced top and a cotton/spandex knit pieced top, I was able to experiment with fabrics that are not normally used for upholstery. I chose knit fabric for the comfortable feel opposed to starchy or rigid upholstery fabrics. Stretch ‘knit’ fabrics are harder to sew than 100% cotton or traditional upholstery fabrics (both are woven and have a firm structure). To offset this, I experimented with adding a non-stretch top-stitch across the seam allowance to add structure. Cotton behaves great on a machine, irons easily, cuts accurately and maintains it’s cut shape. A lightweight 100% cotton is ideal for “piecing” (quilting term for sewing shapes into a composition) but not ideal for upholstery

Figures 33 and 34 show my process dying cotton and linens with Procion MX fibre reactive dyes. Procion MX is a “cold water” dye, which means the colour bonds permanently to the fabric through careful mixing of chemicals, instead of heat. They produce beautiful gradients of colour, and are also great if you are concious about heat and water usage. I used a technique called immersion dying, then washed with cool water. Soda ash and salt are also required as fixatives and to help brighten the colours.

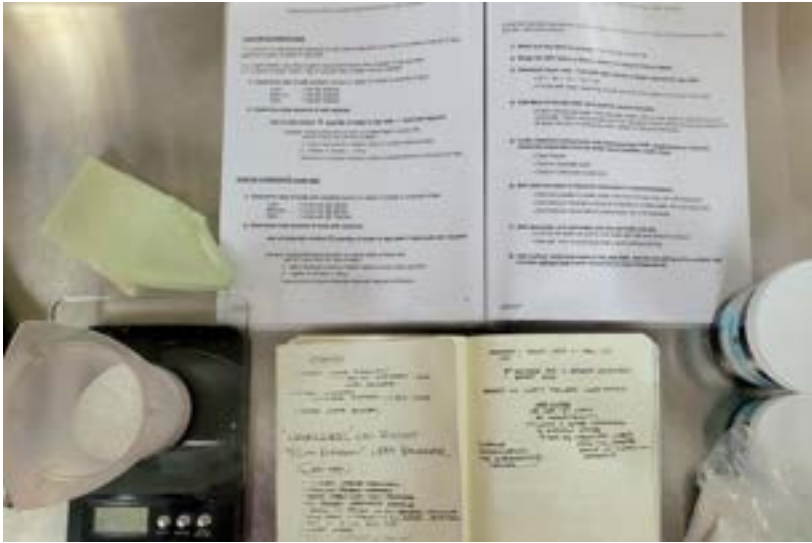






*Figure 31.* Photo of piecing process.

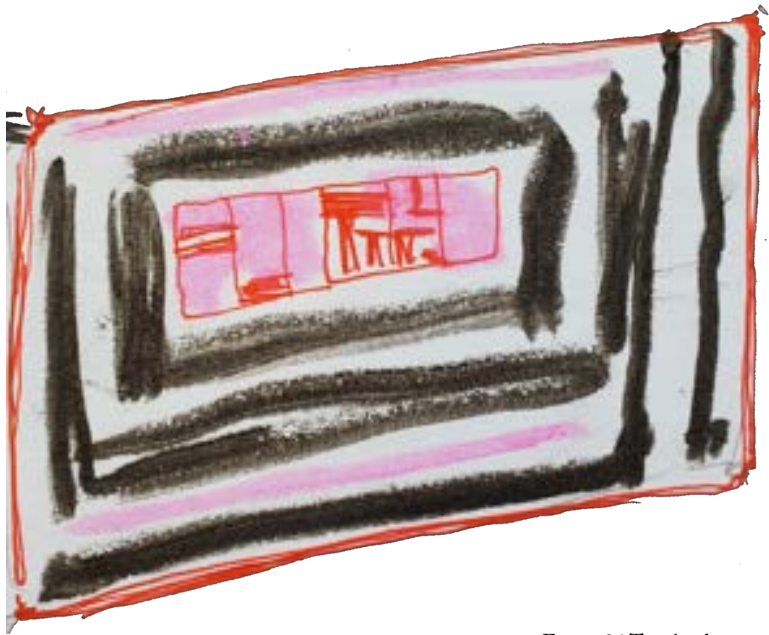
*Figure 32.* Knit quilt ideation executed with recycled sweatshirts.



*Figure 33 & 34. Dying process photos.*

*Figure 35 (Right). Procion MX dyed fabrics ready for use in upholstery or quilting.*





*Figure 36. Textile ideation.*

# Separation

Your absence has gone through me  
Like thread through a needle.  
Everything I do is stitched with its color.

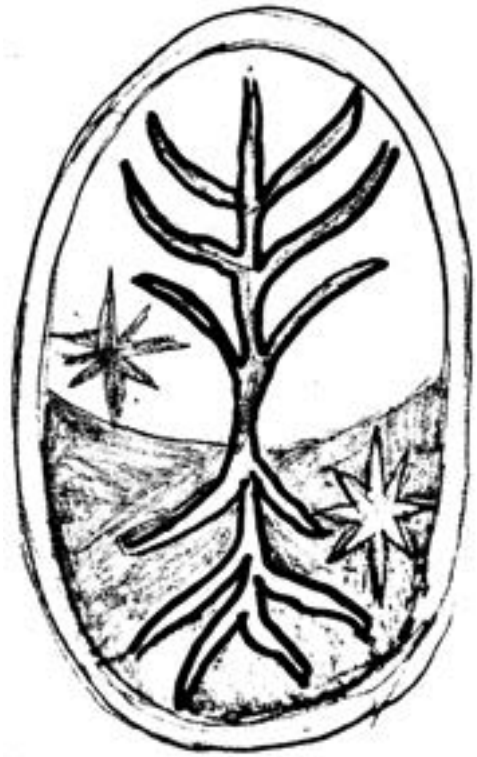
**W. S. Merwin**

## Paint

I started to think about how best I could weave a narrative into furniture. I envisioned at least one of my pieces with stories attached to them, and this took the shape of painted symbols. I sketched all sorts of things relating to the natural world; the tree of life, sprouts and seeds to represent growth and perseverance as well as the life cycle, stars that are meant to symbolize the mystery of life and the universe. I researched the meaning of all sorts of new images in an extremely helpful book called *The Book of Symbols: Reflections on Archetypal Images*. It felt very peaceful to know that symbols have guided thousands of generations through the same experiences.

On the following pages I've documented my explorations with paint on solid wood. I experimented with oils, latex house paints, acrylics, and sampled the results with a variety of finishes and stains as well.

I achieved the best results with an "archival quality" acrylic paint. It's a higher quality acrylic than the standard "craft acrylic". Oil paint soaks into the wood so that the colour is less opaque and blends with the colour of the wood. Milk paint was very successful as a background colour, but was not a smooth enough liquid for good line quality. Making art on these wooden panels lent itself to cabinet making and the planar forms of country furniture. It really founded a lot of my blanket chest ideation, and I could really start to see myself in my designs.





The handpainting samples all began with an idea I had of a painted arch. The archway represents major transitions: passing from life to death. The transparent green is a 1:1 water and latex paint mix, the opaque line drawings are made with latex paint. The latex and acrylic blend paint is more commonly known as house paint. White oak presented a challenge as it was often difficult to paint a fully opaque line over the open pores of the grain. I also knew the paint needed refinement: latex paint has a high viscosity, so it resisted flowing brush work.



Figure 37 (Left & Right). Pencil sketches.

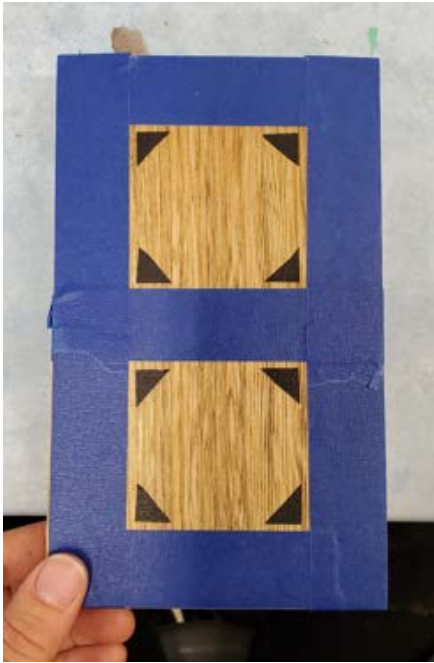
Figure 38 (Above). Latex paint on solid white oak.



*Figure 39.* Sketch with corresponding painting on stained pine with pink oil painted arch and black acrylic linework.







*Figure 40* Masking tape resist with milk paint.

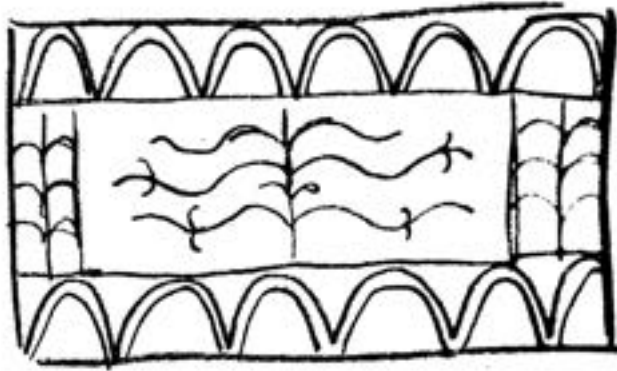
*Figure 41 (Right).* Pine frame and panel sample with handpainted birds in black acrylic.





*Figure 42 (Top).* Sketchbook images.

*Figure 43 (Bottom).* Painting stars. Sample on the right is faux-aged by sanding after painting.



*Figure 44.* Inspiration sketch and corresponding painting on solid walnut with acrylic paint.





*Figure 45 (Left).* Painting detail.

*Figure 46 (Right).* Fall semester samples.

# So Many Different Lengths of Time

How long does a man live after all?  
A thousand days or only one?  
One week or a few centuries?  
How long does a man spend living or dying  
and what do we mean when we say gone forever?

And how much does he live while he lives?  
We fret and ask so many questions –  
then when it comes to us  
the answer is so simple after all.

A man lives for as long as we carry him inside us,  
for as long as we carry the harvest of his dreams,  
for as long as we ourselves live,  
holding memories in common, a man lives.



His lover will carry his man's scent, his touch:  
his children will carry the weight of his love.  
One friend will carry his arguments,  
another will hum his favourite tunes,  
another will still share his terrors.

And the days will pass with baffled faces,  
then the weeks, then the months,  
then there will be a day when no question is asked,  
and the knots of grief will loosen in the stomach  
and the puffed faces will calm.  
And on that day he will not have ceased  
but will have ceased to be separated by death.  
How long does a man live after all?  
A man lives so many different lengths of time.

**Brian Patten**

# Heirloom Chest

**Ideation**

**Storytelling**

**Process**

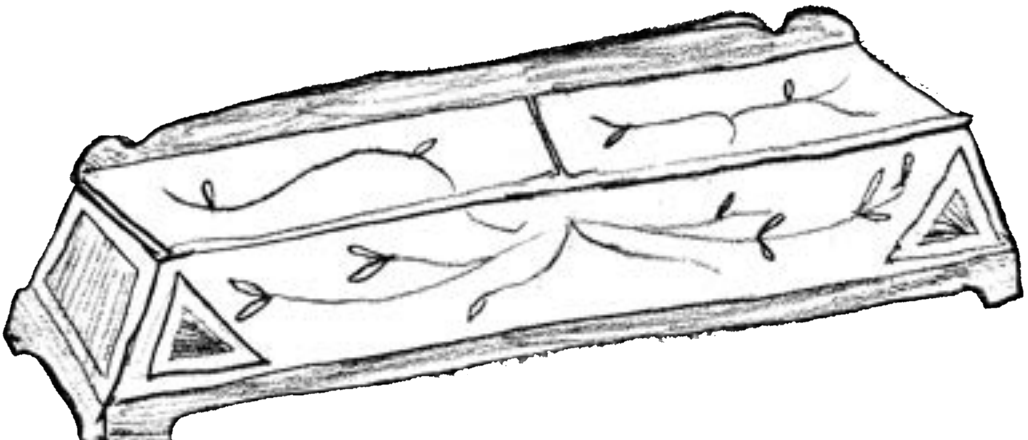
**Images**

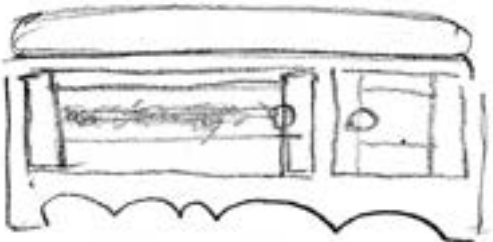
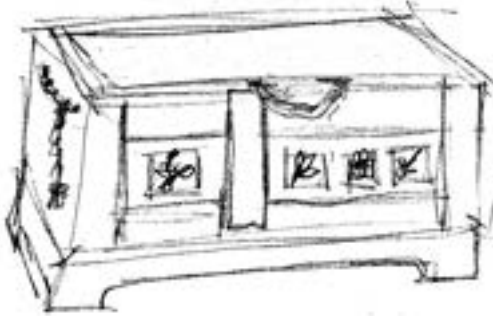
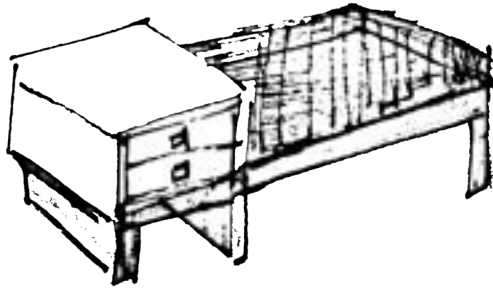
## Ideation

I started by sketching a variety of chest forms; with and without upholstered seating, benches with cabinetry elements, long and short. I quickly decided I wanted the chest to be appropriate for the safekeeping of textiles, because I was already certain on making a quilt as part of this collection. This meant the dimensions should be suitable in a bedroom or a front hall, so it should not take up too much space but should be sturdy with a deep cabinet. In country furniture forms, chests and hutches always sat on a leg structure, so that moisture and dirt from the floor wouldn't ruin the bottom of the piece. This is also when I decided to use pine: an accessible wood that's surface takes colour and surface decoration easily and that reflects heritage furniture building across Turtle Island.

**“Pine was always the wood of choice for craftspeople because it was local, free and abundant: an embarrassment of riches. As a result, the making processes and design thinking that shaped our domestic lives is pine shaped and pine coloured; log houses, carved implements, rustic furniture. There is a primitiveness, a raw beauty, a reassuring strength, generosity of scale and warmth to this architecture and object culture.”**

**(Oy, 2023.)**





Figures 47 & 48 (Left & Above). Sketches experimenting with cabinetry forms and applied imagery.

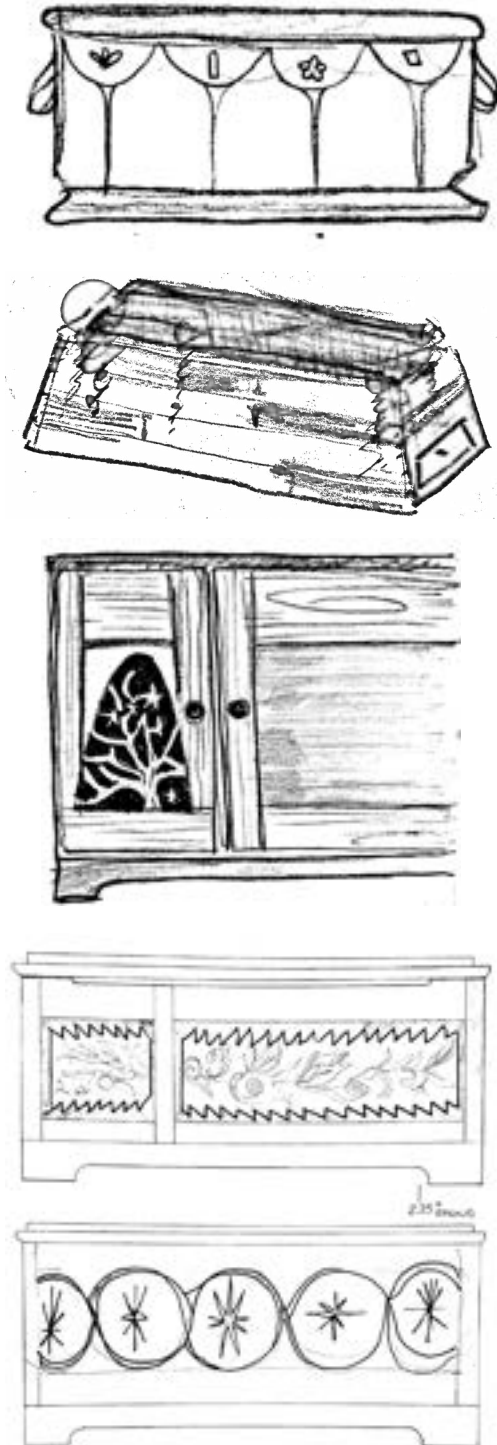


Figure 49. Sketches experimenting with cabinetry forms and applied imagery.



Figure 50. Wooden 1:4 scale models.

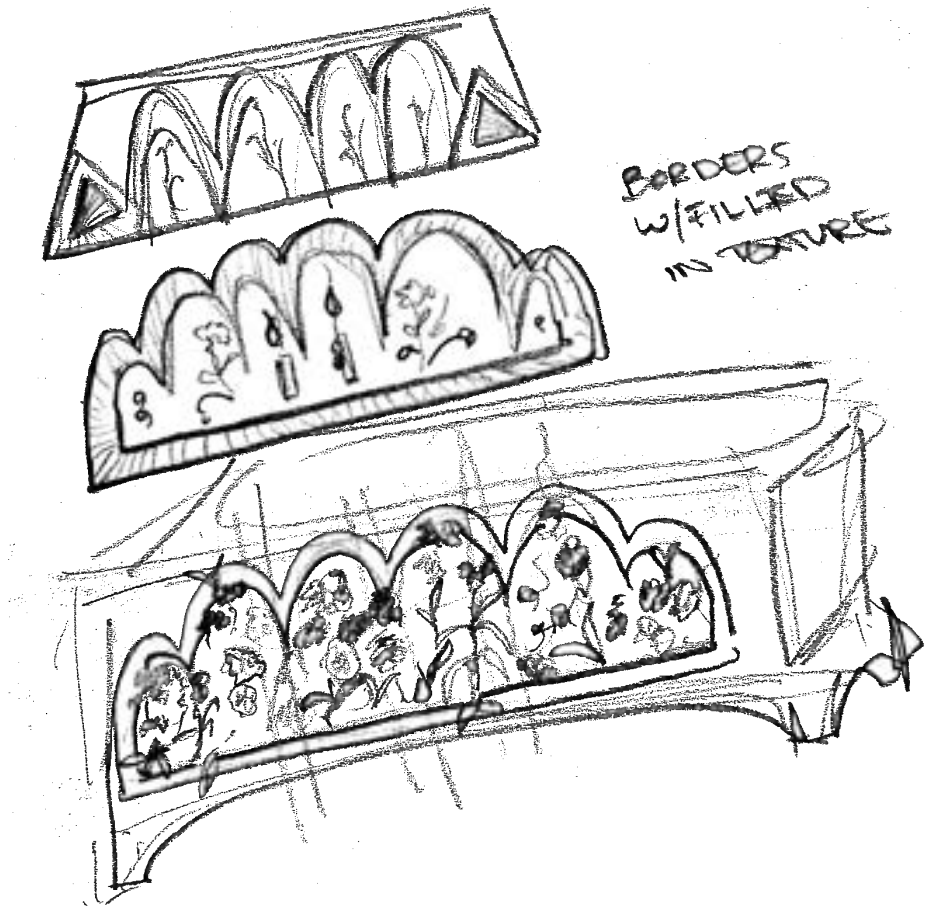


Figure 51. Cabinet sketch featuring arches.



Figure 52. Frame and panel chest sketches.



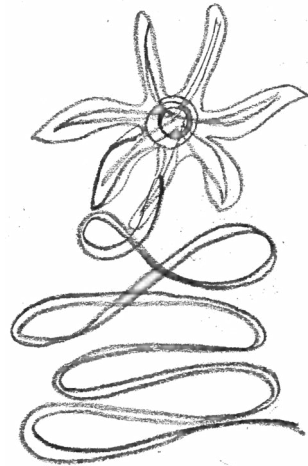


*Figure 53.* MDF mock-up chest.

## Storytelling

I wanted the chest to have a strong sense of sentiment and importance, and began sketching forms that could tell a story. I landed on a frame and panel construction, with artwork painted on the panel pieces, which by nature of the design, each gets its own frame. In framing each painting, the images are honoured and also more physically protected over time as they sit in from the surface. I was also attached to this idea of creating a window into another world, painting images from nature that suggest looking into another environment or another stage of life. The frame shaped like an arch is to further this idea of a doorway or a window. I wanted to tell the story of the cycle of life too; sketching seeds, roots, and plants, day and night.

I also took inspiration from gothic authors, artists, and poets who mused on our relations to the natural world, sentimentality, dreams, and nocturnal landscapes.



*Figure 54.*

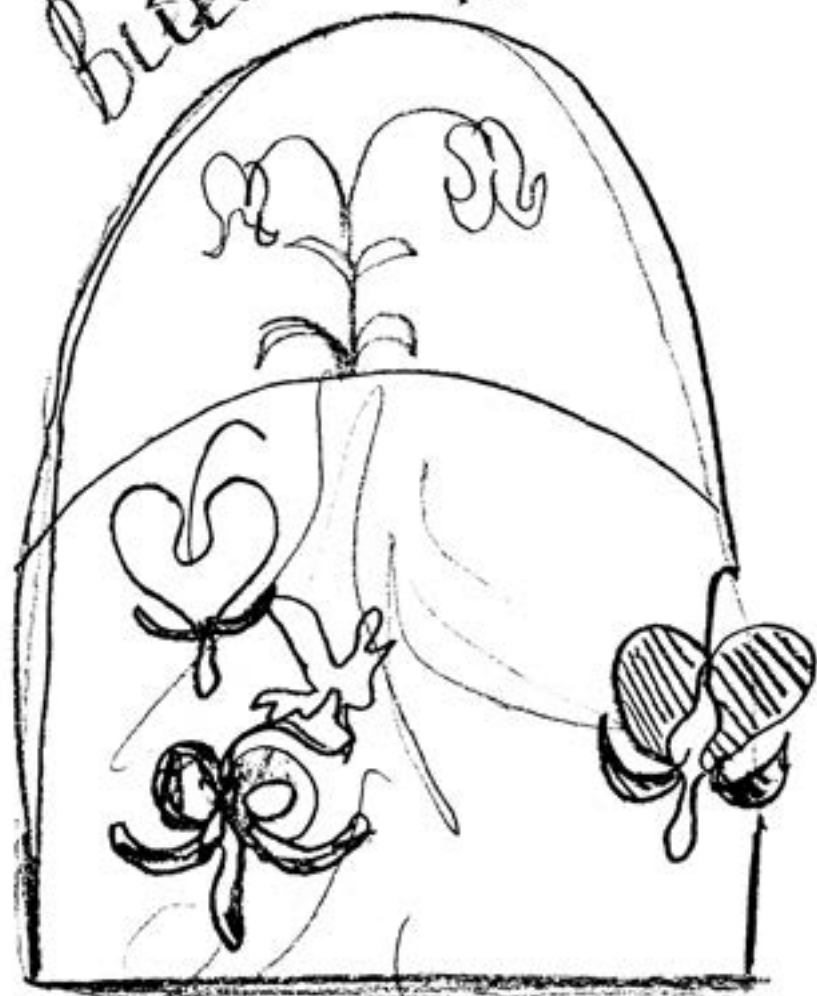


*Figure 55.* Sketching practice for cabinet painting,

**“Myriads of rejoicing living creatures, daily, hourly, perhaps every moment sink into death’s arms. All the merry dwellers of the trees and streams, and the myriad swarms of the air, called into life by the sunbeam of a summer morning, go home through death, wings folded perhaps in the last red rays of sunset of the day they were first tried. Trees towering in the sky, braving storms of centuries, flowers turning faces to the light for a single day or hour, having enjoyed their share of life’s feast—all alike pass on and away under the law of death and love”**

**(Muir, ca. 1939.)**

BLEEDING HEARTS

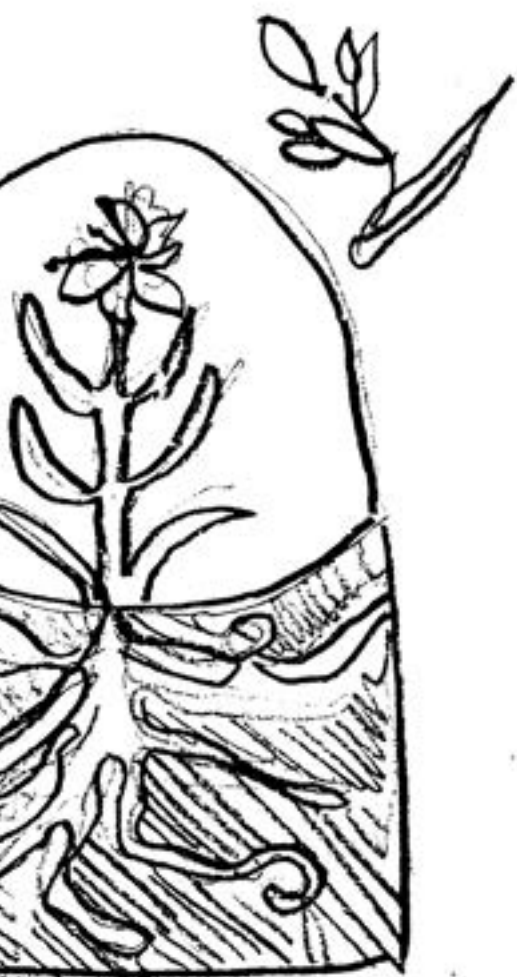


BLEEDING HEARTS

BRIDGE THE

CONNECTION

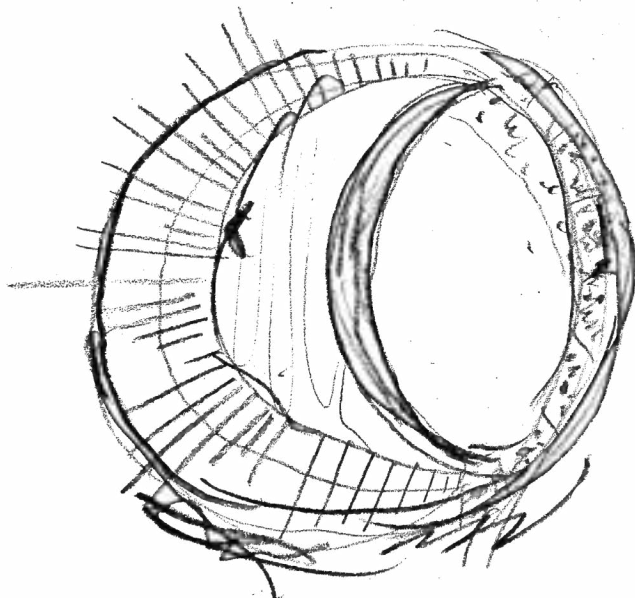
BWTN LIFE/DEATH"



RASPBERRIES



GLADIOLI →  
STRENGTH &  
CHARACTER IN LIFE.



*Figure 56 (pages previous). Initial sketches for back panels of chest.*

*Figure 57. Panel ideation.*

# Excerpt from The Canterville Ghost

Yes, death. Death must be so beautiful.  
To lie in the soft brown earth, with the grasses waving above  
one's head, and listen to silence.  
To have no yesterday, and no tomorrow.  
To forget time, to forget life, to be at peace.  
You can help me. You can open for me the portals of death's  
house, for love is always with you, and love is stronger than  
death is.

**Oscar Wilde**

Oscar Wilde is categorized as a Gothic writer for his romantic and dramatic portrayals of human nature.

## Process

In terms of woodworking processes, I started by creating a variety of routing templates to create the curved frame and panel pieces. After creating the joinery and adjusting the fits of the joints on the tablesaw, I could start painting the panels. The panels are stained to deepen the colour - enhancing the depth of the panel within the frame - and then line painted with black acrylic paint. The painting explorations on pages 41-49 offered me a lot of crucial experience with paint techniques on wood. One of the most important things I discovered was using a hard bristle brush - I ended up ordering hog hair fine-liners. The stiffness of the brush really helps to create an opaque line over the textural surface of wood.

The frame and panel pieces are then joined with biscuits and assembled into a mitered corner box. A cedar base gets screwed into the bottom of the cabinet to ward off any moth damage to stowed away textiles. The lid has breadboard ends that allow the laminated pine panel within to move with the seasons. Finally, I sourced Gothic Revival steel hardware from a small-batch maker on Etsy, to complement to black linework and to allude to the Gothic beginnings of the piece.



*Figure 58.* Initial sketches for a smaller panel on the heirloom chest.



" SUN - THE  
REVEALING OF  
THE LOWLINESS OF  
THE WORLD MANIFESTED  
UNDER THE LOWLINESS OF  
SUNLIGHT. "

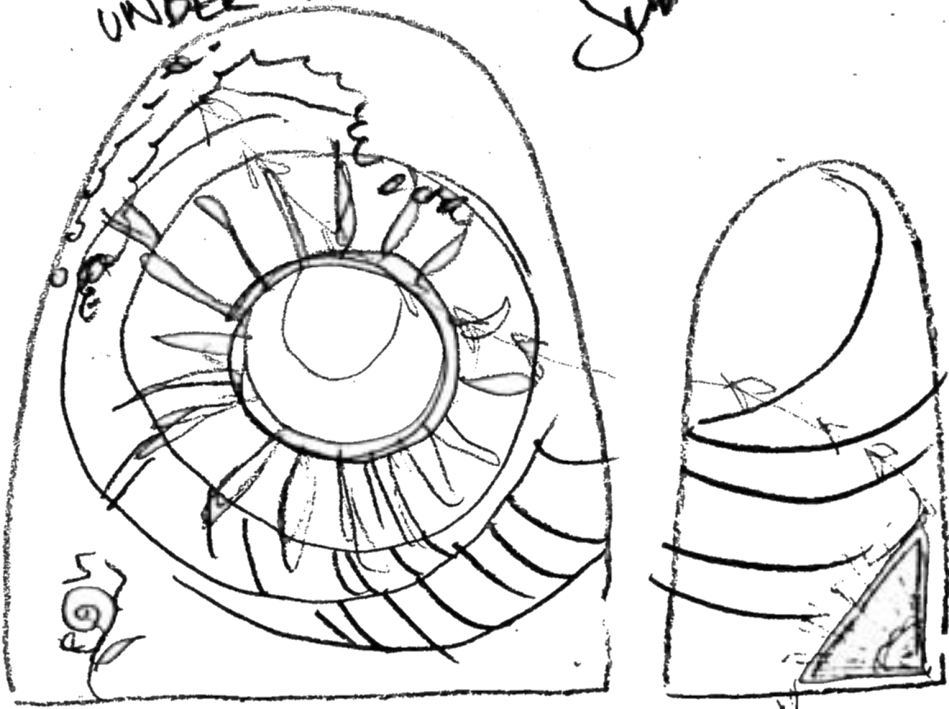


Figure 59. Notes and sketches about the symbology of the sun.





Figure 60-62 (Left to Right). Stages of painting and construction.





*Figure 63 & 64. Cabinet body gets glued together with special thanks to Jared Baylon.*

## Heirloom Chest Images

Pine

Natural oil and hard wax finish

Wool braided & felted rope

Acrylic paint

Iron strap hinges

Aromatic cedar base for textile protection



*Figure 65 (Previous page).* Heirloom chest at home.

*Figure 66 (Right).* Painting detail of a cardinal, moon, and stars.

*Figure 67 (Following page).* Front panel details.











*Figure 68 (Above).* Sprout panel detailing. Heart and pinwheel illustration is taken from a Newfoundland vernacular painting detail from a Walter Peddle book; the pinwheels in the center are meant to represent seeds.

*Figure 69 (Right).* Painting detail.





*Figure 70 (Above).* Back of chest displaying iron strap hinges.

*Figure 71 (Right).* Raspberry bush painting detail.





*Figure 72 (Above).* Fire represents eternity through the metaphor of the “eternal flame”, and symbolizes the memory of someone who lives on.

*Figure 73 (Right).* Back of chest.



Country Furniture Projects  
JONNY APPLESEED  
DUNE



# Log Cabin Quilt

**Ideation**

**Storytelling**

**Process**

**Images**

## Ideation

The textile showcase of *Home by Mourning* is the Log Cabin Quilt. Very early on in my textile ideation I decided on this time-honoured quilt pattern. From Walker's book *Ontario Heritage Quilts*, "Log Cabin quilts and rope beds are two of Ontario's most important historical artifacts. Rope beds were common in pioneer Ontario and old quilts were often kept between the ropes to keep the mattress from sagging." . My dad grew up in southern Ontario with a family who loved being at their cabin by the lake, and this connection to his roots drew me to using this pattern in my ideation. A Log Cabin pieced quilt represents an abstracted view of a cabin from above, with the dusk hours brightening one side of the cabin while the other side is covered by shadow.

**"Over the years, quilts have formed a chain of love linking one generation to another. They have become bonds that join families together more strongly than any legal document."**

**(Walker, 1994.)**



*Figure 74.* Log Cabin design made on Adobe Illustrator.



*Figure 75.* Unknown maker. (ca 1900) Log Cabin quilt sourced from Bruce County Museum, part of their online collection of Ontario heritage quilt images.

Paul Connerton writes about the importance of textile in the AIDS Quilt Project in *The Spirit of Mourning: History, Memory and the Body* (2011):

**“Cloth is the privileged material because it is yielding, because it is not stone or bronze or steel. When a memorial is made of stone or bronze or steel the rhetoric of the material implicitly claims that the memory of the dead will last forever. Cloth carries no such illusions of enduring witness. It is fragile, it fades and frays, it needs mending.**

**It remembers the dead by sewing together mere fragments of their lives. Cleve Jones pointedly drew attention to this material contrast in 1988. “Today” he said, “we have borne in our arms and on our shoulders a new monument to our nation’s capital. It was not made of metal or raised by engineers. Our monument was sewn of soft fabrics and thread, and was created in homes across America.”**

## Storytelling

The Log Cabin represents an important piece of Ontario textile history relevant to my dad's life, but also carries meaning to many quilters who love using this quilt pattern. Over time, this quilt has seen countless variations from quilters who imbue it with their personal touches of the meaning of home. The center of each Log Cabin block represents the hearth of the home, and is usually made with orange or red fabric for a feeling of warmth and comfort. The strips undulate in colour from this center square, representing rays of sunlight falling over the grounds.

I love the way the Log Cabin block embodies both light and dark. I felt this metaphor very suiting to the process of grieving; I often laugh at sweet memories and previously forgotten moments with my dad, just as often as I deeply grieve for him and am troubled and confused by his passing. I decided to emphasize this contrast by creating one large Log Cabin block instead of the traditional repeating blocks that get joined together. I started with the red hearth and kept adding colours on each side until the final design was half light and half dark.

*Figure 76 (Right). Very beginning.*





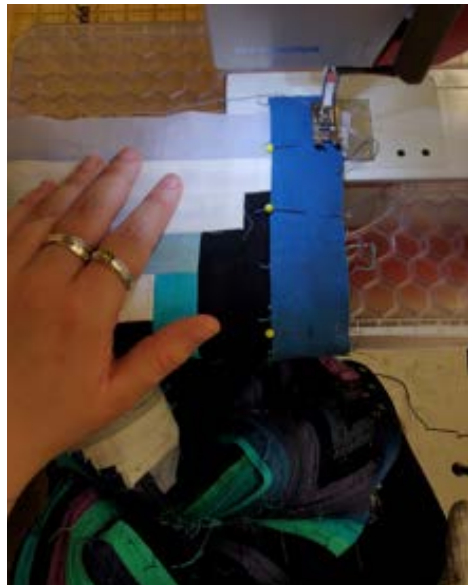
# Process





*Figure 77.* Using colours from my Procion MX vat dyed collection of linens and cottons (Figures 1-9), I rendered variations of Log Cabin quilts in Adobe Illustrator. Illustrator allowed me to create in scale, so that I could click on an individual shape and know the measurement that needs to be cut out of fabric.

*Figure 78 (Left).* Variation on Log Cabin with abstracted strips.



*Figure 79 & 80. Adding strips.*



*Figure 81.* Quilt progression.





*Figure 82.* Drying on the line.

*Figure 83.* Quilting detail.



*Figure 84.* Ringing out the quilt.



# Travelling Together

If we are separated I will  
try to wait for you  
on your side of things

your side of the wall and the water  
and of the light moving at its own speed  
even on leaves that we have seen  
I will wait on one side

while a side is there

**W.S. Merwin**

## Log Cabin Quilt Images

Cotton

Linen

Hand-dyed Procion MX Fibre-Reactive colours

Cotton heavyweight quilting thread

Wool batting





*Figure 85 (Previous). Quilt on the lawn.*

*Figures 86 & 87. Front and back details.*







*Figures 88 & 89. Quilting details.*

*Figure 90 (Following pages). Log Cabin Quilt and Heirloom Chest.*

*Figure 91 (page 121). Cyla shaking out the quilt.*







## Reflecting on *Home by Mourning*

At the beginning of this document, I make reference to a book I knew was going to be very influential, Guy Cools' *Performing Mourning*. In it, Cools examines rituals of mourning by artists, musicians, dancers; all of whom use laments as a theme and device to express and hold the emotions of grief. This duality of expression and containing is the most important experience I gained through creating *Home by Mourning*. Not only did I allow myself to embody my emotions and memories during the making process, I also came out on the other side with pieces that honour and carry this period of mourning.

I've also begun to shape a fabrication methodology that connects me to my father. Diving into painting practice, I was surprised by how often I heard his voice in my head helping me through the process. It was incredibly validating to realize that this pretty lofty project did yield the results I needed; to connect with my dad, and to connect with generations of artists recognizing the power of mourning.

I'm proud of having created a collection that feels like only the beginning of something. My time researching and experimenting in the Sheridan woodshop filled me with so much respect and love for the process, and gratitude for the crafts community. In the introduction to this document I referenced poet Robert Bly: "objects invite us into our own psyches". What I am most inspired by is the opportunity I've had over the past year to witness the creativity, singularity, and processes that made the objects my peers presented for capstone. Witnessing the amount of possibility in my peers' work alongside the immeasurable amounts of knowledge we've been given is an incredible thing.





## About the Maker



Flora May is an artist, writer, youth worker, and furniture maker currently residing in Toronto, Ontario. She is of Inuit and settler ancestry; raised between St. John's, Newfoundland and St. Lewis, Labrador. Manifested in her community work, Flora's goal is to produce craft while creating a safe and exciting space for Indigenous youth to create and enjoy art.

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