

Here and There: A Continuous Narrative



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Here and There: A Continuous Narrative

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
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by

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Abstract

How can we transcend our literal place by connecting with natural space?

As industrialization and globalization have increasingly shaped our society, we have become more and more disconnected from nature, ourselves, and our memories. Furthermore, living busy lives, we have lost the ability to appreciate and be grateful for our surroundings. Nonetheless, we can reconnect with what has been lost—nature, ourselves, and our memories—with a small shift in our mindset and a habitual practice of walking, which pulls our footsteps not toward a certain place but toward an understanding of the passage of time, the resonance of longing, and an understanding of who we are. It is in these moments of peripatetic reminiscence that we can travel back in time with our memories and catch a glimpse of ourselves in other places. Ultimately, this makes us capable of taking in our surroundings in the now. Truly, noticing our environment is a way of reconnecting with oneself and one's history.

My textile work—fine-art woven and printed fabric installations—offers a collective pictorial representation of my personal experiences living in various parts of the world. Bringing these places into one body of work represents transcendence and connection. Memories that pull me into a state of recollection consist of locations relating to my mother's love, my childhood homes, and my current residential circumstances. These are all connected directly with my work. The work has come to life in two forms. One, each location is separate in and of itself, as I nailed down a memorable location. Two, the different places are connected through the physical act of walking and the physical medium of pathways. All of my thoughts, realizations, and feelings as I journeyed through my life are embodied within the work. To me, a place does not have any physical limitations, as the trace of memory it leaves behind becomes a never-ending story that lives on inside of me.

This thesis is a collection of short essays on my experience and my research into the literature of repair, walking, nature, place, and memory. I hope readers will find their own relationships to the ideas. Everyone endeavors to communicate through experience. Just as places lead us naturally by the hand into our memories, so these locations enable us to communicate and connect with each other, even if the memories recollected have a different meaning to each of us. Because all human beings go through life with their own collection of memories, I hope that this work becomes a channel for mutual interaction and understanding for the places that I have represented and those that others might, too.

Essays



15 West Studio, Providence, April 2020

Mobility

Since childhood, I never really had a place to call “home”—a timeless word that evokes feelings of purifying nostalgia. Instead, I have spent the better part of my days collecting invaluable memories, not limited by the numerous borders that separate the world. As my father had been working for a trade-investment promotion agency affiliated with the Korean government, our family had the privilege of moving from country to country every three years.



My parents and I, in the Himalayas, circa 1990

Taking my first international flight at the age of three, I moved first to the South Asian nation of Bangladesh. Although I have trouble remembering the nitty-gritty details due to my young age, I will never forget a particular incident. Susceptible to periodic flooding, Bangladesh awarded us with pounding rain and our home with a real deluge one day. With the water flowing into our house from every direction imaginable, our family was forced to flee for safety.

Such was my childhood, although not as dramatic, as I experienced the rich culture and diversity of the world by traversing through Great Britain, the United States, and Nigeria. Looking back, I am sincerely grateful for the ineffable breadth of experiences made possible by my parents. At the time, to be frank, adjusting to a new environment each and every time we moved

came as a personal challenge. Introverted and shy, I ritualized crying on my first day of school. Understanding my tears, however, my parents never pushed me; they revealed their patience by always waiting for me to become comfortable with my surroundings.



Myself (behind girl with yellow doll) with classmates, in Bangladesh, circa 1989

This is not to say, though, that I had any grievances. With curiosity as my guide, I loved to explore the newness surrounding me. “This is my true home for now!”, I would say to myself. Although I would have to leave the place sometime in the future, I thought it my personal mission to show love, to leave love, and to express my love wherever I went.

Unsurprisingly, I am now enjoying each and every moment of my life taking in the world, journeying to new places, and settling down in a new environment—all on my own free will as opposed to my childhood. Looking toward the horizon, I now ask myself where my compass is pointing to next.

Coincidentally, although I had lived in a plethora of different countries, I always ended up in an urban setting. As clear as night follows day was my particular attachment to city parks—the speck of nature that was so characteristic of cities. Even now, my daily routine consists of taking a stroll through “my” lovely park. Everywhere I go, I feel the beckoning hand of nature caressing me as a mother fondles her child: the sound of leaves whistling in the morning breeze, the scenic greenery of park fields inviting me to join their silent celebration of life. Indeed, cities and nature are synonymous and inseparable.

New York Memories

When I think about a particular place, I unconsciously ponder whether I have any specific relationship with the location. To me, places and memories are inseparable just as couples are united under the fabric of life. The very act of shifting through my mind leads to the recollection of memories. Conversing about these memories, in turn, becomes a stepping stone to unfolding them as material events upon a cinematic timeline.

Although I was privileged to have lived in many different parts of the world, New York was definitely one of my most desired destinations. Whenever I visited the vibrant city, I always promised myself, "I am going to live here one day." Now with four years having passed by under the majestic shades of New York's skyscrapers, I am truly grateful to have manifested this passion.

At first, however, my parents' anxiety was tangible as I explained my plans for New York. They were worried that I would be living all alone thousands of miles away. Nevertheless, my will to take on the challenge of pursuing my dreams led me to where I am today. Studying at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology, I immersed myself in the wonders of textiles and dived into an internship as a CAD Print Designer.

Taking in the beauty of the city, I remember someone telling me about New York and how it was called the "Walking City." Indeed, I can confidently say that I have never walked more in any other city. Unsurprisingly, I have dedicated my shopping spree to hunting for shoes as each new shoe I bought quickly wore down from walking and commuting.



Me in the New York Botanical Garden, NYC, May 2017

I stayed in the Markle Residence, a female-only residence located on Manhattan's 13th Street between 6th and 7th Avenues. Managed by the Salvation Army, the facility is home to international students from all over the world and New York's corporate female employees. Grateful for the free meals offered by the residence, I thoroughly enjoyed eating at the dining hall and meeting new friends. As most of them had come to New York for their love of the city, I found it easy to get along with everyone.

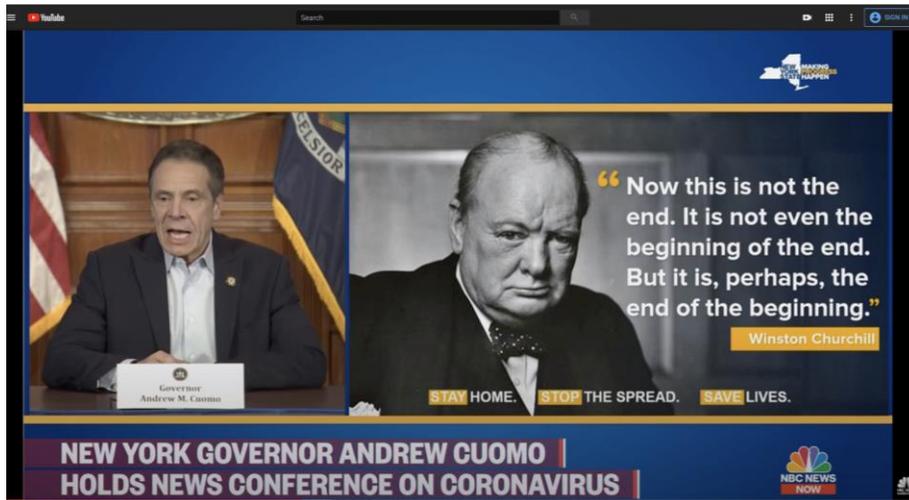


View from Markle Residence, NYC, October 2015

With loneliness nowhere to be found, I spent the majority of my free time exploring the city and appreciating the sheer scale of this hub of the world, guided by my own two feet. Situated right next to Markle Residence was Hudson River Park—a natural paradise that rewarded passerby with the whistle of its singing breeze. Always my favorite place for taking a stroll and spacing out after a good day, the park was especially beautiful at dusk, as the sun rays bounced off the shimmering water. Even now while writing, I can imagine myself on the banks of the water, soaking in the elegance of the park.

Currently, New York is going through a period of turmoil as COVID-19 sweeps through the city. Each time I encounter news of the outbreak, waves of distress well up inside of my mind; the fact that the city I love so much is

enduring such pain digs deep into my core. Andrew Cuomo, the governor of New York, quoted Winston Churchill as he said, "Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps the end of the beginning." Delivered at a news conference on coronavirus, this expression left a lasting impression on me. I genuinely hope this is the "end of the beginning" and a step toward a prospering society, not only for New York, but for the rest of the world as well.

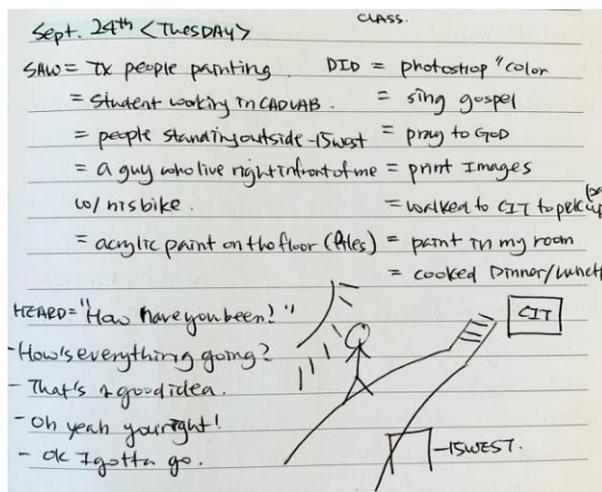


Screenshot of news conference, April 2020

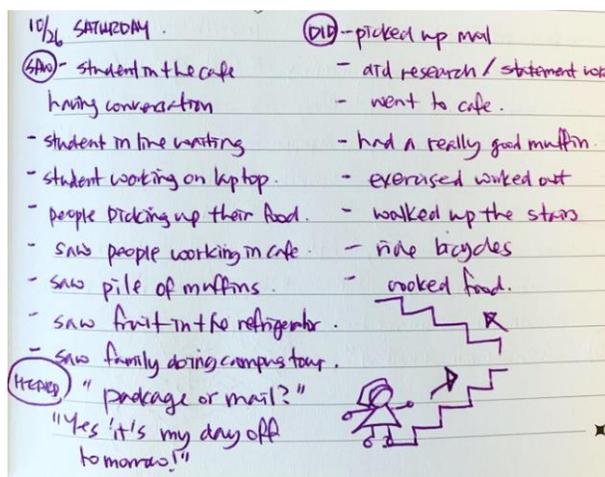
Although I am in Providence right now, every city that I have trekked through holds a dear place in my mind. Acknowledging that I can't be at every "home" simultaneously, I will forever cherish the experiences I have collected throughout my life.

Walking

From my perspective, walking is not only a means of maintaining a vibrant and healthy lifestyle, but also a form of artistic expression; walking, in essence, is the foundation for creating a whole new dimension of experiences. Walking is the fuel for and the source of my creative energy. It enables me to reach deep into my spirit of imagination, use my imagination as a stepping stone for creative expression, and give birth to the artistry that embodies who I truly am. For me, breathing life into this creative cycle comes with such a small but emphatically important commitment—walking. The essayist Rebecca Solnit points to this profound experience of walking when she writes, "Exploring the world is one of the best ways of exploring the mind and walking travels both terrains."¹



4-minute diary, September 2019



4-minute diary, October 2019

It's funny that the word "pedestrian" not only applies to walking but has a second meaning, which is "ordinary." In *Walking Sculpture*, Lexi Lee Sullivan explains, "Pedestrian is derived from the Latin pedestrian, meaning 'on foot' but has come to be synonymous with the prosaic, commonplace, plain and inspired. It is telling that walking, a capacity critical to the survival and the evolutionary ascent of humanity, which enabled our ancestors to throw rocks, make tools, carry offspring, and move out of the forest into the savannah, has now become trivialized in our language. Walking is an action so implicit in our experience of the world that it is essentially forgotten, perhaps because it has evolved to be an unconscious operation."² To me, walking is also very simple. I don't engage in anything significant while walking. I just stride through the city streets and the lush green scenery of city parks without any particular agenda, taking the occasional photo in an effort to capture the moment and keep it as a living memoir within my mind.

As the future remains nebulous without me knowing my date of departure from Providence, I am trying my best to cherish each and every moment of my time here. As I walk now, I realize that Solnit's idea of walking to explore the world is very limited. My whole world is just outside the door, begging to be unlocked. Treading through the same familiar path day by day, I realize that the thoughts and feelings evoked with each step are different every single time. Surely, the very act of walking leads to a tranquility that is unparalleled in magnitude and depth. Moving through the motion of placing my feet one after the other, I can sense a flow of energy springing up inside of me, which is the invaluable source of my inspiration. It is at these moments that I breathe the sparks of creativity into life and unconsciously capture them into a panorama of visual arousal. This, undoubtedly, is when I manifest my surroundings into reality—not of me walking, but of the inherent beauty enveloping me.

Although we cannot rewind "time," we can still experience the vestiges left behind by "time," aided by the memories living within the physical environment. Oftentimes, this becomes a memorable journey through the past despite the fact that we are limited to the present moment. By walking, the otherwise bland buildings and streets of the metropolis spring into life, providing me with a personal comfort zone. My still images captured while walking are an artistic embodiment of my daily excursions. Swiping through my library of pictures allows me to travel back in time to a world of imagination; just looking at the images takes me into a state of relaxation.

NOTES

1. Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York, Penguin Books, 2000), p. 13.
2. Lexi Lee Sullivan, *Walking Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 11.

Healing in Nature

The magazine *Science* documented a study of patients' recovery from surgery depending on the view from their room in a suburban Pennsylvania hospital. Patients were assigned to two kinds of rooms: on one side of the building the windows faced a small stand of deciduous trees and on the other side a brick walk. The data were recorded by a nurse who did not know which scene was visible from a patient's window. Five kinds of information were recorded: number of days of hospitalization; number and strength of analgesics each day; number and strength of doses for anxiety; minor complications, such as persistent headache and nausea requiring medication; and all notes relating to a patient's conditions or course of recovery.¹

In the end, the results showed the patients who stayed in the rooms with views of the trees spent less time in the hospital than those in the rooms with views of the brick wall. The patients on the brick wall side were given many more doses of potent narcotics. On the other hand, the trees group were more frequently receiving such drugs as aspirin and acetaminophen. Overall, the record indicates that the natural scene had comparatively therapeutic influences, whereas the built brick wall view was comparatively insignificant. This study shows that nature can provide therapeutic healing for people.

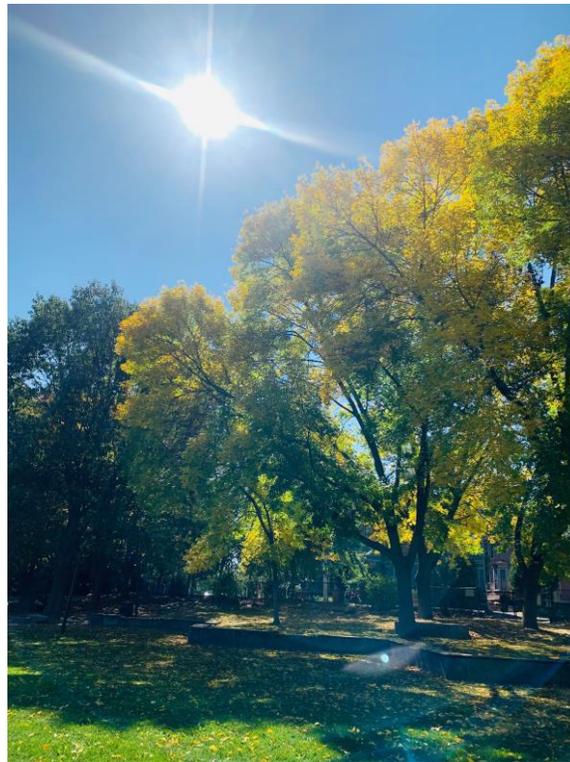
As exemplified by the study, it can be ascertained that nature's capacity to heal the human condition is exceptional, for an open view of deciduous trees had a positive correlation with improvements in patients' health. Truly, nature is a gift bestowed upon the world by the Gods. In fact, it comes completely free of charge, except for the minimal requirement of going outside to enjoy the sun, appreciate the greenery, and breathe in the fresh air. Unfortunately, the hustle and bustle of modern society inhibits, to some degree, much of the populace from feeling the gratitude that nature deserves. Needless to say, part of my motive for pushing myself to walk and discover the treasures of nature originate from my desire to genuinely give thanks to Mother Earth. Just as we are obligated to one day return to nature as naturally born humans, so we must acknowledge that fact that nature is our eternal home.

NOTE

1. Roger S. Ulrich, "View Through a Window May Influence Recovery from Surgery," *Science*, April 27, 1984.



My mother, sister, and I, England, circa 1995



Trees, Providence, October 2019

Repair

In her essay "Repair," Elizabeth V. Spelman argues that human beings are a "repairing animal." Indeed, we live in a world of constant repair, mending, healing, restoration, and reconciliation. As Spelman points out, repair can have meanings both literal and small and symbolic and grand. "The most obvious kinds of repair have to do with the inanimate objects with which we surround ourselves—the clothes calling out for mending, the automobiles for fixing, the buildings for renovating." At the same time, she states, "Our bodies and souls are by nature subject to fracture and fissure, for which we seek homely household recipes for healing and consolation, or perhaps the expert ministrations of surgeons, therapists, and other menders and fixers of all manner of human woes."¹ If we can repair our objects, how can we repair and heal our body and soul?



Broken Tree Branch, Providence, September 2019

In the end, all objects wear out under constant use, no matter their quality or robustness. Clothes are subject to wear and tear, with the occasional hole here and there; fashion is a slave to current trends, hence the term "out of fashion." Fortunately, although one may be inclined to throw away tattered clothing, one is also gifted with the option of "repairing" and "reforming" these clothes with needle and thread.

While the concept of reparation and reformation also applies to humans, there exists a fundamental difference between humans and inanimate objects. Human beings have free will and the ability to think, because there is a living soul within the physical structure of the body. This soul is the inseparable connection to the mind. The mind, in turn, is a playground for one's consciousness.

For humans, reparation and reformation are not circumscribed to the physical, but are extended to the mental state. While we can definitely experience physical pain, we are also subject to psychological strain; while physical distress is evident to the naked eye, mental agony is invisible and hidden within the physical confines of the body. As such, when the mind meets concern and apprehension, it is easy to become lost in an ocean of anxiety and insecurity. The swift cure, of course, is to express these internal fears and converse with those closest to you as opposed to searching for personal solutions.



With my brother and sister, Rothenburg, Germany, 2006

As an illustration of this principle, I will share my relationship with my two siblings. To be frank, there were many ups and downs in our relationship. We would fight over this and that—of triviality and of consequence. With the dichotomy of love and hatred present and tangible, we certainly irked our parents to a great degree. However, my siblings have now become my closest friends. During those awkward moments when I couldn't confide in my parents, I would often lean on my siblings, who would listen carefully and give me heartfelt advice. Needless to say, they provided me with calmness of mind and serenity of spirit. Truly, the mind has the capacity to heal through human interactions.

Touching on another aspect of repair, would it be possible to heal by our own natural means rather than relying on external sources? Taking into account my own experiences, I personally believe that self-healing is achievable. For example, let us consider walking, a form of light exercise. Whenever we encounter troubled individuals, we take the time to listen to their concerns and advise them to take a walk and get some fresh air. This simple cure—walking—has the magic of making people feel much better. Practicing this same routine of walking, I have been able to breeze through numerous occasions of distress and experience first-hand the ability to self-heal.

In fact, the power of walking has been corroborated by science. An article published by Healthline states that our body produces endorphins naturally when we simply engage in something that we like. For example, it can be enjoying a favorite dish, watching our favorite TV drama, laughing, dancing, creating music, or producing art. The article moves on to illustrate, in specific detail, the origin of the word endorphin. The word endorphin comes from putting together the words "endogenous," meaning from within the body, and "morphine," which is an opiate pain reliever. In other words, endorphins got their name because they are natural pain relievers. Since endorphins act on the opiate receptors in our brains, they reduce pain and boost pleasure, resulting in a feeling of well-being.

Personally, I believe my major source of endorphins comes from taking a walk. Walking is an expression of my healthiness, a manifestation of my happiness, and a catalyst for creating positive thinking within my mind. Indeed, happiness is not miles away, but comes from the small steps, the little things that make up our day.

NOTE

1. Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Repair: The Impulse to Restore in a Fragile World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), p. 1.

Immobility

Whenever I move to another place for a few years, I find myself asking the same question: should I stay or should I leave? As a student, I was grateful for my parents' generosity. "Would you like to keep on studying here? The option's open for you to homestay if that's your preference." They would always ask my opinion as to whether or not I wanted to pursue my studies here or move with them to the next place. However, I had a nagging fear of living all by myself. After all, I was only a teenager.

Having reached adulthood, I now ask myself what I really want out of life. Living in New York, I asked my parents whether I should make a living here or move back to Korea. My parents responded with "Where you find yourself happy and satisfied is where you should be. If you are happy, we are happy." I have yet to understand this expression of unconditional love as I am not a parent yet, but one thing was obvious—I was touched. I realized then and there that my parents' happiness stemmed solely from my own happiness.

Although I did wish to stay in New York after graduating from FIT, I decided to return to Korea to prepare for my lifelong academic aspiration: pursuing a master's degree at RISD. Luckily, I was able to have an opportunity to study here. During my last semester, however, RISD unexpectedly closed its campus due to the coronavirus.

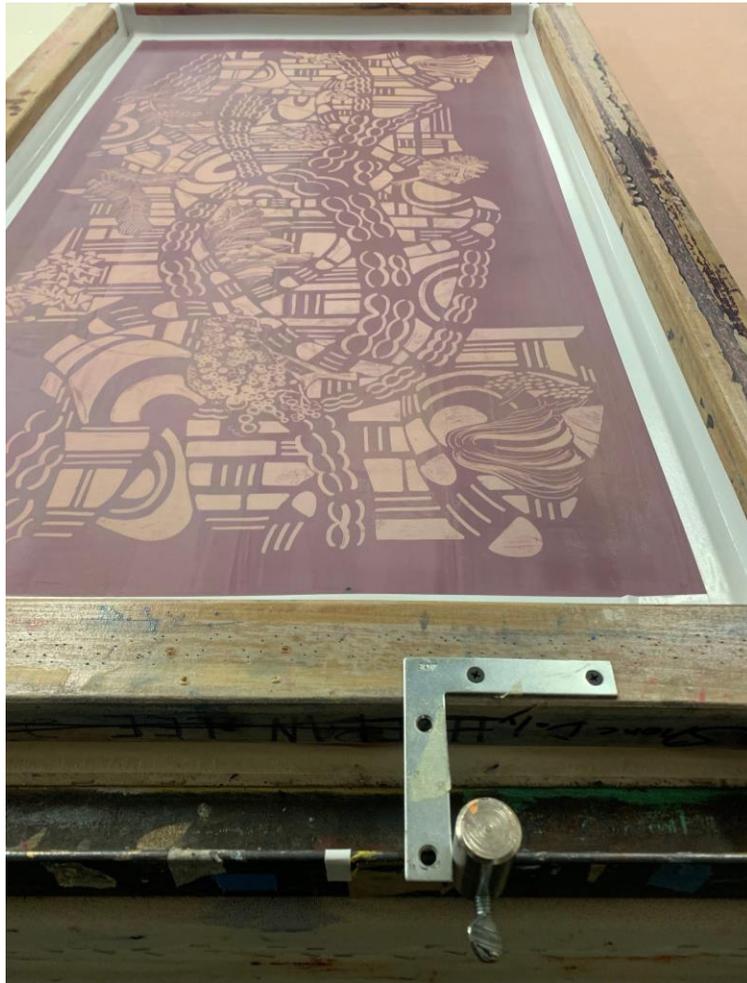


CIT Studio, March 2020

Now, taking into account the current pandemic that is spreading all over the globe, I feel that each and every day harbors the tangible danger of death. Anxiety is running wild and free through my mind as news of COVID-19 casualties hit the headlines. My initial reaction to the suspension of classes and the closing down of RISD was that of worry. What about my thesis? How am I going to produce my work? With the passing of time, however, and the exacerbation of the situation, I began to change my line of reasoning. If the institution's decision was made for the safety of students and concerns for their health, if this was for the betterment of the educational environment, then I view this as a mandatory course of action.

Now I am asking myself continuously: "Should I stay here? Should I leave for Korea? If so, when?" Alone in Providence, with my family thousands of kilometers away, I feel the anxiety creeping up behind me. I dare not think about the possibility of infection. The other side of the coin seems just as dangerous too. The journey back to Korea is in no way short and is full of the perils of the virus. Even if I did reach home, I would jeopardize my whole family with the potential of infection. Truly, there seems to be no clearly safe path of action. For the time in my life, I am suddenly immobile.

Early Explorations



CIT Print Studio, Providence, May 2019



***Memory*, 2019, Jacquard-woven wall hanging, 72 x 54 inches
(2020 RISD Textile MFA show in Sol Koffler Gallery)**



***Memory* (detail)**

Seoul Jong-ro, my hometown, was known for its traditional architecture. Jong-ro, one of the famous tourist towns located in the heart of Seoul, is a place where you can experience Korean culture. In the past decade, some houses in the Jeong-ro area have been replaced with skyscraper apartment buildings. In Korea, regulatory laws aren't strict. The number one topic in the news in 2019 was the lottery apartment, and the protests going on relating to the issue of rising prices in newly built buildings. Now the government is starting to develop the surrounding areas by building new blocks of houses.

This jacquard wall hanging was first drawn in colored pencil and then altered in photoshop to repeat the design. I used pointcarre to put the weave structure in before working on the loom with cotton, metallic, and nylon yarn. The piece recalls memories of walking outside with my mother when I was a child, before the city was transformed. The grid represents a bird's eye view of the neighborhood. The navy blue shapes represent the gates and the denim blue represents a record playing. My mother would play music morning to night when my dad was out. She loved to play Abba and the Carpenters, her favorite band. The wiggly pink lines recall the strawberry milk we would drink on our walks. The gold lines are a symbol of repair. In Korean, the word "geum" means repair and also means gold. In this piece, it's like an overlay that connects the old and new urban architecture.

My mother had me when she was very young. She had to take care of my dad's parents also, which was a struggle in the beginning of her marriage. I empathize now with her wanting to escape by walking around with me; it was a healthy escape for that time. Likewise, Korean people will understand the real estate issues without explaining details. But others around the world may not know what is happening in Seoul, Korea. I hope this work will help viewers understand and empathize with how changes in the cityscape, destruction of tradition, can create real senses of displacement and loss.



Memory 2, 2019, screen print on cotton, 85 x 35 inches



The Park, 2019, screen print on cotton, 65 x 48 inches

The Park follows *Memory* and *Memory 2*, as a sequential representation of the memories with my mother. Screen-printed as a stenciled wall hanging panel, the work is a recollection of my mother and me enjoying our occasional trip to the park. Each square-cut box embodies a certain memory at the park: sitting on a bench and watching pigeons fly by, collecting pine cones scattered here and there, drinking strawberry milk while walking hand-in-hand with my mother. One particular portion shows my mother's bobbed hair—her previous fashion statement. My mother is the symbolic motif behind *The Park* and *Memory 2*. I am indebted to her for all the memories she has given me and truly thankful that they still live within me.



***Daily Walk Providence*, 2019, digital print on paper,
72 x 24 inches**

When I moved to Providence in 2018, I did not know the area very well. As I spent most of my time in the studio, the only time I got to look around the city was while taking walks. I always enjoyed taking walks because they allowed me to think freely and communicate with myself.

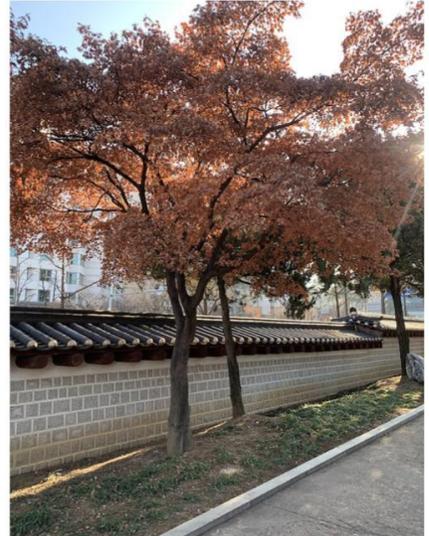
This pattern design was inspired by the pictures I took while walking through Providence. I worked from and with these photographs, sketching their motifs with colored pencils, then putting them into a repeat. The imagery reflects myself walking through a pathway, staring at the light and shadow of the street, my footsteps, and the magic moment of the day.

First, I brainstormed with idea sketches. Once the motif was decided, it was put into a repeat. Next, the scale and color were chosen—a crucial step for idea development as these elements would change drastically depending on the purpose of the design. For example, wallpapers operate on a large scale, interior design, a medium scale, and garments, a relatively smaller scale.

Process Documentation



15 West Studio, Providence, April 2020



Walks in Korea, 2019-2020



Walks in Providence, 2020



View from 15 West Studio, April 2020



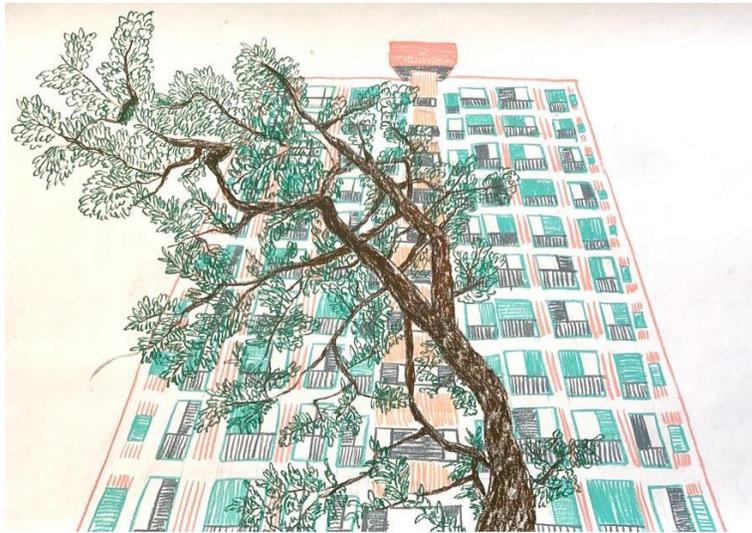
**Color Diaries (Benefit Street), 2020, photograph;
watercolor**



Color Diaries (Benefit Street), 2020, watercolor



Color Wall, 2020, digitally printed fabric, 80 x 32 inches



**My home in Korea (Yongin, Korea), 2020,
photograph; sketch; digital drawing**



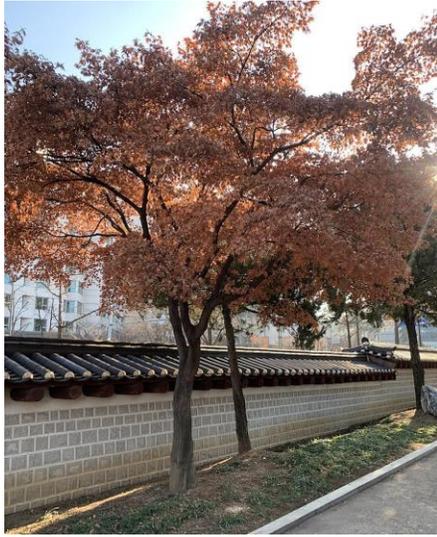
Old neighborhood street (Seoul, Korea), 2020, photograph



Old neighborhood Street (Seoul, Korea), 2020, sketch; digital drawing



**Old neighborhood street (Seoul, Korea), 2020,
photograph; sketch; digital drawing**



Gwang hwa moon Palace (Seoul, Korea), 2020, photographs; sketch; digital drawing



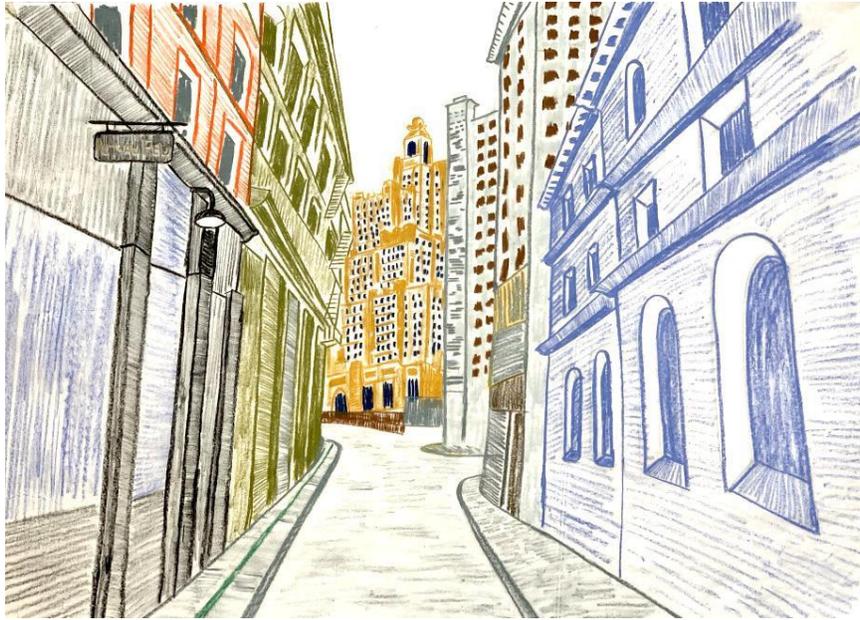
East Providence River, 2020, photographs; sketch; digital drawing



**Knead Donuts (Providence), 2020,
photograph; sketch; digital drawing**



Custom House Street (Providence), 2020, photograph



**Custom House Street (Providence), 2020, sketch;
digital drawing**

Thesis Project



Providence, Rhode Island, May 2020

Here and There: A Continuous Narrative



Here and There: A Continuous Narrative,
digital rendering of planned thesis installation

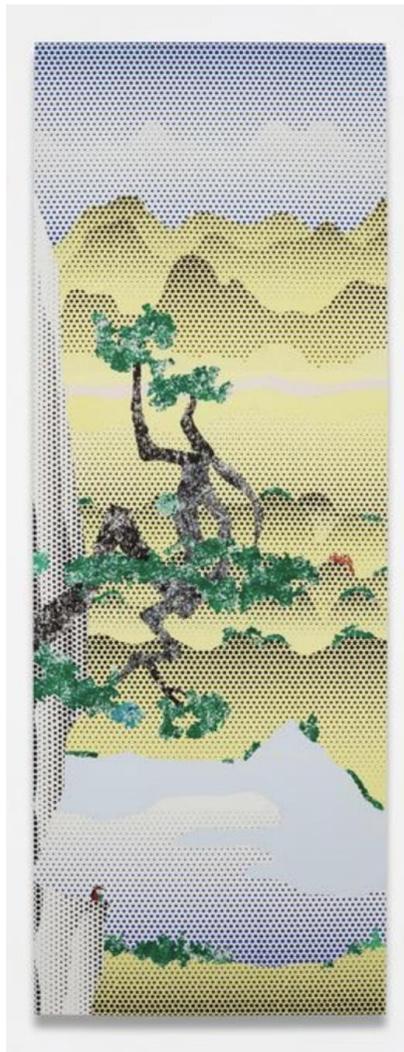


Here and There (detail)

My thesis work, *Here and There*, is an installation of large-scale digitally printed fabric representing scenes from Korea and Providence. The images are drawn from photographs I have taken while walking in city streets and parks in places where I've lived and revisited. I select the photographs that are empty of people, often with extreme perspective. When I sketch them, I try to emphasize these qualities to suggest the subjectivity of the artist (me) and the viewer.

This sequence of images represents a journey through a place where I lived and the places I always visit when in Korea and in Providence. Each place conjures a memory. This method of visiting a familiar spatial environment and letting each site represent a memory is known as a memory journey, memory palace, or mind palace technique.

This work draws from a landscape tradition. However they are not straightforward landscape paintings. They are more emotional rather than illustrative or conceptual, representing a dream of being in one place. Among the artworks that have inspired me in their aesthetics are Roy Lichtenstein's Chinese landscapes and Andy Warhol's Shadow paintings, which call on appropriation and repetition. Lichtenstein's images include a layer that gives the impression of distance, while Warhol's shadow paintings use misregistration to suggest movement.



Roy Lichtenstein, *Landscape with Poet (study)*, 1995



Andy Warhol, *Shadows (study)*, 1978–79

By alternating images of each city, I replicate a feeling I have when traveling. I am always in one place in my mind: no matter where I am, I am home. By giving viewers a chance to walk through my spaces, this work gives everyone the experience of having a different home. It also provides the meditating and self-reflective experience I try to achieve through walking. I am passionate about sharing and informing others about my experience. Deep inside we all have a story, but it's invisible on the surface.



Here and There (preparatory sketches)

**With thanks to all who supported me
in this time at RISD.
Hope to see you here and there.**