



# The Space Between

McIntosh Gallery Digital Exhibition

# To Know, To Belong

By: Natalie Scola

In her 1995 essay *Homemaking*, Jamaica Kincaid writes, “A house has a physical definition; a home has a spiritual one.” This is tidy way of summing up the difference between house and home. The words have a similar denotation, or primary meaning, but for each, there is a deeper association. Every individual understands home differently, which makes defining the term home difficult. Is home the place you were born and raised? Is it the place you chose to live as an adult? Is home even a place at all, or can it simply be a feeling? Home, then, becomes a relative term.

*The Space Between* is a study of images of the home in Canadian art. The exhibition includes works from emerging and established artists and highlights the range of emotions experienced in the home setting. *The Space Between* represents how the home serves as a backdrop for life’s events. There is no single way to define a home and the selected works in this exhibition illustrate the varied meanings that home can take.

Our interpretation of home affects our understanding and experience of place and belonging. The spaces that we live in develop complex meanings, stemming from their symbolic associations, social understandings, cultural experiences and special functions. French theorist Pierre Bourdieu calls this “habitus”, the way that cultural and social settings are established and reproduced. A house (structure) becomes a home (place) when culture is created and then becomes part of an individual’s practice. With habitus, a home is not an empty space; it becomes imbued with meaning and, in turn, constructs meaning for the inhabitants. Since the home is the primary site of habitus, each person’s experience with home will be different. In *Moonlight Under the Stars*, Jason McLean constructs a mental map that defines varied geographical areas of memory and social histories. His is not a traditional depiction of home or place, rather it is a representation of what the artist feels are important locations.

The concept of home is customarily associated with ideas of domesticity. The “cult of domesticity” in the 19th century developed into the nuclear family, with repetitive and endless suburban streets by the 1950s, when home was portrayed as a sanctuary and a place for family. However, this perception ignored domestic conflict and familial dysfunction. Gillian Saward's *Homage #12* and Jenna Faye Powell's *Expansion Potential* depict domestic interiors that have an underlying element of loneliness and melancholy.

In the last year, our idea of home has evolved. The COVID-19 global pandemic has forced people to isolate; this has changed the relationships people have with their homes and living spaces. Shannon King's *Staying Home: Portable Agoraphobe* demonstrates how we have come to view home as a protected space against a global pandemic, but has also increased our fear of the outside world. That safe home is now also a workplace, a social space, and an area to relax. With an increase in remote working arrangements, people have fewer ways of differentiating between home and work or school and previously separated spaces are now blending. The consolidation of functional spaces coupled with the isolation inflicted by the pandemic has made people feel trapped: unable to be with friends and family, confined in bedrooms and make-shift home offices, huddling around computer screens to learn or to work. Home as a refuge, a place to come together in safety, has now become a double-edge sword. A year and a half in, nerves are fraying after spending too much time together or too much time alone.

The pandemic has changed the way we navigate our home spaces, resulting in an increased desire to modify the areas they inhabit. As working from home becomes more normalized, people crave more functional and comfortable workspaces: “Zoom Rooms”, outdoor sheds, and niches under the stairs have all been optimized. As families share spaces, common living areas have had to be adapted for different uses: the basement storage area is now also a home gym, the guest room is now a room for virtual learning, the dining room is now an office.

Colour trends have been moving toward calm shades that evoke serenity and relaxation as a refuge from the uncertainty outside the home. After being relegated indoors for long periods, people have developed a desire to access outdoor spaces. This has created an unprecedented migration to suburban or rural areas. People are also moving to different locations with the hope that work will remain remote.

Areas of Canada that had historically low real estate prices, like the Atlantic provinces, are seeing a massive explosion in home prices as people search for more space.

The pandemic has also revealed darker relationships within the home. Gender-based violence calls increased drastically during the pandemic, as vulnerable people were unable to access necessary supports within their communities. The conditions of the pandemic allowed abusers to increase control over their victims, as well as strengthen barriers to escaping abusive situations. Under these conditions, the home is no longer a safe space or sanctuary.

Another consequence of the pandemic is an increase in homelessness. With the loss of jobs, people were unable to pay rent, and tent cities sprung up in public parks, which police then forcibly removed. Shelters have experienced COVID-19 outbreaks, leading people to feel that encampments are a safer alternative. Having a fixed position allows people to access their support systems, communities and jobs; forcible removal disrupts people who rely on a place of safety. Developers are unwilling to build affordable housing, and house prices have dramatically increased during the pandemic, with the average house price in Canada rising 38% from last year. A decrease in the number of available homes and the rising costs of raw materials have resulted in limited availability in the housing market. Combined with low mortgage rates and a desire for more space, housing prices have skyrocketed, making an inflated housing market even more unattainable for some. While the middle and upper classes have been able to absorb the economic impact of the pandemic, lower income populations, people of colour and other marginalized groups have sorely felt its effects.

*The Space Between* illustrates how homes take on different forms as well as different meanings. It reveals how homes are places of shelter but also places of entrapment. Our relationships with our homes are continually changing – no one can predict what homes will look like in the future. The works in the exhibition encourage the viewer to reflect on their own understanding of what home means to them.

*Natalie Scola*  
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## Author Biography

Natalie Scola is a second-year student in the Master of Museum Studies Program at the University of Toronto. She holds a honours degree in Art History & Museum Studies and a major in the Arts and Humanities from Western University (2020). Natalie is interested in museum education and programming – especially getting people to think about art! When not visiting museums, Natalie spends her time thinking about cooking and baking, and how food can be a connecting point for people, heritage and museums. In her spare time, Natalie love to cook, read lots of books and garden.



Brian Jones  
Coming Through the Back Door  
Oil on canvas  
1982  
130.0 x 106.5  
Purchase, W. H. Abbott Fund, 1983

In *Coming Through the Back Door* (1982), Brian Jones uses colour and stylized forms to illustrate the quick movement of the central figure. The man's arm reaches forward, seemingly out of the frame as he pushes open the door. This gives the sense that he is walking into something in media res, interrupting what is happening on the other side of the picture plane.

Jones creates the impression of action and movement not just through the arm hanging suspending in midair, but also through the tilt of the man's shoulder, the flare of his coat hem and his leg stepping forward into the room. Jones has used colour and form to separate outside from in, and the man is bridging the gap between the two: coming from the cold, snowy weather into the warm inviting area with the viewer.

Brian Jones was an artist based in London and Toronto who focused on depictions of everyday life. His highly stylized forms in bright colours evoke nostalgic memories and celebrate the unique in the everyday.





Sharmistha Kar

"What are the roots that clutch"

Hand embroidery on fabric

2017

147 x 99 cm

Collection of Patrick Mahon & Barbara Mahon



Sharmistha Kar's practice explores identity and mapping through embroidery. She works with textiles from different places and cultures to examine the notion of place. "*What are the roots that clutch*" (2017) is a large embroidery panel that depicts different views of home and shelter. The white fabric background of the work is scattered with different temporary shelters, tents and lean-tos. The idea of shelter (temporary) contrasts with the idea of home (permanent) and speaks to the changing sense of identity in relation to what is considered a home.

Moving from place to place makes home impermanent and the temporary shelters in the work demonstrate that encounters with a place, no matter how temporary, still help shape identity and meaning.

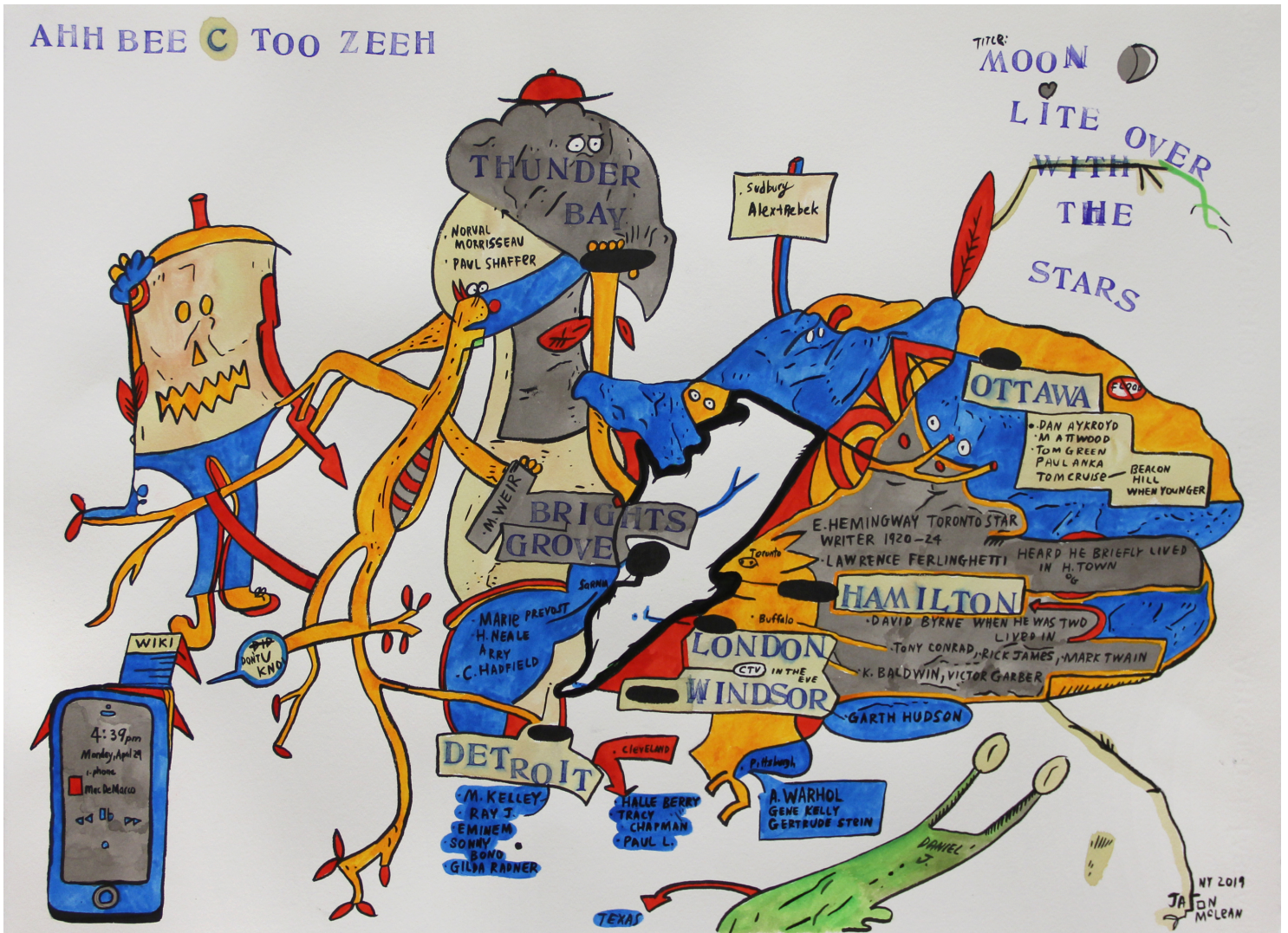


Gillian Saward  
Homage #12  
Oil on Masonite  
1975  
61.0 x 42.9  
Gift of Mrs. Frances Saward, 1987

The delicate use of light, shadow and colour in *Homage #12* (1975) creates an ethereal, photorealistic look reminiscent of Old Masters paintings. Gillian Saward was born in England, but moved to Canada as a child. She studied at H.B Beal Secondary School and at the Institution Allende in Mexico. On a visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, she viewed the works of Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer; she was interested in his use of colour and how colour was used to depict space. Saward created her Homage series which took inspiration from Vermeer in creating realistic images with careful use of light and colour.

*Homage #12* depicts a woman standing in front of a low table. Her pose and the settings reference Vermeer's *The Milkmaid* (1658), *Woman Reading a Letter* (1664), and *Woman Holding a Balance* (1663). The woman is flooded in light from the window to the side, which highlights the folds of her shirt and the creases in the fabric on the table. Behind the woman is a painting of a group of people, possibly a wedding, which stands out on the otherwise empty and plain wall. On the table, the woman has prepared two cups of tea. Her expression is unreadable – the viewer cannot be sure what she is thinking.

Saward has created an work where the viewer can interpret their own meaning: is she lonely, waiting for someone at the window, or does the painting in the background point to marital issues? *Homage #12* is a snapshot of a quiet, reflective moment where there can be multiple meanings, or none.



Jason McLean  
 Moonlight Over With The Stars  
 Ink on Paper  
 2019  
 22 x 30 in.  
 Courtesy Michael Gibson Gallery



At first glance, Jason McClean's *Moonlight Over the Stars* (2019) is a chaotic combination of text, colour and imaginary shapes. But on closer inspection, it is a sophisticated exploration of memory and place, an abstract mind-map that organizes personal experience and understandings.

Cities – Ottawa, Hamilton, London, Detroit – are marked in blue capital letters. It is a map of Southern Ontario, capped by Thunder Bay to the North and bordered by the Great Lakes in the South. McClean has listed famous people and celebrities who are associated with each place: Alex Trebek from Sudbury; Norval Morrisseau from Thunder Bay, Dan Aykroyd from Ottawa. The casual combination of popular culture and inner thought process shows how McClean has mapped his own understanding onto places in the world.



Jenna Faye Powell  
Expansion Potential  
Oil and acrylic on panel  
2016

76.0 x 61.0

Purchase, W. H. Abbott Fund, 2016

There is a sense of maximalism and claustrophobia in Jenna Faye Powell's *Expansion Potential* (2016). Glasses stacks on the table, canvasses leaned up against the wall, paper, paintbrushes and art supplies scattered across the room; all these objects bathed in the yellow light from the lamp.

Faye Powell has used foreshortening to bring all the elements of the work close to the viewer, increasing the feeling of being overwhelmed and stuck. Foreshortening has also distorted elements, like the chair and canvasses being pulled toward the side. The shortened perspective and the flattened look of the objects creates an uncanny feeling, heightened by the choice of colours. Most of the *Expansion Potential* is done in muted greys and browns, but Faye Powell uses blue to draw the viewer through the piece, from the abstract blue shape at the bottom to the top of the stairs. Wine bottles in neon green stand out against the drab table, while the top of the piece is brightened by the yellow light of the lamp.

The claustrophobic composition of *Expansion Potential* feels relevant with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. People have been stuck at home with limited reprieve for a year and a half with stress and frustration reaching a tipping point. When you are unable to escape, is your home really a sanctuary, or does it become a prison? All of the objects in the painting are encased in the shape of a house, but it is unsure if the work is meant to represent a safe place or not.





Shannon King  
Staying Indoors: Portable Agoraphobe  
Sharpie and marker on paper  
2020



Shannon King's *Staying Indoors: Portable Agoraphobe* (2020) is a comic – but relevant – reaction to the COVID-19 lockdowns. King created a costume that doubles as a mobile house, allowing her to leave the house during a time of uncertainty. This image is a drawing of a photographic project.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way people view their homes. Home is no longer a place of rest, sleeping, gathering and sanctuary. It is now an office, a classroom, a place that isolates and limits our lives. Home is a place of refuge from the uncertainty and fear of the virus, but it now represents immobility and people feel trapped. King has used these feelings to create a constructed, moveable home. She used materials from her own home to represent resourcefulness under pressure. King also drew inspiration from animals like hermit crabs and snails who always have a home attached to them – they never tire of their home because it brings them safety, refuge and comfort.



At Our Winter Home  
Kakulu Saggiaktok  
Stonecut and stencil on paper  
1987  
55.3 x 70.7  
Gift of Judy and Murray Bryant, 2002

Kakulu Saggiaktok was a graphic artist from Kinngait (Cape Dorset). She began working in the studios in the 1960s and was well known for her drawings. Her works are inspired by childhood memories of living on the land, and are often imaginative and playful in nature.

*At Our Winter Home* (1987) is a print depicting a mother, a baby and a child in front of an igloo. Igloos were traditionally used by Inuit people as winter shelter. This work shows the diversity in living spaces in the world.





Adrienne Dagg

Time Out

Oil on canvas

2020

60 x 60 inches

Courtesy of Bau-Xi Gallery and the artist



Adrienne Dagg's works combine figurative painting with surreal elements to create unusual narrative scenes. *Time Out* (2020) contrasts the idea of a safe space with the isolation and uncertainty. The work depicts a bedroom, but the central figure has their face obscured by a series of hanging plants. The comforting connotations of a bedroom are subverted in having the figure's face covered, creating a surreal composition with a similar effect to the works of Magritte. With the body and face hidden, the work takes on an element of the uncanny. The figure is present in the work, but could be anybody, allowing the viewer to image themselves in the painting.



Niloufar Salimi  
75 Oriole Rd, August 10, 2021  
Watercolour on paper  
2021  
9 x 12 inches

*75 Oriole Road, August 10, 2021* depicts the changing of seasons and the passage of time from a stationary vantage point. Artist Niloufar Salimi made prints of the apple tree outside her third-floor apartment window over the course of a year. The series of drawings chart the passing time – the past year contained in the changing colours of leaves, and the passage from blossom to fruit. The drawings do not show how society has changed in the past year, with people sheltering inside their homes, the streets in the city empty.

The pandemic shifted the world to the virtual, everything took place on a screen. This upended our understanding of our physical surroundings. Contained by the same walls and environment, our world shrunk to our bedrooms, offices and kitchens. How does nature fit into a constricted world? For many, nature became a refuge. Being outside, unconstructed by four walls, breathing clean air, meant a break from routine and reconnecting with the world outside.

*75 Oriole Road, August 10, 2021* shows the branch of the apple tree in a transitory moment. It has leafed out and blossomed in the spring, and there are two blushing red apple hanging from the end which will ripen soon. A few leaves have started to turn, indicating the approaching cool weather of fall. The work is a study of a moment frozen in time, poignant with potential and change.





Kim Ondaatje

Blue Bedroom (From The house on Piccadilly Street Series)

Serigraph on paper

1970

85.4 x 66.0 cm

Purchase, S.O.G.S Cultural Committee, 1971

Kim Ondaatje's *Blue Bedroom* is part of the *House on Piccadilly Street* series, a group of works inspired Ondaatje's house in London. The works show the contrast of a peaceful and calm home with the feeling of being trapped inside. There are no people depicted in the series, giving the works a sterile, empty quality.

*Blue Bedroom* draws the viewer in with the shock of blue from the bed skirt, which is echoed in the blue pillow on the bed and the curtain at the back of the room. The bedroom is viewed through a series of doors, creating layers in which the viewer must enter to look at the work. The emptiness of the space allows the viewer to image wandering through the space; there are no figures to break the illusion and create a narrative. There is no reference to an outside space, no indication of day or time. The viewer is suspended in the moment looking at the bedroom.

There is an established history of female artists depicting domestic spaces – it is acceptable for a woman to depict the home, the place where a family is raised. Ondaatje's refusal to include figures combined with the clinical composition of the piece subverts stereotypical female domestic space.