

Family Stories: identity and memory

This series started several years ago when I decided to address some of the central themes of my own personal history in my art-making. My interest was in exploring how my identity had evolved based on the experiences of the generation above me, starting with the photographs I had inherited after my Grandparents had died. This series explores family through the understanding of personal and cultural memories and their relationship to identity. It includes several subsets and features multiple photo-based approaches. The three subsets are: *Undone*, *Family Stories and Home*.

We all have these collections of family imagery - this pile of photographs holding the accumulated total of a families' experiences as viewed through the selective eye of the amateur camera. The images take on an importance simply by being present as part of the collection. Often we have no idea who many of the people are in the images, but they are from our clan, so we keep them. Smiling couples sitting on couches, awkward families standing in the front yard, a holiday dinner table with everyone leaning in to fit the frame...all of these mundane signifiers of where we came from and a strong part of who we have become. Is it possible to explore these relics and see the truth we know will come later?

Undone, featured in this display, is a set of mixed media images which incorporate cyanotypes and vintage family photographs examining the structures of family, home, birth and marriage. Many years ago I heard the Dick Lourie poem "Forgiving our Fathers". There was one line especially that spoke to me, "If we forgive our fathers what is left" - it held all that I felt art should hold, a question and thousands of answers. If we let go of our place in the family mythology - what do we have left - who are we without this construction that so much can be built on. That phrase was the beginning of the Family Stories body of work - I wanted to address the very nature of who I was and where I had come from - with the hope that it would speak to others as well.

Ann Mitchell, 2011