



# Stay

Ashleigh Thomas



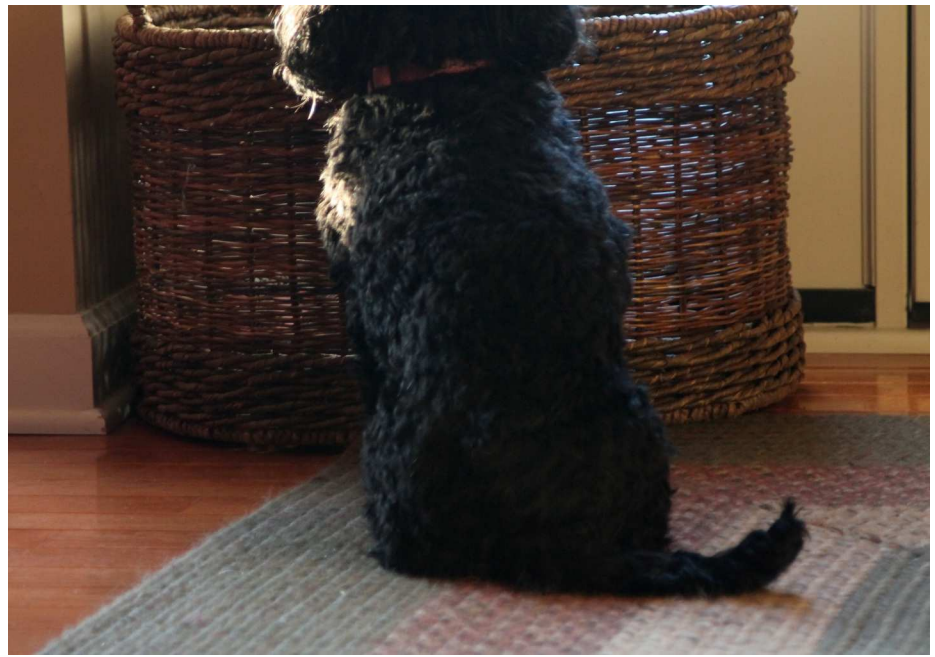






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Existential insideness is found at an innate depth.  
It is the recognition immersed in one's unself-conscious,  
where an experience or place is undoubtedly home.





I make to create a conversation between objects and people, to talk about things that may be too gentle or rigid for words. My fascinations lay within the relationships between people and their homes, where the white space in between projects a certain friction or discomfort. I also gravitate toward the little things that collect and emit fragments of quiet bliss. Ceramic is an attractive material because it articulates itself in various rhythms. Clay can be honest and humble, fragile or loud and quiet. It allows for cadency, movement and print. I work to use the mark of the hand to develop a language and assert comments on the binaries that are delight and disquiet.



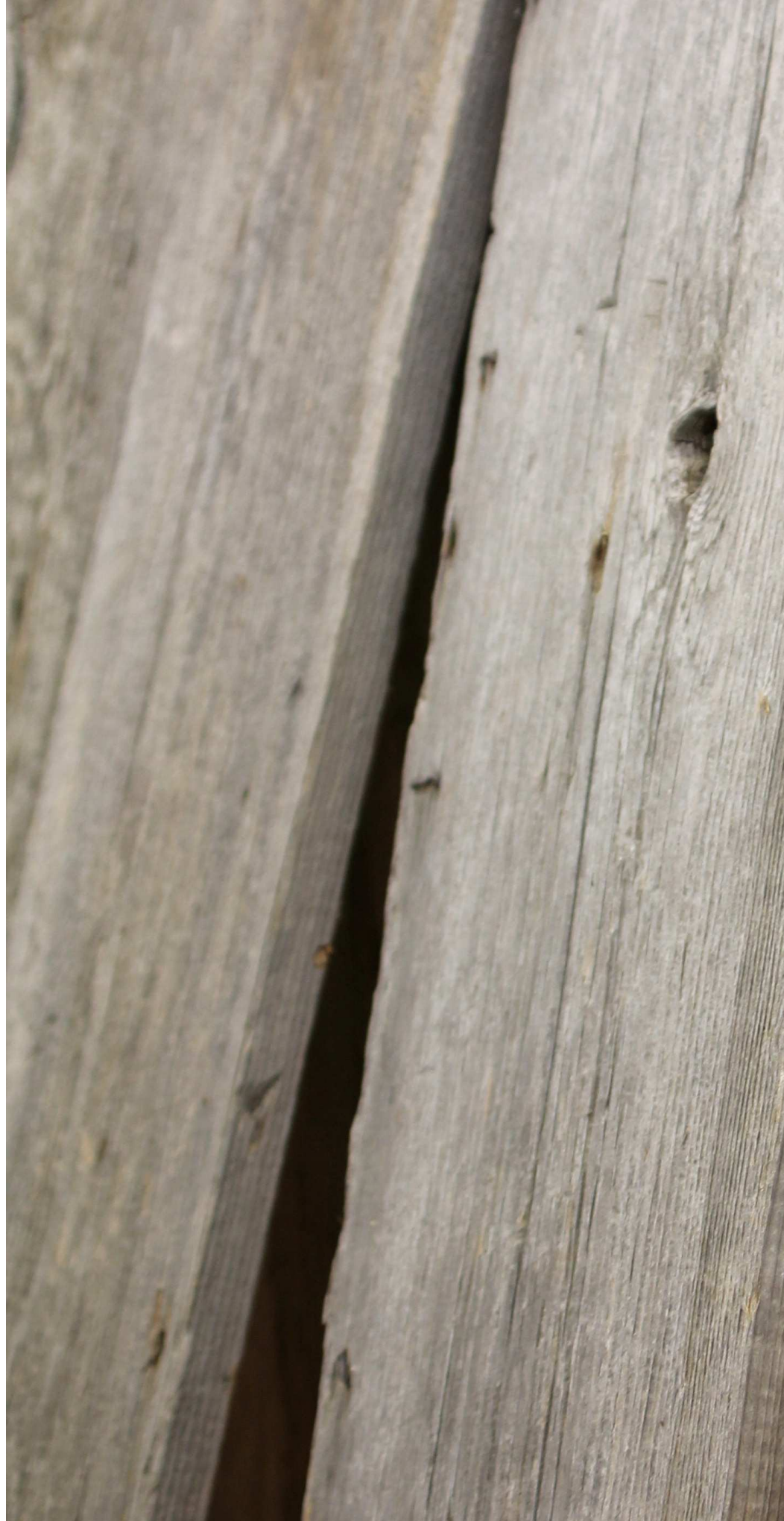
# Narrative

Physical and cognitive spatial awareness begins at birth. We learn the perimeters of our physical forms through experience. Infants will kick, grab and hold on to fragments of their limbs to gain understanding of their position in space.<sup>(1)</sup> Adults experience this cultivation similarly, but in addition to a scaled down physical sense, they understand space in a social and emotional format. Language and communication are utilized to extend an antenna into a space before forming an impression or comfort level associated with an area. The phenomenology of a space and time spent immersed in it begins to build a foundation of meaning. A place is defined as a space with an increased sense of definition and meaning.<sup>(2)</sup> I can see every home I've lived in. As I spent time adhering myself to the frame and creating a permanent fixture, I memorized my surroundings studying the details of the fresh spaces in attempt to define them: home. Gaston Bachelard suggests a study of the phenomenology and the relationship between intimacy and space.<sup>(3)</sup> Through this body of work, I reconstructed a domestic space, exploring the many relationships Bachelard articulates between intimacy, memory, identity, place and domesticity.

Shelter has always been conceived as a notion of basic human necessity. Stripping it down to its most simple format, shelter is protection. In a physical translation, a roof, a wall, a structure that is stable and strong. A shelter is resistant to the elements and forces that act upon it, to protect and preserve what it is underneath. A shelter engages in different dialogues and levels of intimacy with whoever dwells within it in varying seasonal conditions. Winter reveals a stronger, more intimate relationship between shelter and the being that dwells within because of the role shelter plays in sustaining life. The individual who dwells inside, needs the shelter to survive. Shelter has intrinsic warmth in this setting due to the contrast of experience inside versus outside amongst harsh elements. (4) Shelters become transformed into a romantic gesture and source of warmth and comfort. A shelter evolves into a more defined space as a result of the time spent within it. Due to this experience, the objects residing a dwelling also gain meaning. The collections inside our shelters then begin to become a definition or source of identity.

Our shelters also contain the metaphoric and physical function of a nest. Nests are carefully constructed of various fragments of materials to protect and comfort, as are our homes. As we experience life, our collections swell. We bring home keepsakes and memories in the tangible and the intangible formats as we continuously develop our nest. While our place becomes more closely intertwined with our collection of objects and experiences, it elevates the level of intimacy at which we understand our nest. The result of this is increasing our attachment to the collection we call home. Through this, we become a satellite to our homeland; it becomes center of our being.(5)

The organic round shape of the nest plays a role in the intimacy nests embody. Roundness emits a sense of comfort innately. The cyclical visual symbolizes a perpetual rhythm.(6) So often we strive to be centered, because so much of what we know as perfect, is spherical from a micro to macro level. Nests are a standard of perfection, a craft that we as humans can never duplicate. As Bachelard discusses, the nest is built by the body, for a body. Birds compress their backs into the walls by turning around themselves to achieve the perfect circle.(7) The nest in its form and meaning becomes what we strive for; a jovial house is a prospering nest. (8)

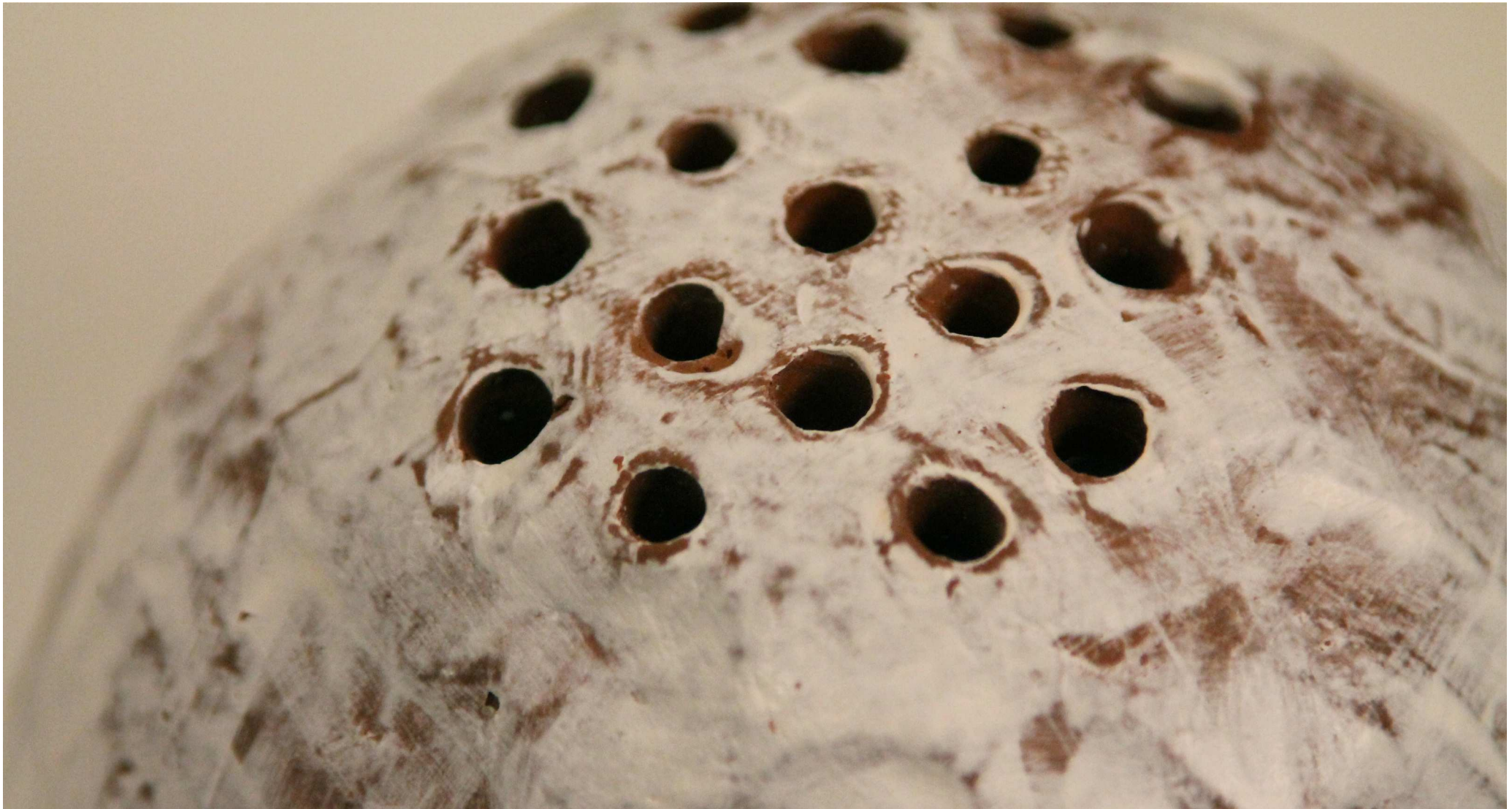




Houses and nests alike foster existence and retain the energy of life and inhabitation. Both dwellings, the nest and house, are busy with beings collecting and growing. The nest and home provide a layer of refuge from the outside world, a place to grow and flourish and dwell seeking comfort.

A nest becomes a place with increased memory: definition and meaning. If this statement is what builds a home, then what is the result, when place and memory contradict one another? Memory in its accuracy and permanency has been falsely illustrated. When a memory is recalled, it begins to shift in its accuracy; every time it is thought of, the details are re-written. The more a memory is reflected upon, the less accurate it is to the original object or experience.<sup>(9)</sup> How truthful are our memories and to what degree do we fabricate them? Bachelard discusses the intimacy of this in the study of domestic space. He reviews this concept of memory fabrication through a romantic, dream-like state of vocabulary. If the position of a memory is never permanent, it is constantly in a state of change and as a product of this, remains unclear. Ambiguity in memory creates a state of oneirism or relating to dreams.<sup>(10)</sup> As this abstraction occurs, it is difficult to distinguish truth from fabrication. Reflecting upon past homes through this lens creates a dissonance. We remember what we choose to fashion and recall. This provides an explanation for why most only remember blissful memoirs in contrast to struggle or grief. Rendering a home or past experience becomes to an extent white washed. Negatives are disregarded and peak moments become dulled down with no depressions to compare them to. Memories flatten. Points of interest in memory derive from how we choose to fabricate and remember them through daydreaming. The daydream experience casts a certain romantic light on how we view memory and in turn, alters the memory and the past. Our past dwellings become what we want them to be, as warm and inviting as we choose. We alter them to reflect our primal needs for shelter, warmth and intimacy. We fabricate memories of our place.

“Thus the dream house must possess every virtue. However spacious, it must also be a cottage, a dove-cote, a nest, a chrysalis. Intimacy needs the heart of the nest,” Gaston Bachelard.<sup>(11)</sup>



Houses can be read psychologically similarly to people. The attic is a place for storage of memory, keepsakes and family possessions, the living room and kitchen areas are the most transparent and publically accessible areas, and the basement is the root and structure of the home, it houses the unconscious.<sup>(12)</sup> A home is a clear reflection of a family or individual. Over time as the individuals dwell in the home, they collect, and create their nest around them. They create public places, personal protected places and void spaces. Their home develops into their identity. The permanent structures of homes house generations, family after family, and age with the character of the memories, events and moments shared.

The most commonly public area to one's home is the kitchen, the heart of the nest. It is a place of necessary congregation. Kitchens hold significance in domestic place because of the exchanges that occur around the function the kitchen holds. The kitchen has been historically a place to track matriarchal lineage. As family members congregate to cook and celebrate life, death, holiday, promotion, new adventures, or something as simple as the moment, connections are formed. The kitchen is a center of learning. Families share past generation's recipes, offspring grow, learn to cook and care for themselves. Family members grow older and then depend on the younger members for support. There is a great life cycle that adheres itself to the kitchen, it relies on it. Affection, knowledge, connection and meditation thrives in the confines of the kitchen. It defines how we live, who we are. It is the center of our nest.

*End notes*

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1. Tuan, Yi-fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. 34.
2. Seamon, David, and Jacob Sowers. "Place and Placelessness, Edward Relph." 43-51.
3. Bachelard, Gaston, and John R. Stilgoe. *The Poetics of Space*. 183.
4. Bachelard, 91.
5. Tuan, 150.
6. Bachelard, 232.
7. Bachelard, 101.
8. Bachelard, 97.
9. "Memory and Forgetting." Audio blog post. *Radiolab*. Ed. Jad Abumrad and Robert Krulwich.
10. Bachelard, 14.
11. Bachelard, 65.
12. Bachelard, 16-19.

# Process

My process coincides with the most basic form of intimacy and evolved from the most primitive form of making with clay, pinch. To communicate a deep sensation of relationship embedded within the work, I pinch from a ball of clay. I work with the mark of my hand to develop a language to speak to the viewer; this piece was made with thought, intention, and affection. I chose to begin pinching work, because it excerpts a necessary force of control and attention to each piece. By pinching, I am forced to work at a slow pace, thinking about each mark and how it affects the piece structurally, aesthetically and metaphorically. Each work gains definition and meaning, and becomes an individual entity and member in a family.







All of the forms included in this body of work are recreations of intangible, personally familiar, domestic objects rendered from my memory. The forms were made singularly, one at a time. Each piece contains the aura of the primary vessel the clay piece is derived from. I work beginning with a ball of clay, and pinching in a cyclic pattern on a banding wheel and then on my lap or vice versa. The pieces are left to set, before cutting into them for clarity of the pot's function or pinching a foot. I work to keep each vessel even, so the finished pots do not need to have clay removed to even the lip or foot. The ball of clay the pot begins with, is the ball of clay the pot ends with.





My red clay body is a very plastic, low-mid range earthenware, vitrified at cone two. The clay exhibits a suede, rich color and texture in the plastic and fired state, which lends itself to pinch and enhances the pinching experience.

Red Art	60
New Foundry Hill	20
XX Sagger	10
Talc	5
Nepheline Syenite	5
Red Iron Oxide	.25
Barium Carbonate	.25





Red Art	60
New Foundry Hill	20
XX Sagger	10
Talc	5
Nepheline Syenite	5
Red Iron Oxide	.25
Barium Carbonate	.25

Additives:

Toilet Paper (Rolls)	4
Nylon Fibers	.25
Fine Grog	1
Medium Grog	1
Coarse Grog	1



The window required a different process and clay body to withstand the tension from the form and scale. Due to its innate fragility, the window had to be constructed inside the small Bailey gas kiln because of its immobility and size. The frail nature of the window form also provided numerous risks undergoing an oxidation once-firing in a gas kiln in comparison to a once-fire in an electric kiln. To increase the rate of success of the window form, steps of precaution were executed in the means of altering the clay body, constructing specifically to allow for shrinkage, and strength in numbers. To offset the clay's shrinkage rate, nylon fibers and toilet paper were added, in addition to a varied mix of fine, medium and coarse grog. Still anticipating high stress on the form due to shrinkage, the window was constructed on top of a layer of coarse grog, and then newspaper. As a final precaution, three window frames were built, in hopes of having one for the show.



Terra sigillata, or ‘sealed earth’ is used to treat the surface. It is made over the course of several weeks and is an extensive process. It begins with ball milling the terra sigillata recipe for 24 hours. This allows for the clay particles to be broken down into smaller particles, yielding more terra sigillata in the end result. Next is deflocculating clay particles to allow for natural separation: water on top, terra sigillata in the middle (the smallest most refined clay particles), and heavy clay particles on the bottom. This separation takes place over the course of three days, in a narrow and tall transparent tube. This way the layers can be seen, and the terra sigillata extracted from the middle. After the terra sigillata is extracted, it is left to mature for at least a week. As the terra sigillata sits, the clay particles mature and continue to separate from one another, resulting in a greater sheen on the finished surface. The last step, is to cook the terra sigillata over a hotplate to boil out the excess water, creating a thicker more opaque terra sigillata.

Terra sigillata is applied to work in a bone-dry state. As each layer of terra sigillata adheres itself to the surface of the piece, it is then burnished to create a matte sheen. My pieces are then individually wiped to remove sections of the terra sigillata indicating worn use and age of the objects. Three variations of terra sigillata were utilized in this body of work to create a slight variation in color ranging from bright white to off white, 100% Tile Six, 50% OM-4 Ball Clay and 50% EPK, and 100% OM-4 Clay.

Tile 6	600g
Water	1400g
Darvan 811	10g

EPK	300g
OM-4 Ball Clay	300g
Water	1400g
Darvan 811	10g

OM-4 Ball Clay	600g
Water	1400g
Darvan 811	10g













# Stay

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**Bachelor of Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition**

Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art  
State University of New York at New Paltz

**Opening Reception**

Friday, December 5th, 2014  
5pm - 7pm

**Exhibition Hours**

December 5th - 9th, 11am - 5pm





stay<sub>1</sub>  
stā/

*verb* 1. remain in the same place.





stay<sub>1</sub>

stā/

*verb* 2. remain in a specific state or position.

stay<sub>1</sub>  
stā/

*verb* 3. (of a person) live  
somewhere temporarily as  
a visitor or guest.





stay<sub>1</sub>

stā/

*verb* 4. stop, delay, or prevent (something), in particular suspend or postpone.



stay<sub>1</sub>  
stā/

*verb* 5. support or prop up.



stay<sub>1</sub>

stā/

*noun* 1. a period of staying somewhere, in particular of living somewhere temporarily as a visitor or guest.



stay<sub>1</sub>  
stā/

*noun* 2. a device used as a brace or support.



stay<sub>1</sub>

stā/

*noun* 3. power of endurance.

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Sunshine Cobb - Maria Kristofferson - Rae Dunn - Zimra Beiner - Joe Pintz  
Giselle Hicks - Nancy Selvin - Amy Benett - Amy Tavern - Lilly Zuckerman









