

BROKEN ATTACHMENTS

by

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## ABSTRACT:

My work investigates the comfort and dysfunction as well as the fragility and strength of familial relationships. Traditionally, a stable home has a framework. There are bedtimes, family meals, and a time for help with your homework. These are the flawless expectations that society place onto families. My work becomes a metaphorical investigation of expectations and realities of family life through the fusion of print and ceramic processes. I begin by making images using traditional printmaking techniques that explore behavior and gender roles within the family unit. On paper, these prints are protected, clean, much like the ideal family dynamic. I then challenge this idea by printing these images on paper clay, which add strength to them, much like a parent hopes to do with their children. On paper clay, they can hold up to the pressure of the slab roller and the etching press. However, the thinner the clay gets, the more fragile it becomes, just as if a child is put under intense pressure. The thinness of the clay also makes it translucent, and when backlit, the flaws in my work are no longer able to hide. The texture from the printing on the clay is like the personal qualities of the mark or “imprints” that people leave on their families. These marks are not perfect, and all of these flaws represent the unique and differences of each individual that make up a family unit. By allowing the flaws to be visible, I relinquish control and accept that even in chaos they are impeccable.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Home is supposed to be a place of comfort, but also a place of control. Generally, when you are home, particularly as a child, stability and order are the framework. There are bedtimes, family meals, and a time for help with your homework. To take out the basic framework and remove the stability and order is to replace them with dysfunction and chaos. My work explores how this lack of control and order can affect an individual in the family unit. Every family dynamic is unique. There is no clear definition on what makes up a family because there is a lot of variation in people's lives. Ideally, my work will be relatable to viewers even if their family dynamic is different from the ones I present. I explore this family dynamic of instability and chaos through the use of prints made on paper clay. This material choice represents a lack of stability while maintaining an illusion of control.

The importance of familial relationships for individual success came to light for me when I was teaching high school. I began by exploring my student's struggles in my own artwork, and started to question why I cared about these struggles so much. I realized it was my own family relationships that made me care. My family is made up of mixed cultures, but this diversity has never gotten in the way has been a positive aspect in my life rather than a challenge or setback. We were always taught that while in public, we should always act perfect and put together. However, when we were at home, the chaos would set in.

While my work is based in print, I explore printing on clay rather than paper. By printing on the clay, the marks become a metaphor for the personal qualities of the mark or “imprint” that people leave on their own families or that their families leave on them. The ground I print on is no longer a protected and perfect piece of paper—the “blank slate” of the plain white page—but one that viewers can explore to discover the flaws and textures that are created within the firing of the clay. These textures and flaws represent the uniqueness, quirks, and differences of each individual that makes up a family unit. No longer the illusion of perfection that the blank paper represents, my work draws on a process that celebrates and highlights the physical imperfections and accidents of using paper clay as a ground. Thus, my work also become a commentary on the difference between real and fake relationships, the expectation of perfection and the actual reality in all its messiness.

My diverse family background, including my Asian heritage in particular, closely informs this approach. Asian cultures have traditionally been patriarchal, ranking the eldest male child as the next in line to lead the family. Likewise, the Chinese population in recent years has been governmentally limited on the number of children they could have. With this one-child law came high stress for mothers to birth a male child into the family: “Historically, China has been a patriarchal culture in which the subjugation of women is symbolized most cruelly by the phenomenon of bound feet... [T]he demographic imbalance between men and women speaks to just how male-dominated it remains. The combination of China’s one child policy and the advent of sonograms has meant that families who preferred a son could get what they wanted, aborting unwanted

girls.”<sup>1</sup> Families that live in the United States have never been put under that pressure from their government and have always been able to have as many children as they want. Large families clearly change the dynamics within a household. Coming from a family with thirteen siblings, I have seen firsthand how the older children had to sacrifice and help with the younger ones. At the same time, I also saw the Asian patriarchal tradition playing out in my family where the expectations put on the girls for assistance with childcare differed significantly from that of the one male son in my family.

In my thesis, I explore both the social and scientific theories behind relationships within family dynamics. According to Conley Dalton, “When parents have enough ‘class’ resources to go around—time, money, social connections—kids turn out more similarly since parents do not have to choose and can actively compensate for inequities among their kids.”<sup>2</sup> Families who have the resources are able to give their children an equal opportunity opposed to large families who have to split up the resources and each child gets less and less. Often in these cases, the older siblings step in and help take care of the younger ones and therefore have to sacrifice goals and opportunities that would have given them an even playing field with their peers. “The further away from the parents the siblings are in birth order,” Dalton writes, “the more strongly they influence one another.”<sup>3</sup> This means there is a chance for the youngest sibling in a family to become the most successful because they have so many people looking out for them. The resource dilution theory, also outlined by Dalton, talks about the importance of family

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Powell, "Gender Imbalance: How China's One-Child Law Backfired on Men," *Newsweek* 164, no. 22 (2015): 22.

<sup>2</sup> Dalton Conley, *The Pecking Order: Which Siblings Succeed and Why* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), 14.

<sup>3</sup> Conley, 19.



size and how resources get diluted as the family grows. Being an older sibling, I was one of the children to step up and help take care of my younger siblings due to my parents having to work all the time to support such a large family.

Conley's *Pecking Order* also speaks of the hierarchy of siblings within the family and how different things—whether economic standing, divorce, religious, and sexual orientation—all affect the power structure and success between the siblings to establish the so-called “pecking order.” Siblings watch one another and want to either imitate their older siblings or shape themselves in an opposite way. Family dynamics can also be assessed by the family system theory and social learning theory. One study asserts, “The family system theory postulates that family members are interdependent and continuously exert a mutual influence on one another, whereas social learning theory posits that children can learn aggressive behavior patterns either directly through experience or indirectly by observing people around them.”<sup>4</sup> This type of influence can determine how the children in that family turn out. I have seen this happen directly in my own family. We are either just like each other in a lot of ways or completely resent the other sibling because of their actions.

In my thesis work, the material becomes a metaphor for how families work—their complexities, their changing profiles. A family dynamic requires a constant back and forth between members, while my process requires me to go physically back and forth between two spaces, the print room and the ceramics room, as well as constantly up and down the stairs in our art building. My process is also packed full of unknowns: my clay

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<sup>4</sup> Andéanne Plamondon, Geneviève Bouchard, and Mylène Lachance-Grzela, "Family Dynamics and Young Adults' Well-Being: The Mediating Role of Sibling Bullying," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2018): DOI: 10.1177/0886260518800313.

may blow-up or stay whole, may sustain damage and even come out more beautiful and interesting because of it. Likewise, a family may have a “blow up” or fight, it might sustain damage that can or can’t be repaired, but it might also become stronger with these challenges. At times the materials “burn out,” and like a relationship, it’s unclear and uncertain if I can repair this damage afterwards. Both my body of thesis work and family relationships take sustained and determined commitment, both offer challenges, both push me to new levels of exhaustion, all the while nurturing this delicate material—the paper clay and the family unit—knowing full well that these may not even hold up.

I am specifically drawn to paper clay because it is made with paper, but it is not traditional paper. It is a hybrid process, mirroring my hybrid heritage. My use of paper specifically references my father’s upbringing in Hong Kong, China, because paper has played such an important and longstanding role in Asian cultures. To be sure, “China has become the worlds largest paper and paperboard producer.”<sup>5</sup> By bringing that into my work, I honor those relationships within my family dynamic. Then by printing onto paper clay, I remove the stability out of the printmaking process so that my work now becomes a locus of chaos, but one that embraces the chaos as having the potential for meaning and beauty. The unique nature of this process also highlights the many unknowns of the family dynamic. And by using porcelain as my clay body, I emphasize the fragility and strength, the preciousness and the precariousness, of family relationships. Porcelain is “a vitreous whiteware of more or less translucency fired to cone 9 or more. It is made by combining white burning clays with feldspars and flint. The relatively high heat acting

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<sup>5</sup> Yu Chang, Lei Shi, Yutao Wang, Yuan Chang, and Baodong Cheng, "The Eco-efficiency of Pulp and Paper Industry in China: An Assessment Based on Slacks-based Measure and Malmquist–Luenberger Index," *Journal of Cleaner Production* 127 (2016): 511-21.

upon the fluxes in the clay results in a dense, impervious body which approaches glass.”<sup>6</sup> Porcelain is known for its translucency among potters but also is difficult to work with because it will crack or warp when firing. With porcelain, the thinner I get the clay, the more translucent it becomes—further underlining this balance between strength and delicacy.

In the second chapter of my thesis, I explore the influences of my work. Artists have used family as a reference for their work since the beginning of time. They show both the public and private identities that are within the home and household. For instance, lithographer Kathryn Polk explores family relationships and gender roles within her printed work. Another artist that uses images of significant incidents and interactions with people who meant a lot to him was David Hockney. He drew and painted his relationships with people that he knew over a long period of time because he felt like he did not want to impose his style onto someone he did not know. The relationships that are revealed through layers and translucency in art are often are a direct metaphor for the ones we have in our personal lives.

The third chapter of my thesis explores my process in terms of technical aspects. As I said above, my choice of material is a direct metaphor for family relationships, but this chapter will describe in detail how that metaphor unfolds in my physical and material process. As I will explain, I add paper into a translucent porcelain clay body. When the clay gets to the workable stage, I use a slab roller to flatten it out. The slab roller is also a direct reference to a rolling pin, a domestic tool found in a family home—and one that is usually gendered. In a patriarchal family dynamic, it is the woman who uses the rolling

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel Rhodes, *Clay and Glazes for the Potter* (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2015), 42.

pin, who prepares the food for the family. As I work, I keep these meanings in mind and at play. When I carry the clay sheets up the stairs of the art building, it is as if I am carrying a younger sibling, protecting them and nurturing them to strengthen my family unit. Then as I send the sheets through the etching press so that the image can get transferred onto the ground, I feel as if the process models the imprinting and education process that goes on within a family. We all etch our influences on our family members and they etch theirs on us. During this stage almost all of the water content comes out of the clay, so it is important to work fast—this need for rapidity and this moment of pressing the weight of water out of the ground is like running out of time to influence our siblings. Clay, like children, has a memory to it and will remember what was done to it. It will affect the outcome and success of the clay. According to Daniel Rhodes, “To avoid warping in porcelain, very careful handling and drying are necessary. And making any kind of porcelain, great care must be taken to prevent contamination with iron or other impurities which could cause specks. All the utensils used must be clean.”<sup>7</sup> When I cut the paper clay into strips and build the cylinder forms that will become lanterns, it is a representation of the hope of strong relationships, the light of family bonds that function well. If I am too rough with the clay, its memory will take over and warp during the firing. The lanterns are yet another direct tie to my Asian heritage, drawing on the festival tradition of hanging paper lanterns. Lanterns have been a symbol of celebration for thousands of years going back as early as the Han Dynasty in 25 to 220 AD. Throughout time they have represented things from strength, to celebrations of Buddhist beliefs, to peaceful, prosperous times in China. As one study states, “In modern-day

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<sup>7</sup> Rhodes, *Clay and Glazes*, 44.

China, the lantern festival continues to be celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the annual Chinese calendar, which marks the end of the Chinese New Year celebrations. It's a time for celebration with loved ones during which families gather to light and admire lanterns."<sup>8</sup> Likewise, it gives the paper clay images more than just a function as a picture; they become a lamp that produces useful light, symbolically moving the negative roles and dysfunction that is found in family relationships into wishes and hopes for a better and brighter future.

The fourth chapter of my thesis is a description of each of the works in my exhibition. There, I discuss the specific inspirations of each piece, as well as details of the particular subject matter. I go over variations in the technical process for each work, and explain how the results informed my intention for each piece. And, finally, I will conclude with my fifth where I will address once again how there are so many unknowns in my process. Will the clay hold up to the pressure of the press? What images and colors will be successful and influence the next print? What marks will survive the firing process? But these unknowns are profoundly meaningful to me, just as the unknowns of cultivating families can produce incomparable human bonds. All of these questions and uncertainties can reference relationships within our own lives. By using this technique, I relinquish control—but I also admit that control itself is an illusion. The perfect family is an illusion but inside of the individual chaotic moments that happen within family, beauty and belonging can be found. In traditional printmaking, I feel more like I know what is going to happen when I hold the final product in my hand, but that is not how

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<sup>8</sup> "Chinese Lanterns: Their History and Modern Uses," CLI, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://studycli.org/chinese-culture/chinese-lanterns/>.

relationships work or how life works. One can work continuously on building a relationship, only to have the slightest thing happen and have it break right in front of you. This fragility and uncertainty is the basis of my work, but it is also the basis of the opportunities I embrace to make unique and meaningful art. For me, the best art comes out of admitting our shortcomings, by facing reality instead of pretending things are perfect.

## INFLUENCES

Coming from a large family, my entire life has always felt like dysfunction and chaos. There were never family meals because someone was always gone or our parents were always working. In the rare events that the entire family was at home, nothing but chaos filled the house. The older siblings always made sure the younger ones had what they needed to survive. Artists have used family as a reference for their work since the beginning of recorded art making. Early



Figure 1 – *Relief of Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and their childhood. C 1340 bce.*

examples show both the public and private identities that are within the household. For example, *Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and their children blessed by Aten (Solar Disk)* (fig. 1), shows an image of an ancient Egyptian ruling family, but in a highly untraditional way. Indeed, something is different and interesting about this family dynamic. The mother and father sit facing one another, clearly showing a heterosexual couple as their genders are noted in their clothing and headdresses. They are also shown as having relatively equal status: they are approximately the same size—while in ancient art larger size often shows greater importance—and the couple tenderly embraces their children. Akhenaten even lifts his female child to his mouth to kiss her, while Nefertiti nurturingly holds another child on her lap. However, in this scene we can also clearly see that one child in the family is getting more love and affection than the other child. When the father kisses one child, that child is being singled out and privileged, while the other child appears to point to this kiss and turn her head to her mother almost as if asking for the same treatment.

Such complex family dynamics in art have inspired my own thinking and approach to my thesis work.

More recently, Chinese artist Zhang Xiaogang takes traditional Chinese portraits and translates the idea of photography into paint. The figures appear somewhat flat and cartoonish, and have a little exaggeration to them. “Muted and compliant,” writes one scholar, “Xiaogang’s extended family convey individual identity through their unalterable physical features: too big heads, tiny hands, long noses, and subtle alterations in hairstyle give clues to intimate characteristics and stifled emotions”<sup>9</sup>



Figure 2 – “A Big Family”, Zhang Xiaogang, Unknown Date, Saatchi Gallery.

Xiaogang draws on the collective mindset within some Chinese cultures. China has placed importance on “sacrificing personal independence” so that all of the members are protected while the predominant cultures of the United States generally encourage a more independent mindset, a mindset that “strays away from relationships that require them to be reliant on another person.”<sup>10</sup> The figures in this work also show the hierarchy that is still present in modern day China, at least more pervasively than in the U.S. The elders and male figures inside the family are given a higher importance than the female counterparts.

I am drawn to this work because of the unrealistic nature of the figures and the way that the relationships between the figure that have tension between them. He also

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<sup>9</sup> Saatchi Gallery, “Zhang Xiaogang.” Saatchi Gallery.

[https://www.saatchigallery.com/artist/zhang\\_xiaogang](https://www.saatchigallery.com/artist/zhang_xiaogang), n.d. Saatchi Gallery. Accessed November 4, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Jake D., “Individuality in China and the U.S.,” blog entry from the Confucius Institute at the University of Delaware, January 11, 2013. Online at <https://sites.udel.edu/ci/programs/nsli-y-china/individuality-in-china-and-the-u-s/>.



uses a color to show that one figure is different than the other. In *A Big Family* (figure 2), the boy's face is red while the girls' are black and white. In Chinese cultures, men are traditionally the heads of the family and there is a sense of the men having a higher importance or identity than the females within that same dynamic. I address this in my work as well, with my own family dynamic being patriarchal, holding onto those Asian traditions, even while we live in America. Even though there is no father figure in the work by Xiaogang, the male figure is pictured centrally and, in the foreground, allowing the viewer to know that he is the most important. Xiaogang also uses the traditional three-person family photos as source images for his work. I have taken this idea into my work by using three figures that represent family.

Some Chinese cultures view relationships with their family with the males being more respected and the dominant figure to support the household. These relationships are "dictated by ancient tradition rather than personal views"<sup>11</sup> My work explores this aspect of Chinese culture because half of my family is Asian-American with Chinese heritage. My step father is Chinese and in our family dynamic, he is the only father figure we had, so I have always been interested in learning more about his culture. Much like *A Big Family*, my biological father was not present in our lives, and a new male stepped into our family and assumed that role. As there is not a father figure present in the piece by Xiaogang, we can read it as challenging traditional family dynamics and even suggests the idea that blood bonds could be less important than other familial bonds.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Another recent artist who deals with the family in her art is Kathryn Polk, a lithographer who has prints in collections all over the world. *Non-Indigenous Sisters* (fig. 3), for instance, makes the suggestion that the two figures have no loyalty to place where they live. Even though they are dressed perfectly, the details tell a different story. Their shadows are not connected even though the girls hold hands, and the taller sister's mouth is missing, showing that there is a strain on this relationship. For



Figure 3 - Kathryn Polk, *Non-Indigenous Sisters*, 2010, lithograph, AR/PC Texas Tech.

me, this image might represent that the mouthless girl could have an independent mindset and not feel the need to stay and take care of her family. Or it could show that things that are bottled up and not spoken about. Like Polk, I also remove some of the facial features of the figures in my work because of the emotional connection formed between those siblings. I also use shadows in a meaningful way in my work; the idea of the shadow figure appearing in my work reveals that even though the relationship might at times seem perfect, there are always flaws that can be brought to light. By allowing the shadow figures to exist in my work, or in Polk's case manipulating the shadows from the expected reality, helps the viewer to make associations that relate back to their personal family life. According to a podcast in which Polk talks about her work, "The invite comes with gentle colors and non-threatening forms, and once we have arrived in her world, the specificity of the content gives us no other choice than to start to decode what we are seeing, often by placing ourselves and our family into the scene." Polk continues, "In my work, I want it to have a depth of freedom of interpretation because maybe there's something in there that someone needs to hear more than what I

was trying to say.”<sup>12</sup> Like Polk, I desire that freedom of interpretation for my viewers too, as I attempt to pull out meaning from them in my suggestive but not fixed images.

I am also drawn to the environments that Polk create within her work. Polk places the figures into locations such as a home or school, familiar settings that prompt viewers to relate to that place or space in their life. I similarly take this idea of an environment and create a simple but clear setting in each of my prints so that the viewer can relate to the situation more. For instance, in my *Manipulation and Guilt* serigraph, I include an old fashion phone to locate the scene inside of a family home. Finally, Polk’s use of flat color is something else I employ in my work. This flat color makes her aesthetic appear childlike, and I am trying to achieve a similar style that is straight forward and simple, almost like an old-fashioned greeting card or the illustrations in a kids’ book. As Polk notes regarding her style, “My drawings are childlike colors and poses, like Dick and Jane books, but there’s a darkness. Right now I’m feeling a lot about our politics that is hard for my head, and the fact that society has all these rules that it casts on our children.”<sup>13</sup> My work uses a parallel aesthetic relating to the life of children in a presumably simpler time.

Another artist who explores intimate human relationships is David Hockney. Hockney mastered various print techniques along with drawing and painting. He preferred to paint and draw people he knew over a long period of time because he did not want to impose his personality and style onto someone he did not know a lot about: “While not worrying about flattering his sitters or about offending them, he takes into

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<sup>12</sup> Miranda K. Metcalf, “Episode 28: The Internet’s Number One Printmaking Podcast – Out of the Wardrobe.” Pine, Copper, Lime Podcast, November 20, 2019. Online at: <https://www.pinecopperlime.com/pp-kathryn-polk>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

account how they see themselves – how they dress, how they hold their bodies, what facial expressions they habitually adopt – rather than seeking to impose himself, or even his style, on them.”<sup>14</sup> His art appreciates the dialogue and understanding between two people who care about one another, instead of the hierarchical relationship where he impresses his “self” too much upon others. This helps me think through the complex family dynamics that I am interested in for my work—the way that some family members try to push themselves onto their kids or siblings while others encourage more of an equal status between members of the family.



Figure 5- David Hockney, *Noya and Bill Brandt with Self- Portrait*, Photography, 1982.

Hockney’s work goes against the power structures of patriarchal relationships, and I find this useful for my work as well. Hockney talked throughout his career about the “collaboration between the artist and the sitter.”<sup>15</sup> When thinking about what dynamics I wanted to explore, I had to consider my feelings about my own sibling relationships and whether or not I would allow the emotions to show up in the work. I am also drawn to Hockney’s polaroid compositions (Figure 5) because while they are photorealistic, and I am also starting with some photographic source material, although I interpret the photo in drawings before making them into prints. The details Hockney brings out by having his

<sup>14</sup> David Hockney et al., *David Hockney* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2006), 19.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

images in squares makes me want to explore the work up close. I also use the design element of pattern and the organization of smaller pieces into larger works, such as my tiles being ordered into what represent roof patterns. The roof tiles for me draw out ideas of home, shelter, and the safety of having a loving family. By having the images close up, there is nothing that can hide from the viewer. Hockney said, “I thought I’d rather just join the pictures together, even if they don’t fit, its more interesting, more honest, and gives you a feeling of space.”<sup>16</sup> By building fragmented compositions like this, Hockney invites the viewer in to an intimate setting with his sitters, much as my paper clay tile works do. Hockney’s composition is a good reference to understand how to layout my compositions in order to have the best results. Like Hockney’s arrangements, even though my tiles do not fit perfectly together, it allows for the image to become a distortion of the perfect expectations we place on family.

My work also draws on the work of artists such as Jerry Bennett, who, like me, use paper clay for their material.<sup>17</sup> Bennett uses paper clay to hand-build intricately thin



Figure 4- Jerry Bennett, *Untitled*, Unknown Date, paper clay.

non-functional vessels such as those seen in figure 4. Drawing on his research that he openly shares on his website, I have defined the recipe to create paper thin pieces of clay that I can send through the

printing press in order to print an image on it. I took the recipe that Bennett published and

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>17</sup> Jerry Bennett, “Revised Paperclay Workshop Handout,” online at <http://www.jerrybennett.net/category/blog/>

altered the amount of paper pulp to add into the clay to work with my process of using tiles instead of hand building. While adding paper to the clay body adds strength to it, the material is still very delicate. Bennett uses the paper clay to build non-functional forms that for me relate to the interior of the body. He reveals the interiors of his pieces, and does not allow them to hide anything. In my tile pieces made with paper clay, I backlight them so that the flaws come to the surface, representing that the scenes are no longer a private matter, but rather are completely on display for the public to see.

By taking all of these artistic influences into account for my work, I am able to think about what I am creating in multiple mediums and identify meanings not only in the subject matter, but also in the style and materials of my work. My body of work not longer just consists of simple prints on a clean piece of paper. Instead of this deceptively simple relationship, my work reveals that art and life are much messier, that families can help each other grow and influence one another, but not without flaws and mistakes along the way.

## CHAPTER 3

### PROCESS

Homes can be soft places, full of textiles, books, paper, clothing, rags. These are all things we can grow out of and move on from. They are also things that are shared and passed down through generations. For my process, I often use tools from the home that families would use and share, to successfully make the artwork. Both the slab roller and the etching press is much like a rolling pin that flattens things out. I use a blender to mix up paper lint and clay, and these things are found in many home kitchens. Another important part of my process is paper, a vital component of printmaking and creating the paper clay. Paper has been used for documentation and letter writing between families since its creation.

The first step in creating this body of work begins with finding the source images that I use. The images I have chosen were found on various websites. I specifically looked for photographs of children playing together. The idea of playing is often about innocence. Children do not understand at a young age the many roles they play in a family dynamic but even then, the roles are there. I also looked for images that would describe challenging situations that siblings face while it seemed they were having a good time. Some of the relationships I am referring to in my work are older children that come from a larger family made to care for younger siblings and equality among siblings.

After I find the images, I begin producing drawings based on these found images. I start by printing out the source and then I decide which figure in the image is more important than the other. I place tracing paper on top of the image and use various

mediums to make the drawing, such as charcoal, ink, marker, and pencil. On other images, I cut the figure out of the source photo and draw the marks through the hole that is created to make the figure. The variety of marks made during the drawing represent the chaos that results when children are not given certain resources, such as in a large family when one child receives the majority of the resources and another child is left with much less. I then create the main figure using details because they are the ones who benefit from the family resources in the relationships I am trying to convey.

Once the drawings are created, I scan everything into the computer. I take the original photograph and manipulate it in Photoshop by turning it into a duotone, which allows me to control how the color is distributed across the image. The colors I chose for this body of work were specific to the idea of children and tend to be gendered in our culture, such as my use of blues for the boys in the image and pinks for girls. But the color palette that is somewhat soft and pastel reflects an expectation of childhood innocence, like one might see on an old-fashioned greeting card. Then I tested these colors in the kiln. I have found that I am only able to use certain variations of the colors I chose because the rest burn out in the firing. The two colors in my duotone are beneficial because they limit my palette, as I can only use certain colors that can hold up to temperature in the kiln, but this duality of color also embodies the relationships between the two children depicted.

After the duotone is finished, I put the hand drawn components on top of the image making sure to include a dark key line in Photoshop. Once I get the image completed on the computer, I print out each layer onto a transparency in order to expose it for the print process. Every color gets exposed onto a separate plate (for lithography) or



screen (for serigraphy). Once done exposing the images, I begin to mix my colors by hand. This process is in direct reference to reading a recipe and cooking in the kitchen; each color takes specific amounts of cyan, yellow, magenta, black, and trans base in order to achieve the desired result. I then print the images onto each sheet of paper, taking extra precautions not to dent or dirty the paper in any way. The print needs to be a perfect after coming off of the press with no dings or dirt on the print. This perfection is a metaphor for the perfect family relationships that I have in my head.

After the prints are finished, I go back into Photoshop and save the key line from each image into a separate file. This black detail line is turned into a vector image using illustrator, allowing me to enlarge the key line to any size without worrying about it pixelating. A vectored file is needed to transfer the key line to the laser cutter to be etched into a piece of Masonite. After many tests, I found by slowing down the laser during the etch, it allows the cuts to go deeper into the Masonite and holds more ink during the printing process. When the etch is complete, I put a coat of varnish onto the masonite so that it does not warp due to the moisture of the clay released while going through the pressure of the press.

Once the image is etched on the laser and ready to be printed, I begin making the paper clay. To make the paper clay, a cotton linter is torn into little pieces and weighed out to 400 grams. This paper pulp then soaks for twenty-four hours in one gallon of water. Ceramic artist Jerry Bennet says that allowing the linter to soak for this long will help it to break down enough so that it can be put into a blender.<sup>18</sup> While that is soaking, I mix up enough dry materials to create twenty pounds of porcelain clay. Porcelain is

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<sup>18</sup>Jerry Bennet, "Revised Paperclay Workshop Handout."

used because of its durability and its translucent qualities. When the paper pulp has sat for 24 hours, I take the pulp mixture and combine it with the dry materials and add another gallon of water. I mix this using a drill mixer until it is a thick yogurt-like clay and dig it out using a measuring cup to put into wood frames so that it can dry into sheet form.

By this time, the paper clay is leather hard, and I send it through the slab roller to less than one eighth of an inch thickness because it has to stay thick enough to flatten again when I run it through the intaglio press. I smooth out all of the texture from the cloth of the slab roller using a plastic rib, and then carry the clay upstairs to the print room. To prepare the image to ink and send through the press, I mix up three teaspoons of mason stains, a glaze colorant, to one-part linseed oil. I wipe the plate with the ink and because the ink is so smooth there is no need to wipe the plate as in traditional etching printmaking. Instead, I use phonebook newsprint to wipe it until there is no more color on the top of the Masonite and the ink that remains sits down in the grooves. I place the masonite on the press bed and set the paper clay slab on top. In order for the clay not to rip or tear from getting to thin, I have to set the pressure on the press exactly at five over three. Too much pressure and it tears the clay apart and too little the image does not transfer onto the clay. After rolling the plate and clay through the press, the clay has to sit and dry a little longer so I can pull the clay off of the plate without it tearing or distorting the image.

Once the plate is off the clay, I then take the clay tile that is created and cut it into a roof tile shape. Drilling two holes into the top edges of the roof tile allows it to be hung on an L screw on the wall. After I finish printing all the key lines on the tiles and have

them cut into roof tile shape, I project and draw the image back onto the tiles so that I can know where to put the underglaze colors. After painting on the underglaze on the bone-dry clay, it is ready to be placed in the kiln for firing. During this stage the paper clay is really strong, whereas normally in bone dry ceramics work, the clay at this stage is fragile. The paper in the clay body makes the clay mold really fast. Once the tiles come out of the kiln, I lay them out onto a table to recreate the original print image, but then I rearrange tiles so that the image becomes distorted. Much like how memories of relationships are only in fragments and never the whole thing, my image must be made in pieces and tiled together. For these pieces, I crop the images so that the viewer cannot see the entire image. The final product hangs in multiples on the wall with lights shining behind them to reveal the translucent quality and the layers not unlike how relationships can have multiple layers.

Another part of my practice is the creation of functional objects, and for my thesis exhibition, I created a series of lanterns based on both my ceramic and print processes. The tiles represent dysfunction so it was important to me to have the images from the work turn into functional items that other families could now take into their own homes and use. The process was completely the same except instead of creating a larger image, I etch the images onto 12" x 18" pieces of Masonite, then run the whole large sheet of paper clay through the press instead of cutting it into 4x6 rectangles. Once the paper clay came off the press with the image etched onto it, the clay was completely dry. By using a water bottle and spraying the paper clay, I was able to rehydrate it and this allows for it to be manipulated around a PVC pipe into the shape of the lantern. I created two types of

lanterns that represented the idea of “function” featuring the entire image and “dysfunction” with the image split much like the larger tile pieces that were created.

Much like families, this body of work took a lot of different mediums in order to create it, and required many aspects working together. Modern families have a lot of different looks and forms to them, and they are no longer set by a specific standard, and I took that into account when using multiple mediums to create my work, each with both a symbolic and a functional purpose.

## CHAPTER 4

### WORKS

Just like families are made up of multiple complex parts, the work for my thesis is created the same way. The work is made up of three parts: prints, paper clay tiles, and paper clay lanterns. The content of my show comes from a series of prints I made over the year prior. There are three categories themes in this series of prints: behavior cycles, behavior traits, and gender roles.



*Entangled Mess*  
2020  
Serigraph  
9" x 12"



*Never Ending Cycle*  
2020  
Serigraph  
9" x 12"

PRINTS:

***Behavior Cycles: Entangled Mess and Never-Ending Cycle***

Each print shows a sibling in detail, a sibling with less detail that looks angry and has fewer facial features, and a shadow figure that is not present in the relationship. These two prints both speak to the cycles that siblings will observe within their household and repeat due to it being observed while they grow up. Children sometimes are able to escape the negative behaviors and change their life and other times the cycle just continues. *Entangled Mess* has three girl siblings standing in a line holding hands. They two on the outside edges are pulling the girl in the middle in different directions. There is a line around the feet of the figures so that we can see the direction of movement within their dynamic. The girl in the middle is rendered with the most detail, which shows that she is the most important figure and has to decide whether she wants to continue the same cycles in her family or to leave like the girl on the left and change this behavior. The body positions of the figures represent the tensions and complex balancing acts that go on in sibling groups. *Never Ending Cycle* has siblings holding hands and spinning in circles while wearing roller skates. The figures become distorted mimicking the feeling one gets when playing the childhood game of spinning faster and faster while holding hands and wearing skates. If anyone lets go, both partners are in danger of being hurt. This co-dependent relationship that can literally spin out of control at any minute shows that

every sibling in a family relies on the rest of the family to survive. Children have roles that they fulfill within the family unit so that the entire family can survive. The colors from the prints are flat and pastel to mimic the colors of children's illustrations. Both prints are serigraphs and are 9 x 12 inches. The prints are matted in a simple white mat and hung on the wall in a simple black frame in order to only draw attention to the image instead of what is protecting it.





*Favoritism*  
2020  
Serigraph  
9" x 12"



*Riding Coat Tails*  
2020  
Serigraph  
9" x 12"



*Manipulation and Guilt*  
2020  
Serigraph  
9" x 12"



*Self Sufficient Child*  
2020  
Serigraph  
9" x 12"



*Uneven Playing Field*  
2020  
Serigraph  
9" x 12"

***Behavior Traits: Self Sufficient Child, Favoritism, Manipulation and Guilt, Riding Coat Tails, and Uneven Playing Field***

This series of prints discusses behavior traits that are mimicked from older siblings or expressed from following the parents. *Self Sufficient Child* shows children who are able to take care of themselves and who do not rely on other people in the family to take care of them. This child could be taking on parental roles by taking care of the other siblings or fending for themselves. The image shows a child standing in the chair cooking a meal. The colors for this print are mostly tints and shades of pinks to also remind us of the debated woman's role in the kitchen. *Favoritism and Uneven Playing field* represents how parents play favorites among their children and how that benefits one sibling and not the other. This behavior sets one child up for success while the other will continue to struggle. In *Favoritism*, we can see three figures. The girl is rendered in detail with full color while we look and see the mother fixing her clothes. The boy has his back turned to the other two. He is made up of sketchy, fast paced lines and does not have a lot of detail. He is simply holding a lunch box. The boy is facing having to earn everything in life instead of having it handed to him like the little girl in the picture. We can see this by the negative space in the background while the little girl still has a roof over her head and a home given to her. We know the young girl receives the house because the mother figure is not there anymore because of the shadow figure. In *Uneven Playing Field*, we're looking at three siblings innocently playing with each other's hair while standing on a slide. The girl that is higher up on the slide has been given more resources because she is

draw in details and has full color. As the slide slopes downward, the figures lose less detail. This tells us that the figure on the ground does not receive the same amount of resources as her siblings.

*Riding Coat Tails* and *Manipulation and Guilt* both express how siblings can take or hoard resources in order to get ahead. This behavior occurs naturally in some families as older siblings will give of themselves so that the younger ones can succeed. In *Riding Coat Tails*, the figure on the bike is having to work harder pulling the other sibling along. This figure's line quality is faster and done with less detail. The girl that is on roller skates is holding onto the coat of the sibling pedaling the bike. The drawing for this girl is done in detail and she has full color to her. She is just along for the ride not using any of her own energy to get to where she is going. In *Manipulation and Guilt*, the little girl is standing on the back of a young boy in order to do a simple task like talk on the telephone. The girl is done in full detail while the boy is done in both the ghost image and the scribbled line. This tells us that this girl has manipulated and guilted more than one person to help herself get on top. All of these prints are serigraphs that are 9 x 12 inches and framed and matted in the same way as the others for the same reasons.



*Playing Their Game*  
2020  
Plate Lithography  
9" x 12"



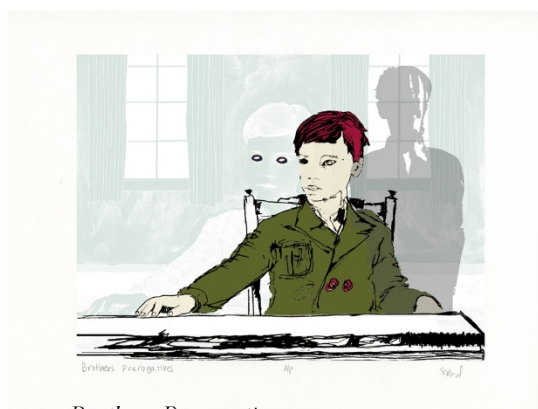
*The Pecking Order*  
2020  
Stone Lithography  
9" x 12"



*Daughters' Obligations*  
2020  
Serigraph  
9" x 12"



*Double Standards*  
2020  
Plate Lithography  
9" x 12"



*Brothers Prerogatives*  
2020  
Serigraph  
9" x 12"

***Gender Roles: Pecking Order, Daughters Obligations, Brothers Prerogatives, Playing their Game, Double Standards***

This set of prints discuss the gender roles and hierarchies that are still predominant within families today. Coming from a blended family where half of our traditions come from Chinese culture, the male figures in our household still have certain privileges above the women. *Daughters Obligations* and *Brothers Prerogatives* speak to this very thing. The brothers are able to go sit behind a desk and “work” while the daughters are still responsible for typical household responsibilities. While it is supposed to show him working, the boy is sitting behind the desk with his arm on the table posing with a very military look. His clothes are in an army green color to allow the viewer to think military. *Playing Their Game*, *Double Standards*, and *Pecking Order* all show how women have to work twice as hard to compete with men inside of the family. *The Pecking Order* is a stone lithograph that shows a boy sitting with a girl standing over him. She is standing with her arm on her hip and staring straight forward not acknowledging his presence. He is sitting on the ground facing to the side in less detail with one leg bent at the knee. *Double Standards* and *Playing Their Game* are photo lithographs. *Double Standards* shows a girl working the sails of the boat while the boy sits at her feet doing nothing. *Playing Their Game* shows a little girl wearing a dress and having to jump over a boy, referencing how women have to jump over obstacles to be treated equally to their male counterparts even within the family unit. *Daughters Obligations* and *Brothers Prerogatives* are serigraphs. *Daughters Obligations* shows the roles that are expected of girls who will eventually grow up, like cleaning, laundry, taking care of kids, as well as

being a sexual object for men. These ideas are present within the print by having the girl sit in the floor with her legs only slightly open. She is looking up to someone standing over her. There is also an iron and a mop in the picture that shows the duties that have been placed upon women even young children. There is a train in the photo that represents two things: taking care of the children and being a sexual object for men. The train heading towards her vagina implies this. The original source photo on this girl was a blow-up doll in the same pose but changed to make her look slightly younger. *Brothers Prerogatives* has a boy sitting at a desk dressed in military green. This shows that he will be the head of the family and also the enforcer of the rules. He has the shadow figure standing over him like a father would stand and watch his every move he is making so that he can provide for his family. All prints are framed and matted like the others.





*Equally Dysfunctional*  
2020  
Porcelain Paper Clay

## PAPER CLAY TILES

### *Equally Dysfunctional*

*Equally Dysfunctional* presents the idea that everyone in the family is equally dysfunctional in some ways, even if no one sibling is favored over the other. To create this piece, I took the image from the print *Favoritism*, and instead of clearly identifying which child was favored, I showed the relationship for what it really is: chaos. Since I was a child, I have had these expectations in my head of what a family is supposed to be: a protected, perfect thing. However, as an adult I have come to realize those expectations are just distortions of the realities that we live with. Within families there are flaws, but even when brought to light those flaws are not something to be shamed but rather admired for the struggles that a family has gone through in order to come out stronger. This piece is made up of 96 tiles that resemble roof tiles. I chose roof tiles as symbolic of a family's "home" and the idea of having "a roof over one's head" when one has a stable home. Shelter is of course one of the main components of human survival, so the roof tile style of my work references safety, protection, and what is expected in a supportive family. I chose this shape of tile because in the print, the favored sibling was a girl, and the strong curve of the tile is more feminine. Even though the viewer can no longer tell who is the favorite, the idea is still there. In the serigraph, the little girl in the most detail is bigger than the sibling next to her. The sibling also has no color and is just a scribbled line which means he is less important. The mother is also helping the girl and the boy has his back turned to both of them. The idea is still present in the tiled piece because we can still see two figures but we are now unable to see which



child has the parent favoring them. With the tiles rearranged the boy is no longer just a scribbled line but has other elements of the serigraph in with him as well. The pink and blue colors I chose were specific to the stereotypical gender roles that society has placed on them. The piece is mounted on the wall as a single piece instead of 96 individual pieces, much like how a family is one whole unit made up of individual members. The relationships with each individual member is made up of moments and these moments are never remembered all at once, but rather in pieces that go together to create the whole image. People have different interactions in public than they do in private and this always changes how these relationships look when together all at once.



*Frailness*  
2020  
Porcelain Paper Clay

## Frailness

*Frailness* is taken from the photo lithograph, *Playing Their Game*. The lithograph discusses how girls are having to jump through hoops and over hurdles in order to compete with boys for the same treatment. With Asian cultures placing so much importance on boys, and with my family consisting of 13 members with only 3 boys, the girls were always having to prove that we could do what our brothers could. The title *Frailness* describes one of the reasons why women cannot do what men can do, because society often deems them too frail. The idea for the piece comes from a children's game of leap frog, and while there is innocence to the game, one can still see the idea of a girl in a dress jumping over a boy and having to work twice as hard. The piece is composed of 64 tiles. The roof tile shape was chosen for this one because of its straighter lines and sharper edges representing a supposedly more masculine form. This specific tile shape has a hard-diagonal line that represents change, and this diagonal represents how the stereotypical idea that being male is better than being female is changing. The colors blue and pastel yellow again were chosen based off societal gender norms and are pastel to relate to children's illustrations. The boy is dressed in typical blue and girls are presumed to be more "soft" so I used a pastel yellow for the ground. By mixing up the tiles we can still see a figure jumping over something but it is no longer a girl jumping over a boy, and the gender roles are therefore undermined and challenged. With the tiles being backlit, the viewer is able to see each flaw within the relationship and this draws out the parts of the paper clay that burned away. This relates to how parts of relationships can be burned away and yet still work together.



*Insufficient*  
2020  
Porcelain Paper Clay

### *Insufficient*

*Insufficient* comes from the serigraph *Self Sufficient Child*. The print talks about how children step up and help take care of the family because the parents are not there due to work and other reasons, or they are just not in the picture. The image portrays the typical gender role of a girl in the kitchen even from a young age. I transferred it onto the clay tiles and distorted the image to the point that the young girl cooking is no longer legible, and we cannot tell if it is a child or an adult cooking, but we know simply that the family is being fed. The piece is titled *Insufficient* because no matter how large or small a family is, sometimes it feels like there are not enough resources to go around to provide for every member. Even if a family has the money to support it, the parents might be busy working and do not have enough time to give attention to their children. The piece is made of 64 tiles distributed over 8 rows. The color originally matched the print but because there was too much white space, it felt empty. I took blue acrylic paint and painted it on some of the white tiles, which allowed the color to distribute across the piece more evenly. I chose blue to go with the orange underglaze color that the kiln produced because the color contrast amplifies the design. I chose to use paper clay because paper clay can withstand the pressure of the press, much like families withstand the pressures that are placed on them. The work is backlit and because of this we can see the places that are burned away and the parts that cannot be brought back.





*Lanterns*  
2020  
Porcelain Paper Clay

## PAPER CLAY LANTERNS

There are 15 lanterns in the exhibition that were made from the images in the prints. It was important to figure out how to create a functional object out of the paper clay that could then be taken into a home and be used. Not unlike the symbolism of the roof tile format of my paper clay pieces, these lanterns represent the safety of the family home in the way they cast usable light. They also hung in the center of the gallery, connected all the other pieces together, and creating a home-like space in the gallery as a whole. The individual tile pieces' function is to be a work of art, but art sometimes is deemed anti-functional. The lanterns, in contrast, are intended to be functional, much like a family can go through struggles and still hold together as a family. The lanterns bring out the dichotomy between functional/dysfunctional relevant to my work. I also chose paper lanterns because they are used in China to celebrate many things, like the Chinese New Year, but the thing I celebrate in my lanterns is family. Families can be hard to deal with. They take a lot of time, patience, and hard work. At the same time, they are very fragile, delicate things that can break under the slightest pressure. I made the lanterns to celebrate just that. There are two different types: smooth and distorted. The smooth ones reference back to the protected and perfect pieces of paper that are the prints and the distorted ones references the chaos and dysfunction of the tile pieces on the wall. The whole image was printed onto a single sheet of paper clay was wrapped around a piece of pvc pipe, which allowed the image to stay smooth and symbolize a functional family. The fragmented lanterns were printed onto a sheet of paper clay. When it came off the press it was completely dried out so the clay had to be rehydrated with water so I could cut it into strips. The strips were then pieced back together around the pvc pipe, causing distortion

in the image because the strips had to overlap, thereby representing the dysfunction in a family. Siblings try to put the pieces of a familial relationship back together and they find that some moments of the relationship are gone just like with the fragmented images. The translucent quality of the paper clay worked perfect for lanterns, and they are illuminated, showing how even through the hard times, families can be the light in our existences.

There are two different types of bulbs used but both produce a warm happy color. When the lantern is lit, there are no longer shadows that are present within the relationship that continue to bring negative emotions, and this allows the positive aspects of family life to be celebrated. As mentioned above, the lanterns were hung in a row through the middle of the gallery as a way to separate but not disturb the other types of work in the show.

This separation acted as a wall between but also a bridge between the perfect and flawed, order and chaos, functional and dysfunctional pieces. They hung low enough from the ceiling to allow interaction with the viewer. The viewer was able to walk around and explore each piece and see the perfections and flaws within them.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Families dynamics involve complex relationships that take an enormous amount of work to nurture and maintain. The relationships we build in our family units see us through more than just our childhood, lasting for generations. My thesis project and related research explore various family dynamics, including the hierarchies of siblings, learned behavior traits, repeated behavior cycles, and gender roles. Like families, my thesis work requires a collaboration of multiple processes and media. [moved this here] Much like how nurturing and caring for a family is exhausting, there were points throughout the complicated process of producing my thesis that left me feeling the same way. Regarding its themes and subject matter, my work explores how despite the social expectation of having a perfect family, the messy realities of families are often more interesting and beautiful than any expected perfect. I am interested in how the lack of control, the absence of order, and the issues of limited resources all affect individuals in the family unit.

Multiple artists have inspired my body of work, namely Kathryn Polk, David Hockney, Zhang Xiaogang, and Jerry Bennett. Kathryn Polk's use of multiple figures in a surreal but also home-like setting, and her choices of flat, simple color schemes, are both comparable to my own choices of settings and color palette in my work. Chinese artist Zhang Xiaogang explores the idea of the traditional three-figure family portrait but challenges the expected mother-father-son triad at the same time. His interest in gender

roles and family dynamics playing out in simplified compositions of figures was a strong model for my work. And the ways he kept in play the Asian expectation of the patriarchy makes its presence known in my pieces as well. Another figural artist, David Hockney, used a tilework pattern of Polaroid images in ways that helped me conceive of my roof-tile pieces. And, finally, ceramic artist Jerry Bennett's use of paper clay to hand build non-functional ceramic work inspired my own research into this novel material. By drawing on his techniques that he openly shares on his website, I was able to successfully define the recipe for a paper clay material that fit my needs of going through the etching press and staying flat. Building on influences from all of these artists, I was able to find a process, style, and subject matter that successfully created my body of work.

The work in my exhibition took on many forms, including prints, tiles pieces, and functional lanterns. This diverse oeuvre represents the variety of personalities that make up a family, and the complex dynamics that it takes to cultivate family relationships. Of the three processes I chose to pursue for this work, two of them (the tiles and lanterns) involved learning new mediums all while still using traditions that are centuries old, like the porcelain clay body. Combining new and old, the familiar and the unfamiliar, again reflects ideas about the difficult maintenance work that family life requires. Families celebrate traditions that are often centuries old, while they also create modern traditions that will be celebrated by generations into the future. My lanterns in particular were created to show this new-old dichotomy and to celebrate family life and worth working for. They are functional pieces of paper clay that other families can take into their homes and pass down to future generations. The textures that are present within the paper clay pieces of this work not only show the imprints that others leave on our lives but also

allow the viewer to physically feel the work and interact with it. This is just like relationships and we are able to feel and interact with one another. The pencil that made the drawings indents into the paper and then after the pieces go through the process, the key line from the drawing is now raised up. Both marks leave a change on the substrate but in different way, which is much the same with the way people leave their marks on us during our lives, and we leave our marks on others.

As humans we can chose to continue in the same cycles that are put in front of us, or we can choose to create new cycles; often we do both. I have realized that the family relationships I have in my life, while full of chaos and difficulty, are strong and can withstand the challenges and crises they face, not unlike the paper clay I use in my thesis withstanding the pressure and manipulation, taking on new marks but not being destroyed. Life does not have to be perfect and that even within the dysfunction there are moments of beauty. There are multiple aspects that allow a family unit to continue to thrive, and this body of work made me realize that just as families work together to create something beautiful, artists can use multiple mediums and not be tied to one thing. Not knowing if the pieces would survive and having to leave the cracks in the ceramic tiles when I knew how to fix them was a challenge—I still craved that expected perfection. But in the end, this thesis pushed me to let go of the idea of perfection and embrace the flaws. It was an illusion in my head to seek the perfect, the clean, the unmarked. And now I am able to see that even the dysfunctional moments and marks are perfect in their own way too. I can now apply this lesson and its message of adaptability to both my creative practice and to my interactions with my family—and I can find the beauty in doing so.

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