Picturing home:

Home as represented in vernacular image making

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Abstract

This project grew out of an interest in notions of 'home', what 'home' is and its relationship to the 'house' as a physical place of dwelling. Specifically, this project explores how the home is represented in vernacular image-making, such as the photographs in the family album and craft methods such as cross-stitch. This lead to an investigation into vernacular photography, collections and archives, and contemporary craft methods. An archive of photographs collected follows the text, as well as drawings and embroideries made during the project. The final work consists of a large-scale projection of a cross-stitch and the photograph it originated from.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank to thank all the Massey University SoFA staff and my fellow Masters students,
especially Val Diggle and my supervisors Ann Shelton, John Di Stefano and Wayne Barrar.
A huge thankyou to my incredible cross-stitchers, Katie Moore, Jay Lane and Mum;
and to everyone who lent me a photograph (or ten) for my archive – very very much appreciated.
Lastly, to my amazing friends and family, for putting up with a crazy person for a year.

This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents, Ted and Pat Watt, my eternal cheerleaders and the world's most thorough research assistants;
I would never have begun this journey without your support and encouragement.

Contents

Introduction

I am interested in vernacular photography of the home, the blurry snapshots in the family album and the digital files on a hard drive filed under miscellaneous. I want to know what these images might tell us about home, our conscious or unconscious understanding of what home is, implicit in our depiction of it. It then becomes important to discern what 'home' is in relation to 'house'. Initially it appears that 'house' is simply a physical structure, and 'home' lies in the emotions attached to that structure. However, this view is too simplistic, the relationship between notions of 'house' and 'home' are complex, and as such will be discussed further in the first chapter.

Figure 1

This interest in notions of home led to the creation of a collection/archive of photographs. Friends and family were asked to volunteer photographs of homes that they live/d in, which were taken by someone who had a relationship with the home (ie live/d in it, or knew the people who did). This is where the notion of the 'vernacular' steps in. This will be discussed further in the text, but for now it is important to note the context of the original photographs. They were created for the personal documentation of the residents of the homes, and as such were never intended as 'art'. The photographs were collected from people I know, and reflect the culture in which I live. The images tell us as much about the cultural value placed on he house, demonstrated by the need to document it; as they do about the architectural vernacular of New Zealand homes.

Figure 2   Figure 3   Figure 4   Figure 5

The collection grew to range from historical photographs of the homes of my ancestors, to photographs taken the day before they were sent. Some sent original prints, others digital files; all exemplify the current technology of which they were made. In some photos the house is documented as objectively as possible, in others the eye of the photographer is strongly evident, skilled or otherwise. Some are empty of figures, in others the family proudly display themselves in front of their home for the camera. Some sent one photo, one sent 134 photographs depicting the dissassemblage of the family home, its reassemblege on a new site, and the building of a new home on the original site. I became curious about where the notion of home was contained in this instance, whether notions of home were still contained in the original structure, relocated; or if they were contained in the new house on the original site.

It became apparent to me that just re-presenting the photographs was not enough; I needed to take the photographs somewhere radically different, while still maintaining their integrity as photographs. I began thinking about other ways of vernacular image-making – how ordinary people generate images. I started thinking about the kitsch little 'Home sweet home' embroideries you see in people's homes. I learnt to cross-stitch as a child under the tuition of my mother, and so re-taught myself in order to make my own 'Home sweet home' embroidery, complete with pink roses. I found the process almost cathartic, the repetitious in-and-out as I made a line of diagonals one way, and then back across the other way to form a neat line of x's. So I continued making other kitsch home phrase cross stitches, 'Bless this home', 'There's no place like 'home' and 'Home is where the heart is'. I even bought some off the internet, it seemed bizarre that people would invest so much time in a sentimental phrase about their home, and then sell them on the internet (a paradoxically technological

Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

medium) for less than the cost of the materials. I began investigating what else I could do with cross-stitch, how I could relate this medium to my existing body of work. So I took one of the photographs from my collection and divided it up I into 2mm squares and transferred each colour to a grid, manually pixelating the photograph. I then used this diagram to cross-stitch my first original cross-stitch. Enjoying the result I made more.. and more..

I then began experimenting with projecting slides of the cross stitches at a large scale, referencing the original house that the image was derived from and its journey from object to image, to object to image; large scale to small scale, to small scale, to large scale.

But before I get caught up in this I must go back to 'house' and 'home' and analyse what these terms really mean, their implicit connotations, and enactment in everyday life and art, specifically the work of Rachel Whiteread, Mark Robbins and Bill O'Donnell. I must also then consider the way the photographs were made; what it means to collect other people's photographs and re-present them in a context very different to that which they were intended. After this discussion of 'vernacular' photography and the work of Peter Piller and Joachim

Schmid I go on to question the difference between 'the archive' and a collection, comparing my work with that of Gerhard Richter. I will then consider the implications of making 'art' through 'craft', referencing the work of Elaine Reichek, and finally, what it means to project a photograph of a stitched replica of a photograph.

House or Home

The general idea of 'home' is that of a physical place of dwelling, embodying the sentiments of privacy, security, family, intimacy, comfort, belonging and control within its physical structure (Morley, 2000). This differs from the 'house' which is purely a physical place of dwelling. Witold Rybcynski traces the evolution of notions of 'home' as distinct from the 'house' to the Dutch in the 16th Century (Rybczynski, 1986). This is primarily because Dutch women engaged with their place of dwelling in a very different way to other Western cultures such as the English. Only very upper

Figure 9

class Dutch households had servants, so Dutch wives cleaned their houses themselves, physically engaging with the space, and over time, developing the notion of home.

As Gaston Bachelard notes, "even when reproduced from the outside, it [the home] bespeaks intimacy" (as cited in Bird, 1995, p112). The idea that the intimate nature of home can be seen in representations of its exterior is central to my project. This is particularly true in New Zealand, as our sense of place is tied to the physical structure of the ideal detached, single-family home (Brookes, 2000).

This 'home' is not just a singular physical place, as Winifred Gallagher notes, "your home is not just your address, but also a state of mind that somehow encompasses a lifetimes dwellings, including some of your loved ones and perhaps a few only glimpsed yet always remembered." (Gallagher, 2006 pxv). While Gallagher is perhaps a little too sentimental, I do agree that we understand 'home' to be more than one physical place and that past homes inform our understanding of what 'home' means.

This notion of home informs our identity, our sense of belonging. John Berger notes that the word "home meant the centre of the world, not geographically but in an ontological sense" (as cited in Bell, 1995 p 12). Home is the place from which we understand the entire nature of being, it is the constant central point around which we construct our knowledge of the world.

Home can also be considered as a fictional construct, as being created through enacted relationships and therefore not restricted to place. As Angelika Bammer notes, home is an "enacted space within which we try on roles and relationships of... belonging and foreignness... [creating] mythic narratives, stories the telling of which has the power to create the 'we' who are engaged in telling them" (as cited in Morley, 2000 p16-17).

Alternatively home can be seen as defined by patterns in activity and time, rather than by physical space. As John Di Stefano notes, "it is a space or structure of activity and beliefs around which we construct a narrative of belonging. More than a physical space, home might be understood as a familiarity and regularity of activities and structures of time." (Di Stefano, 2002 p38).

It is clear that 'home' is not something that can be conveyed in one simple definition, and there is nothing to demand that these differing positions be mutually exclusive. Home is, essentially, whatever you think it is; and this may be closely tied to the physical structure of the house or completely detached. The main question then, is whether these notions of home are conveyed in images of the exterior of the house. I have come to the conclusion that different images will speak to different people in different ways, depending on their own personal memories and associations of home.

Figure 10. Rachel Whiteread, *House*, 1993

One seminal work that explores notions of home is Rachel Whiteread's *House*, 1993. Whiteread cast the interior of a Victorian terrace house in London's East End with sprayed concrete, and then removed the exterior brick cladding of the house to reveal the solidified interior space within. Doreen Massey discusses how this made present the absent house no longer there, turning the space inside-out and opening the private to public view. This defamiliarises the house, exposing the normal, comfortable mythologizing of 'home'. The solidification of the interior volume that once contained the social time-space emphasises that that social time-space is now absent, and impossible to recover (Massey, 1995).

Within the title the use of 'House' instead of 'Home' further challenges the sentimentalised notions of the domestic. The word house distances us, and refers more to the physicality of the walls and roof which have been removed and no longer are, than to the home. (Massey, 1995 p42).

Massey states: "House emphasised... the fact that its meaning always had to be interpreted; that there was never any simple 'authenticity'; that the meaning(s) of home are always open to contestation." (Massey, 1995 p42). *House* is not didactic, it does not tell you what to think about home, rather it opens up discussion and absorbs the thoughts and

memories projected onto it. In the same way I do not intend to instruct the viewer what to think about home, I want to open up the subject to a reconsideration of our understanding of 'home'.

Unlike Whiteread, who reveals the solidified private interior space to public view, my images only show the exterior of the houses. The viewer is shut off from the private interior world, even the windows have become opaque and impenetrable. The image of the façade of the house has become pulled apart from the specific home depicted. This enables the house to stand in for the past homes of the viewer, to question the relationship between this house and their homes.

House became almost monumental, both in its large physical form and the way it came to memorialize a community that still considered itself very much alive. But Whiteread never conceived of *House* as a lasting monument, and once demolished only remains in photographs. So a sculpture which had the appearance of permanence, is actually as ephemeral as a projection of an old family photograph. Both of which have pushed apart 'house' and 'home' to create space to reconsider what these terms really mean.

Figure 11. Mark Robbins, *Thanksgiving: Dad, 82, Mom, 77, 52 years*, 2002.

Mark Robbins photographic series 'Households' displays selected photographs of houses with photographs of the occupants. Robbins is attempting to discern how people represent themselves through the interior of their home, what aspirations are represented within the space, and consequently within the image. The 'households' represented range from the traditional nuclear family, to single people, to same-sex partners. Robbins questions the distinction between house and home, and what constitutes a family in today's society. While Robbins interest lies in the way people *present* their home to him, the photographer, my interest lies in the way people choose to *represent* their home from the exterior, as the photographer. I hope that the use of vernacular images enables space to be opened up for the questioning of 'house' and 'home' in a way that is less forced and instructive and more organic and personal.

Figure 12. Bill O'Donnell, *Furrows*, 2007.

Figure 13. Bill O'Donell, *Poles*, 2007.

Photographer Bill O'Donnell's series 'Home' questions the certainty of the notion of home. Models of houses are photographed in black and white within fictionalised diorama environments, questioning whether the notion of 'home' itself is real or ideal. The short depth of field means that only the house or part of the environment is in focus, for example, in *Furrows*, 2007, the house sits at the rear of the picture space, blurred and out of focus, unattainable. Whereas in *Poles*, 2007, the picturesque little house is in focus, but the landscape is out of focus, the house is no longer grounded in space and so is still rendered unreachable.

By removing photographs from their original context within the family album I am detaching the photograph from its indexical function, as evidence of the real event. This enables the viewer to reconsider the function of the photograph and its attachment to notions of the 'real' or 'ideal'. Within the context of home I hope this allows a reconsideration of their own photographs of past homes, their motives for taking them and the truths they have come to represent.

Vernacular Photography

The term 'vernacular' originates from reference to language which is native to a specific region or area, rather than a literary or learned language. Thus when used in reference to architecture the term indicates architectural styles local to a specific area, methods of building that have evolved due to the local environment, weather conditions and availability

Figure 14

of materials. For example, houses in Wellington are often weatherboard, wood being an abundant local material. Some of these local vernacular building conventions can be seen within the photographs in my collection.

When used in reference to photography the term 'vernacular' can be considered in two ways. Vernacular indicates both local methods and styles of photography, and the untrained, rather than learned, 'art' photography. My work seeks to uncover what these local photographic conventions might be. Most of the photographs I have collected show a straight on, eye level view of the 'front' of the house, but within this you can see decisions the individual made about the 'best' way to photograph their house. The include decisions such as photographing

Figure 15

the house from a distance to include the garden out the front, or closely framing the image to insure neighbouring houses are not included in the image. These photographic conventions reveal underlying beliefs about what home is, our pride in attaining the New Zealand dream, or rather expectation, of the detached, pitched roof weatherboard home on a quarter acre section.

The limits of what kinds of photography the term vernacular includes is much debated. William Hunt believes a vernacular photograph is any photograph taken without art historical considerations (as cited in Batchen, 2000), or as Douglas Nickel puts it, "If a photograph wasn't

made for non-utilitarian, self-consciously expressive reasons that allow it to be designated 'art', it devolves to this grab-bag left-over category designated 'vernacular'. Vernacular is thus defined not by what it is, but by what it isn't." (as cited in Batchen, 2000 p229). Daile Kaplan links the vernacular to someone who is untrained, or amateur, and who has no artistic ambitions. This person will focus on the ability of the photograph to communicate, its immediacy, rather than aesthetic or artistic aspects of the medium (as cited in Batchen, 2000).

Elizabeth Edwards contests this, asserting that vernacular needn't be confined to amateur photography, but

> ...encompasses a wide range of photographic practices where the aesthetic or expressive conditions of image making are secondary to their functional uses, both in terms of image content and the social use made of the photographs, both as images and material objects (as cited in Batchen, 2000 p230).

Thus the way we photograph our homes is directly related to our reason for doing so, we photograph our homes to document and communicate, both to ourselves and to others. A photograph of a past home is both a record of where you lived and a marker of who you were, valued for both proof of memory and as a comparison to who you are now.

Figure 16. Peter Piller, *H11, H24, H13* and *H21*, 2004, from the series *Nicer from the earth*, Group H: *Person in front of a house.*

Peter Piller began working with found vernacular images while working for an advertising company. Piller collected images from newspapers, sorting them into bizarre topics such as 'policemen searching', 'looking into holes' and 'décor and munition'. Piller exploits the "ability of the images to fluctuate between what they depict and what they suggest, their power to absorb nearly anything we project onto them." (Kastner, 2007 p275). His aim is to search through the mass of seemingly banal images until he discovers a new meaning, images that have the potential to be read in a different and interesting way, (Jothardy, 2005 p24) what Piller terms a "productive misunderstanding". (Eichler, 2006 p139). Through the presentation of masses of images "the ideal - the absolute image – is annulled." (Jothardy, 2005 p24).

One very intriguing series is entitled *Nicer from the earth*. These images were gifted to Piller from a company that attempted to sell aerial photographs of houses to the homeowners. It was not a very successful enterprise, as one homeowner commented, his house was 'nicer from the earth'. Piller sorted through the

mass of images and grouped them by visual similarities such as this group of images which all show someone standing in front of the house.

I enjoy this series as it considers the 'home' from an unconventional position. Taken from above, these buildings in the photographs read as 'houses', rather than 'homes'. This highlights the major difference between Pillers work and mine, our relationship to the photographs, the photographers, and the houses. Piller is detached from the photographs, they were given to him by people he did not know, who had photographed the houses of strangers as a commercial business, in the quickest way possible. Hence Piller considers the photographs formally, grouping them according to visual similarities. I, on the other hand, am interested in who took the photograph of the house, why they decided to, and the decisions they made about how to do so, decisions that are implicit within the photographs. My relationship to the images is then intensified through the process of embroidery, as I painstakingly replicate the photograph my decisions then become embedded in the images as well. Pillers photographs are of houses, whereas mine sit in between 'house' and 'home'.

Another artist using similar methods is Joachim Schmid, who formed the *Institute for Recycling Old Photos* out of a belief that it has become irresponsible to create new photographs due to the volume of images that have all ready been created. Schmid regards the distinction between 'high' and 'low' photography as completely artificial and based on the myth of the art photography.

> The average person who takes snapshots is not so naive as people are inclined to think. He usually knows precisely what a photograph has to offer. Even though he is unaware of the theoretical foundations of the history of photography, he will never confuse picture with reality. At the same time he knows perfectly well that a photo is more than just a piece of paper. (as cited in Gierstberg, 1991 p59).

As Clive Scott explains, while photographs are known to be images, and not the 'real' object/subject, "the *cultural* fact remains that photographs are believed to have evidential force and the ability to authenticate real events." (Scott, 1999 p9). He goes on to discuss how 'happy snappers' represent the true indexical function of photography more clearly than 'art' photographers, as they are concerned with the action of photographing the real object/subject, rather than focussing on the iconic image produced. Over time these photographs gradually

lose their indexical reliability and become representative, increasing their generalized, educative and cultural value. "All photographs become, with time, documentary." (Scott 1999, p33).

When the photographs of homes were in family albums they fulfilled an evidential role, they authenticated real events and memories. Their importance was based upon their indexical link to the real places and events, rather than being concerned with the photograph in and of itself. By removing the photographs from their original contexts I am hastening the removal of this indexical link to the real. When they are viewed by strangers they evoke past homes they viewers have lived in, a generalized, cultural relationship rather than a specific, indexical relationship.

Okwui Enwezor expands on the cultural, ethnographic role of the vernacular photograph:

> The snapshot… exemplifies the most prominent aspect of the private motivations for image making, for it not only records that burning desire for the archival, it also wields a formidable ethnographic meaning. The photographic image, then, can be likened to an anthropological space in which to observe and study the way members and institutions of a society reflect their relationship to it. (Enwezor, 2008 p13).

It is precisely this about the snapshot that interests me, what we can discover about the photographer and their relationship to the home through the photograph; and through a collection of images, what can be discovered about a society's relationship to the idea of home. Enwezor also highlights the archival role of the photograph, something that I began thinking about and will discuss further in the next chapter.

Collection or Archive?

Over time I acquired a large collection of photographs of peoples homes, and I began to think about what it means to collect. I began to wonder whether I had a collection or an archive, and what the difference was. The dictionary defines a collection as a group of things collected or accumulated, and an archive as a collection of primary source historical documents or records. But the word archive has official, almost institutional implications of permanence, objectiveness and cultural and historical value; whereas a collection has subjective, idiosyncratic, domestic, even hobbyist connotations. In this way we could consider the relationship between the collection and the archive as similar to the relationship between vernacular and 'art' photography. This relationship has an implicit hierarchy; the collection is subordinate to the archive, as vernacular photographs are subordinate to art photographs.

Derrida even states that documents in the archive receive value and are legitimised *through* their position in the archive. (Enwezor, 2008 p16). "...the technical structure of the 'archiving' archive also determines the structure of the 'archiveable' content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivisation produces as much as it records the event." (Derrida, 1995 p17).

As an archive my collection falls short, it is lacking in official historical 'value', and makes no attempt to engage with archival systems of permanence. In fact, my collection is of a temporary nature, as I intend to return all the original photographs to their owners at the completion of the project.

But Okwui Enwezor argues that the contemporary archive must do more than use archival structures of accumulation, sorting, interpreting, and classifying; the archiving-artist must interrogate their relationship to the culture in which they

Figure 17-22

19

collect, and the role of the archive as a historical site that exists between evidence and document, public memory and private history. (Enwezor, 2008 p23&26).

In that light, maybe I do have an archive, even if it is of a pseudo or temporary nature. I am engaging with what it means to collect, examining the culture that I live in and what home means to that culture. I am reengaging with private documents in order to uncover evidence of wider public notions of home.

Enwezor also points out that "the desire to make a photograph, to document an event... is directly related to the aspiration to produce and archive." (Enwezor, 2008 p12). To photograph *is* to archive.

Figure 23-28

20

Figure 29. Joachim Schmid, *Archiv*, 1986-1999, (installation detail).

Joachim Schmid, who we looked at briefly earlier, engages with photography and the archive in *Archiv*, 1986-1999. The work consists of 725 panels, each containing 2-60 images with similar aesthetic features or motives, collected from found print media such as newspapers and postcards. As Schmid states, *Archiv* is "a survey of photography in the 20th Century with some fields missing, like art photography, fashion and journalism – everything that somebody else cares for." (Weber, 2007 p71).

Gerhard Richters *Atlas* deals with many similar issues to Schmid's *Archiv*, utilising archival systems of accumulation, sorting and classification to organise over 5000 photographs, drawing and diagrams into about 700 panels.

Armin Zweite states: "The *Atlas* gives almost no hint of the personality of the artist as it is not an intimate diary. Richter is experimenting, documenting and archiving in such a matter-of-fact way that he himself does not become a subject of the task. Consequently, the *Atlas* is more than the sum of its parts. It can be understood as an autonomous work that combines a manageable amount of diversity with exacting form; it provides fragments of a picture of the world, but it refuses to be taken as a coherent world picture." (Zweite, 2003 p61).

But as Lynne Cooke points out, "*Atlas* is not an archive: there is neither a coherent and systematic compilation of an identifiable body of material nor an archaeological exhaustion of a specific subject." (Cooke, 2003 p18). I began to question the plausibility of a truly exhaustive archive, not only would collecting every photograph of home ever taken, (even from only people I know,) be impossible, it would also be pointless. Similarily, I doubt Schmid can create and exhaustive *Archiv* with every kind of photograph ever taken. I doubt there is much the millionth photograph of home could tell me that the first three hundred already hadn't. I began to question what the aim of the archive is, if it is not to complete it.

Figure 30. Gerhard Richter, *Atlas* (Installation View).
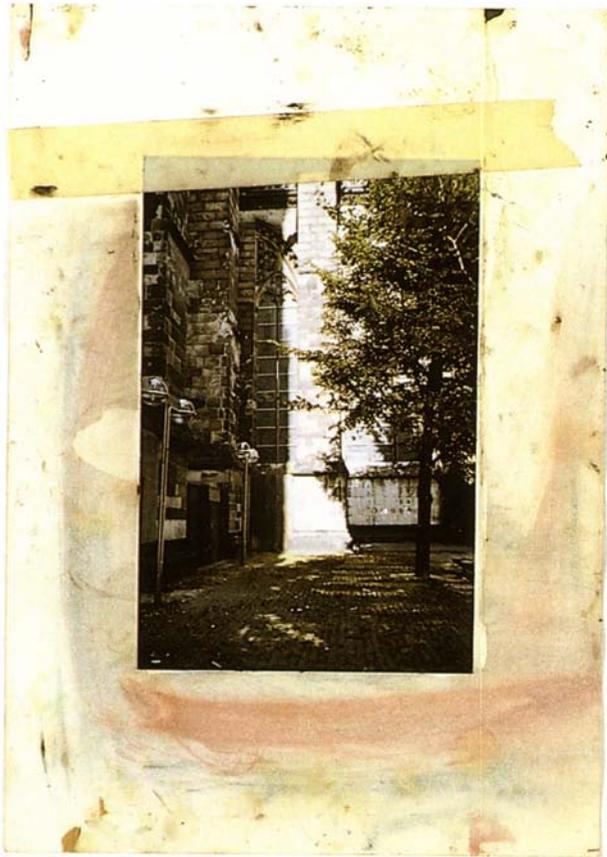
Figure 31. Gerhard Richter, *Atlas Panel 446, Domecke*, 1984/88.
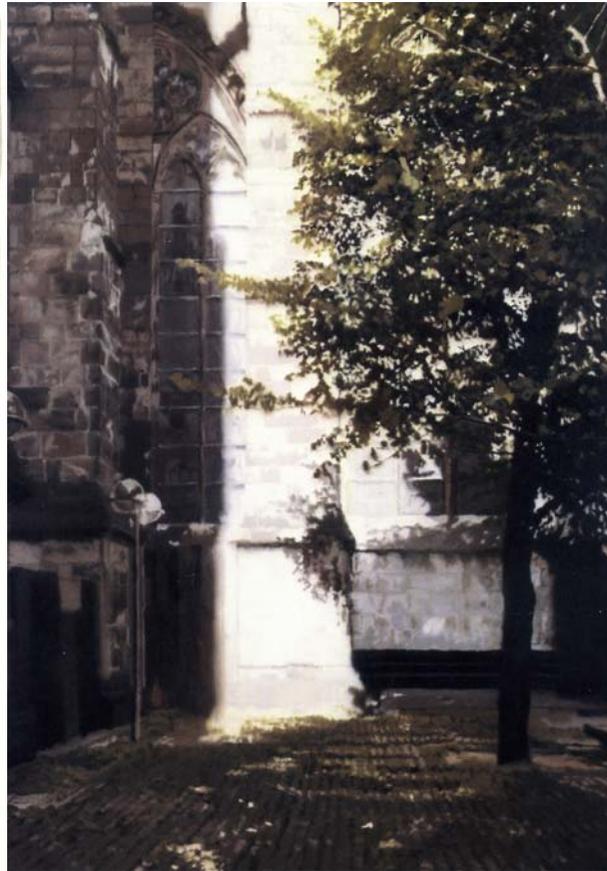
Figure 32. Gerhard Richter, *Cathedral Corner [Domecke]*, 1987.

The aim of *Atlas* differs from *Archiv* in that *Archiv* is purely to collect, whereas *Atlas* has another purpose, the photographs serve as the basis of paintings. Likewise, the photographs within my collection have been reworked as embroideries, the collection becomes subsidiary, source material for the 'artwork'. Richter takes photographs and faithfully reproduces them as paintings, slightly blurred and smooth, the brushstrokes are invisible; it is as if Richter considers it more important that we know the image began as a photograph than that we are aware that it is a painting. This inevitably leads me to question why one would paint a photograph, what does the painting give us that the photograph could not? Is the photograph inferior to the painting because it has been usurped, or is the painting inferior to the photograph because it will inevitably be photographed? I began to rethink how my photographs have been re-examined and reworked into embroideries, morphing into a grid of average colours they appear pixelated, referencing something inherent to the original photograph, but completely invisible until treated in this way.

Figure 33

Figure 34.

These embroideries themselves could be considered as archives of pixels, of stitches, in a similar way to traditional samplers are an archive of stitches learnt. In the archive the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, the individual pieces in the archive. In the same way the embroidery becomes more than just a collection of stitches, when those stitches work together to form something.

I questioned then, which holds more value, the original photograph or the cross-stitch, or in fact whether they gain more by existing together.

Craft

By learning a craft though the process of making I was absorbing what Peter Dormer calls 'craft knowledge'. He writes, "To learn a craft is to acquire values that constitute that crafts practice. The constitutive values of a craft are only learned by actually doing the activity. Indeed, they are the activity. This is a fundamental point about craft knowledge. You cannot understand it or know it until you can do it." (Dormer, 1994 p 42).

Figure 35

Sue Rowley discusses how this activity based making and use gives the object meaning. "...objects may validly act as vehicles by which identity and memory may be organised and expressed. From this perspective, objects are imbued with meaning through use, and, in turn, they enable personal and cultural experiences to be constituted as meaningful." (Rowley,1999 p17). For this reason photographs of homes have value because of their use as *aides de memoire*, without this they would just be photographs of houses. The cross-stitches gain value through the time and care taken in making them, if made by machine they would lose their personal value and become generic houses.

Not only are objects given meaning through their use, M. Anna Fariello discusses how they reflect those who made and used them: "Objects made or modified by humans, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, reflect the belief patterns of individuals who made, commissioned, purchased, or used them, and, by extension, the belief patterns or the larger society of which they are a part." (Fariello, 2004 p3). In this way photographs and embroideries reflect the values of the society in which they were made, a society that values the places in which they live in a way that is beyond their functional use as dwellings.

But not everyone is so positive about the role of craft, craft has been fighting to shake off its reputation as inferior to 'fine' art. Jonathon Hoskins suggests that this is because of crafts associations with time and effort, " 'Labour' is art's dirty secret, personal labour, graft. Afterall, labour is toil and how can something that toils be anything approaching genius?" (Hoskins, 2007 p75).

Terry Smith discusses how the negative implications of 'craft' are a result of modernism, which left the impression that art and craft differ in *all* ways. Modernism priortizes the visual as image, as simulacrum, which is not a relationship that is important to craft. (Smith, 1997). Dormer explains "An orthodoxy of modernism, which is still strong, is that craft knowledge is separable from meaning in the visual arts – that technique is merely the means by which ideas are executed rather than conceived." (Dormer, 1994 p26).

Craft has managed to shake off some of these negative associations to have a revival in the last ten years, Dan Cameron even asserts that "Needlepoint can be just as avant-garde as the latest theory about mass-media appropriation; it just takes a further stretch of the imagination to get there." (Cameron, 2003 p 16). This is reflected in the way Gianfranco Maraniello compares embroidery to other accepted fine art media: "Embroidery means repetition, obstinacy and sensitivity to time: it is a rhythmic writing, a refined engraving, and the most faithful of paintings." (Maraniello, 2003 p58). And "the practice of embroidery is a performance without a public, a necessary time spent in holding together fragments of a lost world..." (Maraniello, 2003 p60).

Craft is evidently capable of overcoming its subordination to other Fine Art mediums, Larry Shiner explains how: "What transforms a craft-work into art is not the rejection of function per-se but a self-consciousness that lifts it form the plane of the merely well made and useful to the plane of significance." (Shiner,2001 p277).
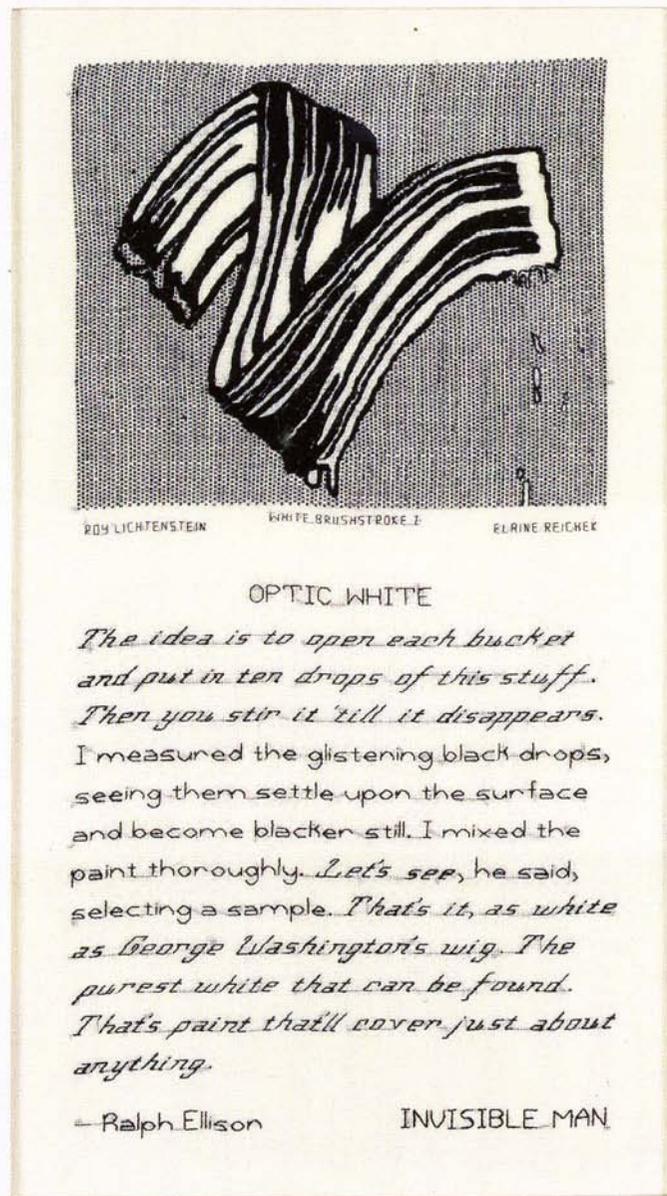
Figure 36. Elaine Reichek, *Sampler (Optic White),* 1999.

Figure 37. Elaine Reichek, *Sampler (Andy Warhol),* 1997.

One artist using craft methods whose work exhibits this level of self-consciousness is Elaine Reichek, who uses embroidery as her primary method of making art. David Frankel reflects on how Reichek bridges the gap between craft and fine art: "As art, it is nowhere, really, for we think of art, whether beautiful or ugly, as a philosophical vehicle that will tell us something big, and of embroidery, even when undeniably beautiful, as a decorative entertainment. Yet Reichek knows that embroidery is a language, and that language, even or perhaps particularly when silent, is thought." (Frankel, 2000 p 8).

Reichek takes patterns from traditional embroidery samplers and juxtaposes them with embroidery replicas of paintings by the American modern masters, quotes from those artists, and literary quotes that often refer in some way to women and the crafts. *Sampler (Optic White)* is an incredibly labour intensive embroidered copy of Roy Lichtenstein's *White Brushstroke 1*, 1965 and a quotation from African-American novelist Ralph Ellison. (Frankel, 2000).

Some of the quotes hint at how craft can be subversive, giving the maker the appearance of being occupied while allowing their mind to be absorbed in their own thoughts. "I don't much like my daughter sewing... She is silent, and she- why not write down the word that frightens me- is thinking" quotes French novelist Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette's *Earthly Paradise,* an autobiographical collection of her writing. Reichek notes, "At home and in the world is for me in some ways a return of the repressed: even while it is, among other things, an argument about the limitations of formalist concerns, it proceeds by allowing their re-emergence." (Reichek, 2000 p58).
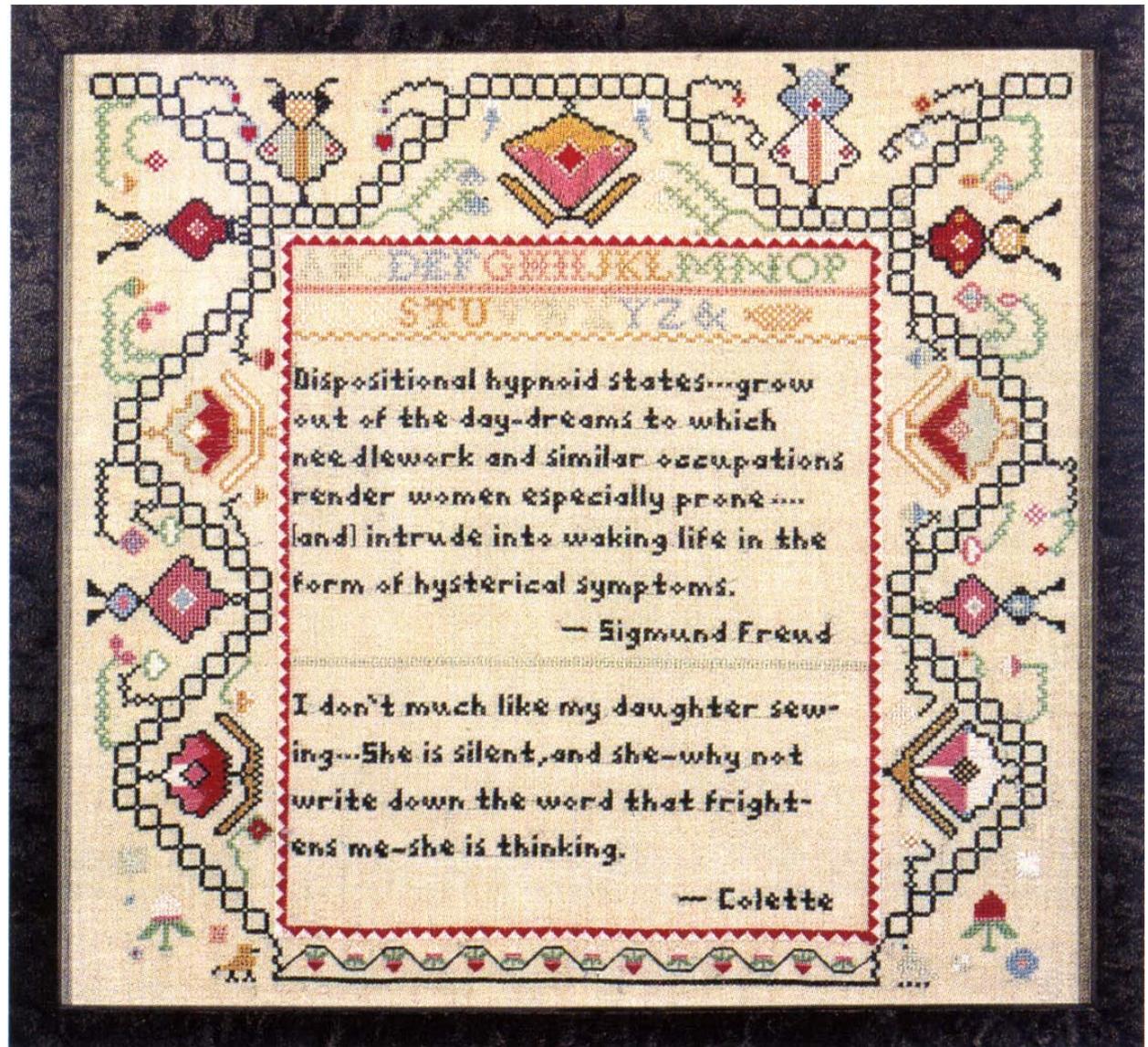
Figure 38. Elaine Reichek, *Sampler (Dispositional Hypnoid States)*, 1996.

Figure 39. Elaine Reichek, *Red Dot Man*, 1988.

Some of Reichek's early work in the 1980's explored other media such as photography and knitting, Reichek experimented with knitting versions of photographs, in a similar way to how I cross-stitch photographs. She writes "Embroideries share with the printed halftone, and with computer images composed of pixels, this quality of being pictures made ups of tiny, carefully controlled fragments. To see that is to start to inquire into picture-making generally, and into the relative values assigned to different ways of constituting an image." (Reichek, 2000, p 61).

This is in essence the crux of the issue for me, embroidering photographs is a way of highlighting the relationship the embroidering still has with its origins as a photograph, and questioning the value we place on different forms of image-making. This does not seem immediately evident in *Red Dot Man*. Reichek has greatly enlarged the original photograph, which is already warping the value relationship. The knitted figure is taken out of its photographic background context and thus seems more about removing the figure from the environment, than about establishing a relationship between two mediums as a way to reassess the values attached to them. Nor is is an engagement with photography and its pixels evident in the image.

In my cross-stitched replicas of photographs of houses the process has inherently resulted in the pixilation of the photograph, thus the reference to photography is made organically. Both the photograph and cross-stitch are standard commercial photo printing size, as this is the size vernacular photographs are generally printed for their domestic context. The cross-stitch is then projected at a very large scale, referencing the scale of the original house. The cross-stitch has grown beyond its traditional domestic context, yet still references domesticity. The following chapter will address the question of what it means to project a cross-stitch of a photograph, and why I chose to do so.

Projections

I began experimenting with projecting slides of photographs of the cross-stitches as a way to return the image back to its original house-size scale. The texture of the embroidery is visible, but the images are not instantly recognisable as cross-stitches. The process of cross-stitching has pixelated the photographs, an outdated technology referencing modern technology and the digitization of photography. The pixilation also relates to memory, the way that images of the past can become blurred and distorted in our mind. Both the mediums of cross-stitching and slide projection are nostalgic, outdated technologies, which relates to the way that thinking about notions of home and past homes is nostalgic. I began experimenting with projection without much knowledge of the precedents in that area and felt the need to learn more in order to understand what it means to project. A comment by Rosalind Krauss greatly informed my sense of what it means to project:

> The medium or support for film being neither the celluloid strip of images, nor the camera that filmed them, nor the projector that brings them to life in one motion, nor the beam of light that relays them to the screen, nor that screen itself, but all of these taken together, including the audiences position caught between the source of light behind and the image projected before our eyes. (Rosalind Krauss cited in Kotz, 2008 p383).

Chrissie Iles expands on these ideas:

> Whether the multiple images of projective installations are identical or not, the viewers attention is always directed upward and outward, to the walls of the space. This viewing mode is a direct reversal of our inward focus on an object, however phenomenological, *in* space. In most projective installations the viewer does not share the space of the gallery *with* the artwork, but is enclosed *by* it... As Morris argues, a large object or projection makes more demands on viewers, who must stand at a greater distance to perceive it, and involve their bodies more fully in it. (Iles, 2001 p64).

A work by Anthony McCall, *Line describing a cone*, 1973, engages with this notion of projection in its purest form. All image and narrative are absent from the work so that the work becomes about the relationship between the projector and the screen, and the space activated between them by the beam of light. Documentation of the work installed at Whitney Museum of American Art in 2002 shows viewers caught in the space, literally enclosed within the beam of light and interacting with it.

Figure 40. Anthony McCall, *Line Describing a Cone*, 1973.

> In most cases, projection abandons a fundamental artistic employment of video, that is, to tell a story. Consequently, one of the most interesting features of artists use of video projection so far is a reflection on time. Through real time or extreme slow motion, through repetition, or rapid pictorial variation and recombination, through editing, video projection resembles nontemporal art without actually compromising the temporal dimension. (Mayer, 1996 p29).

Figure 41. Anthony McCall, *Line Describing a Cone*, 1973.

Alvin and Mary Lucier's collaborative work, *Room*, 1970 engages with Marc Mayers notions of temporality. In Alvin Luciers sound work *I Am Sitting in a Room* 1969, Alvin Lucier plays a recording of himself reading a text about the work. The sound is repeatedly rerecorded until the speech "becomes increasingly abstract and unintelligible as a phonetic representational form." (Iles, 2001 p49). Mary Lucier then produced *Polaroid Image Series (Room)*, 1970 to accompany the sound work. A Polaroid photograph of the corner of the room where Alvin Lucier recorded *I Am Sitting in a Room* is repeatedly photocopied, until the image becomes abstract. When the slide photographs are projected together with the sound work the work becomes *Room*.
"In Room, the gradual disappearance of the image of the room at the same time as coherent speech slips away suggests a loss of the entire structure of domestic existence and, in the increasingly muffled reverberations, a corresponding loss of self." (Iles, 2001 p50).
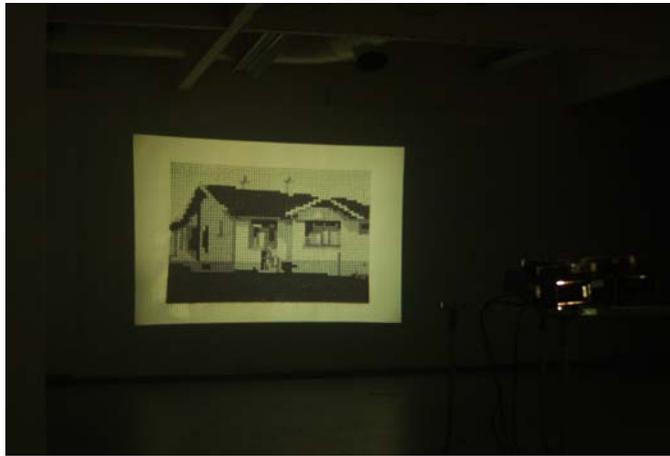

Figure 42. Mary Lucier, *Slides from Polaroid Image Series (Room)*, 1970.

I enjoy the way Chrissie Iles discusses the tactility of the experience of viewing:

...television is an extension of touch rather than of sight alone, because of the low definition, which produces a diffused electronic mosaic of horizontal lines and dots that the viewers eye completes. This intensive involvement with the screen results in a kind of osmosis of viewing (Iles, 2001 p61).

This experience of tactility is evident within my work, the enlarged cross-stitch appears so present in the room that you expect to be able to touch the fabric and feel the stitches of thread. Within the final work the projected images slips back and forth in between cross-stitch and photograph, unable to be grasped and felt as a tactile piece of fabric. The image is ephemeral and fleeting like the memories they provoke, moving in and out of focus.

Top: Figure 43
Centre: Figure 44
Bottom: Figure 45
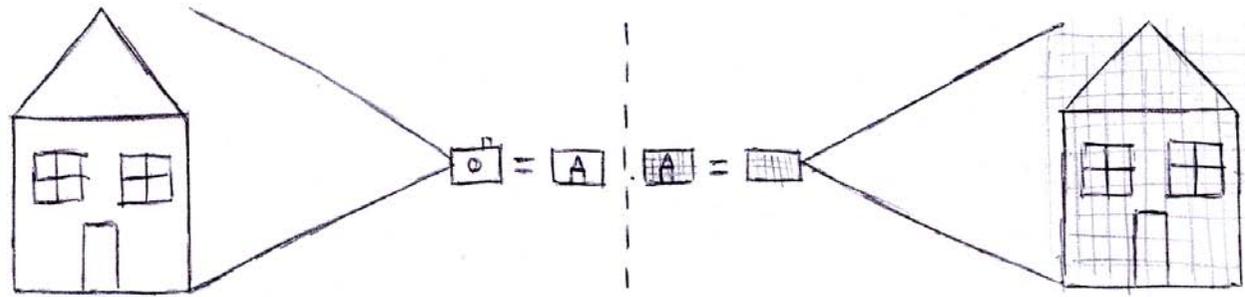
Figure 56

Figure 46 shows a diagram explaining the conceptual symmetricality of the work. The house is originally large scale when it is captured as light by the camera, and converted into a small-scale photograph. This scale is maintained when a cross-stitch replica of the photograph is made. When projected the image is thrown out as light, back to its original scale. The 'Archive' then sits conceptually in the centre, holding the two halves of the work together. These scale changes are also a metaphor for the hierarchies explored within the work, home vs house, vernacular photography vs art photography, craft vs fine art, and collection vs archive.

Several tests of the work were made in different spaces, but all have had to make some concessions to scale – it is impossible to find a space in which to project the cross-stitch of the house at its full house size. For this reason the final piece will be titled *House, half size*. One can imagine the wall onto which the image is projected sitting on the conceptual diagram between the projector and the house at full projected size. The final image fades between the photograph of the cross-stitch and the original photograph in order to hightlight the relationship the projected image has to photography. Not only was the cross-stitch generated from a photograph, but in order to be projected it has also been photographed.
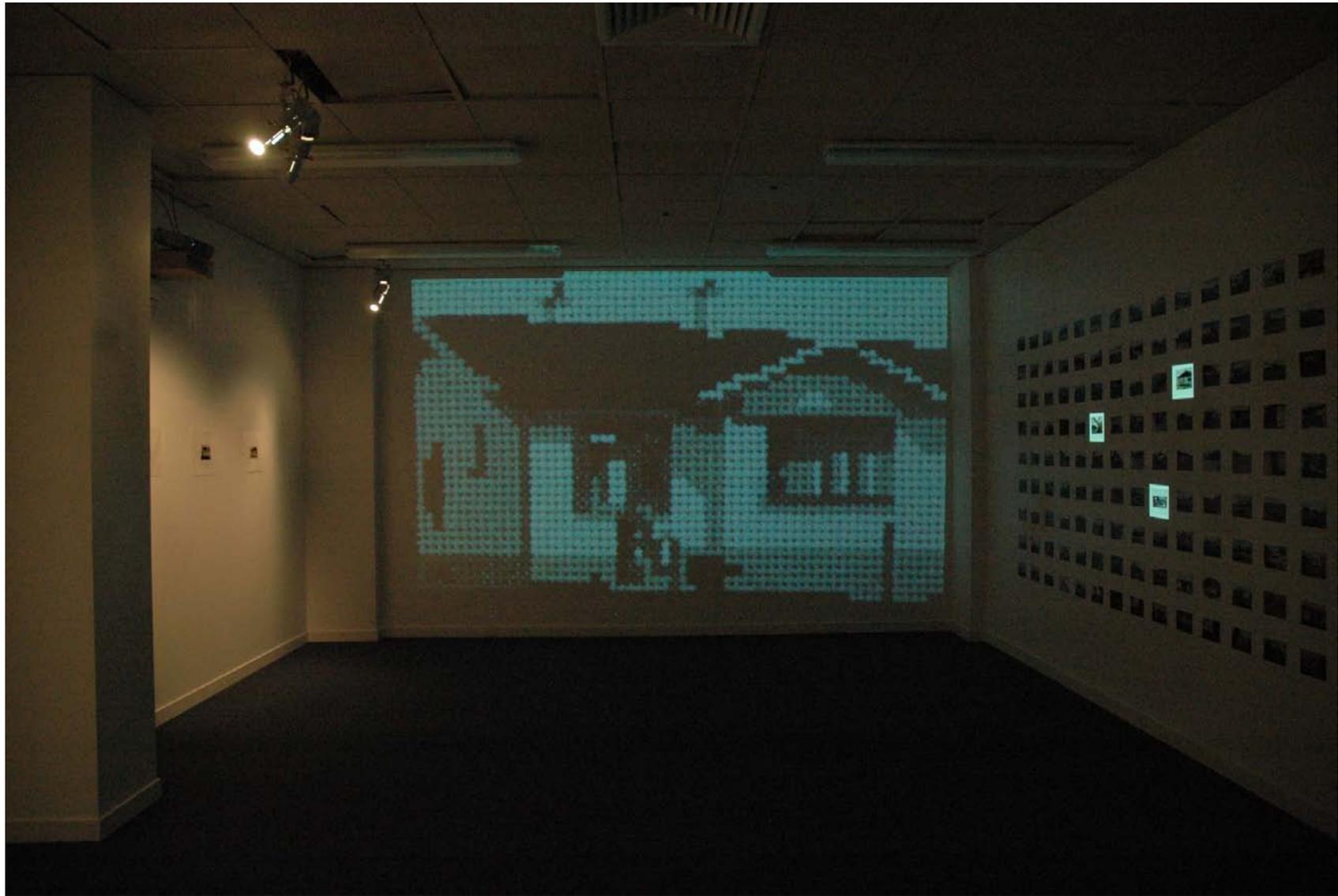
Figure 47

The Last word

Home is not one succinctly definable thing, it contains many paradoxical notions, such as an intangible fictional construct, state of mind or pattern of activity and time, yet can physically exist in the form of a house. These sentimental notions of home as centre of identity, belonging, comfort, intimacy, security and privacy can be conveyed in an image of the exterior of home, through photography, embroidery or sculpture. Our need to photograph our home reveals our underlying beliefs about what home is, our pride our place of dwelling that goes beyond its functional use. We take photographs as a way to record and to communicate, both to ourselves and to others. Those photographs become both a record of where you lived, and a marker of who you were. To photograph is to archive, to preserve a memory, even if that photograph comes to stand in for the memory, in a mediated form. The houses we live in change, but what remains of home?

House, half size reflects the instability of these notions of home, as it slips between cross-stitch and photograph its fails to definitively present itself as either 'house' or 'home'. Like our memories of past homes it fades in and out of clarity, ephemeral, no longer existing in tangible form. Both vernacular and art, craft and fine art, collection and archive, the work does not attempt to proclaim a definitive conclusion, it both is, and it isn't.
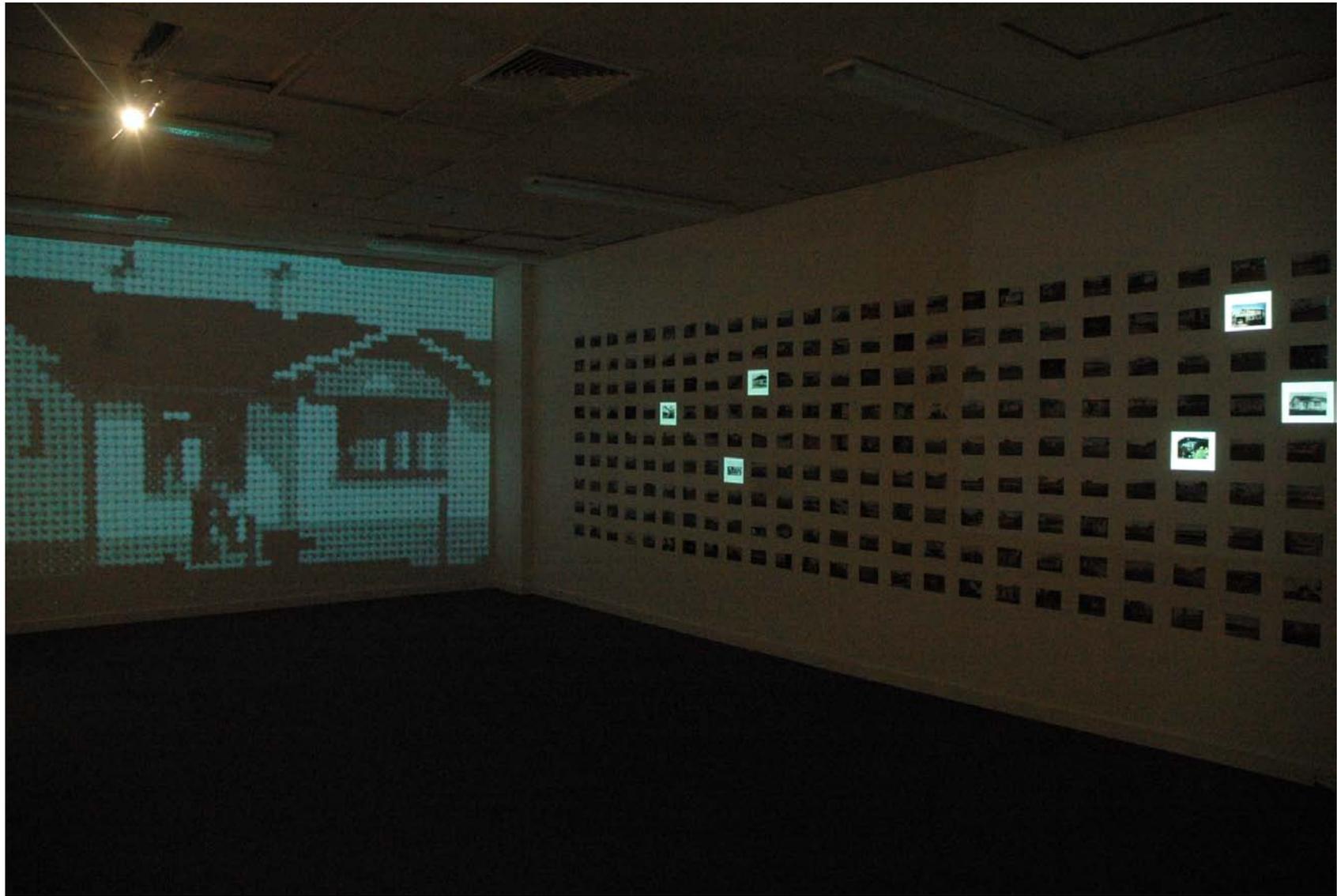
Figure 48

Figure 49
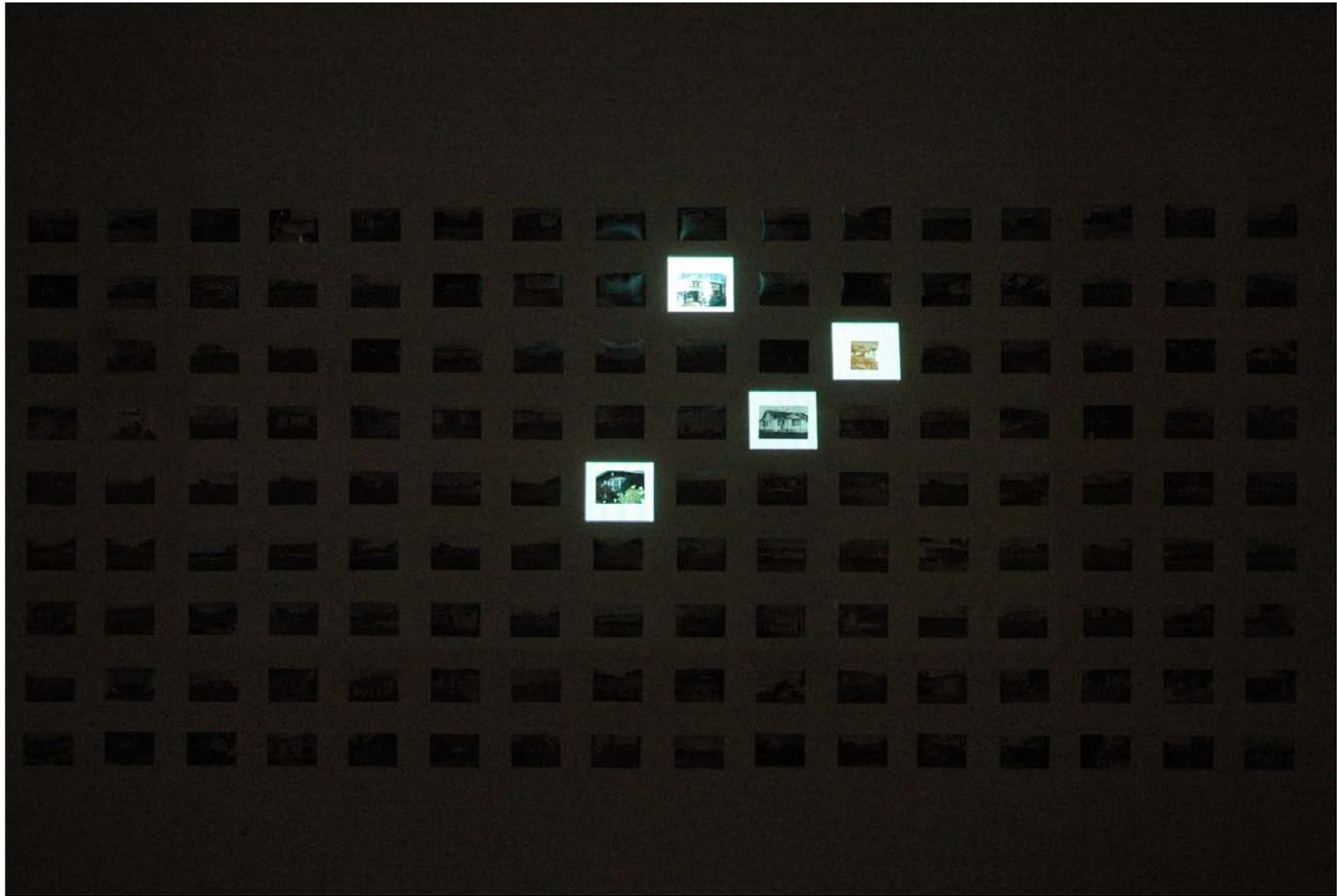
Figure 50
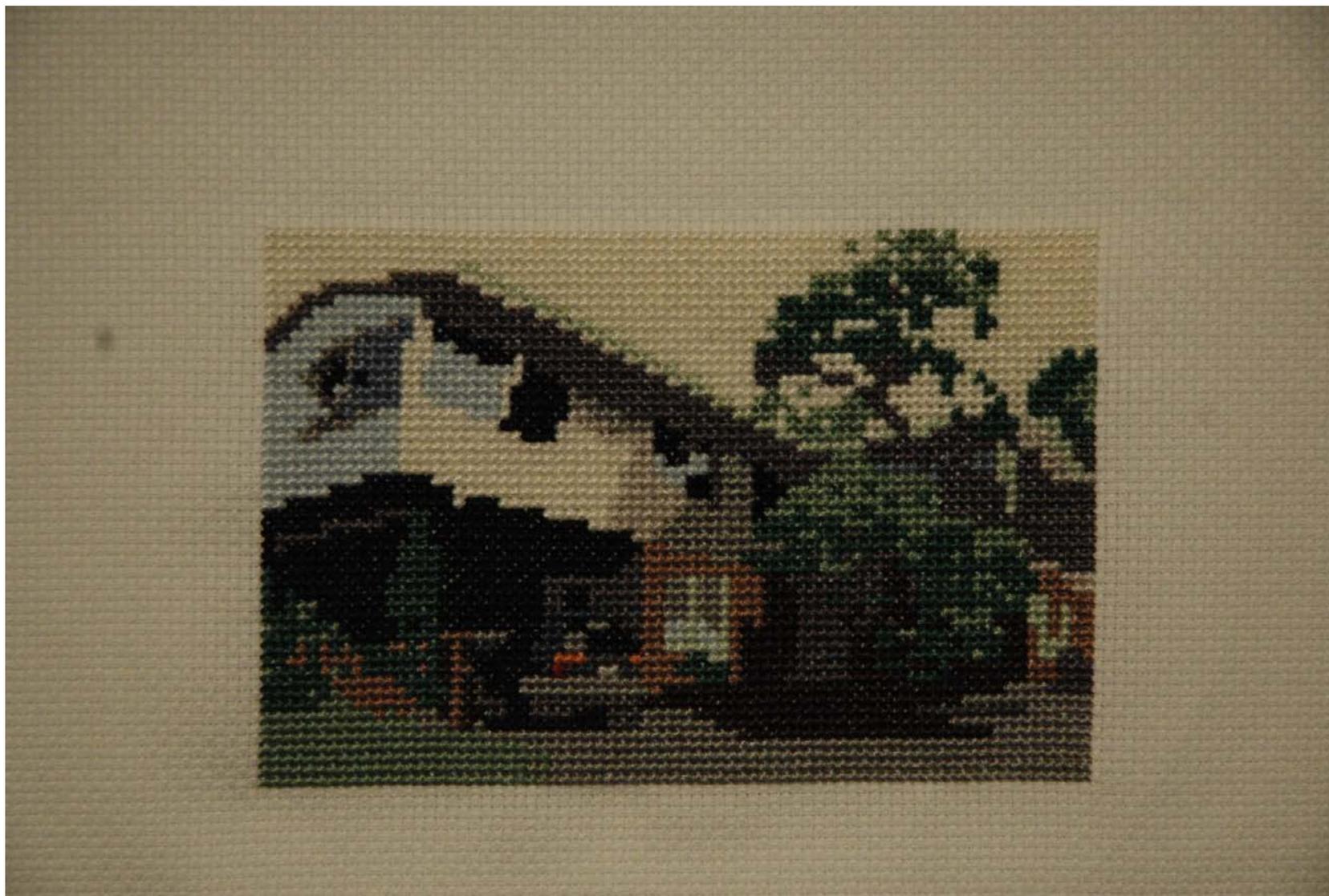
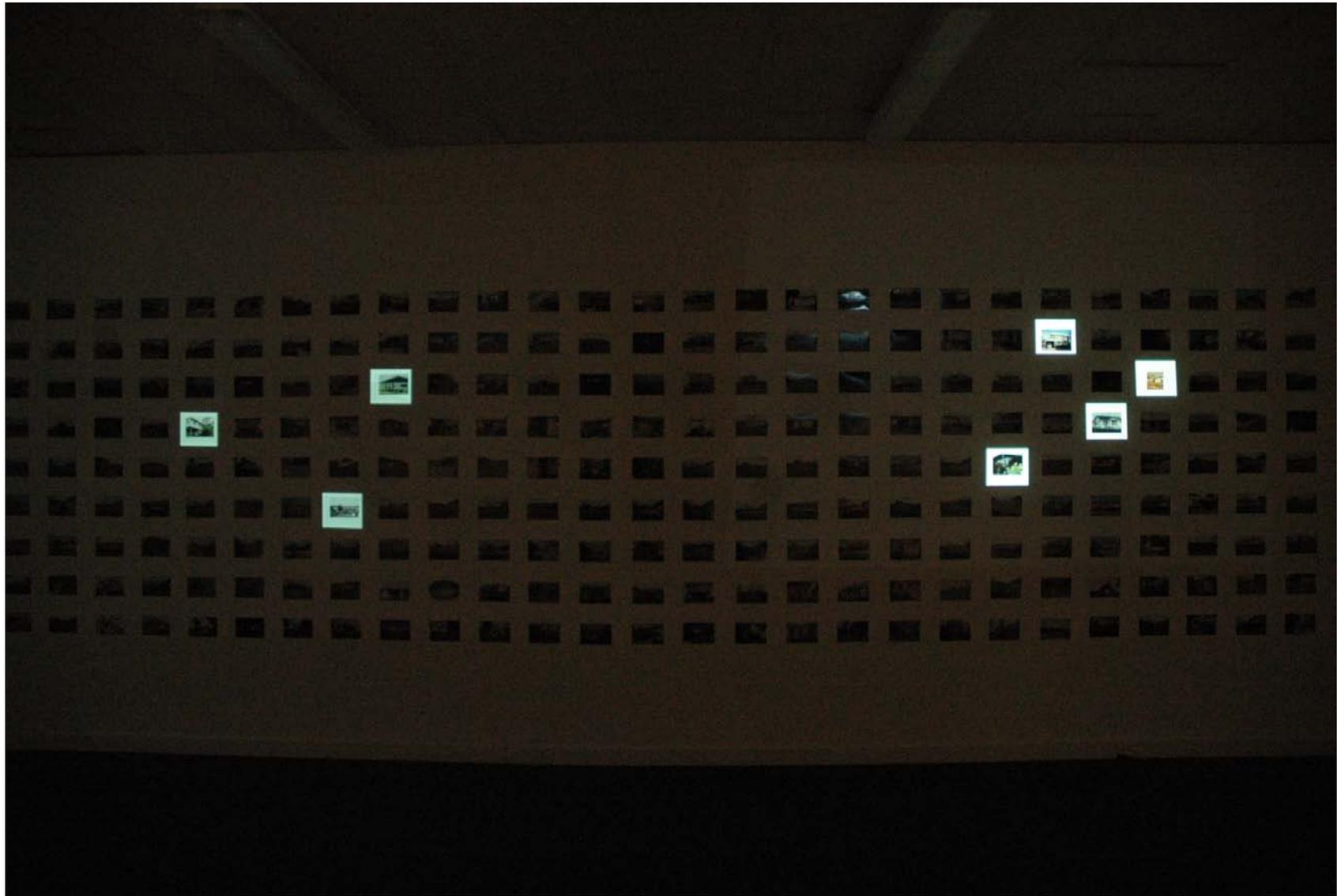**Figure 51. Christina Oldfield,** *Cross-Stitch 7*, 2010

Figure 52

Figure 53

Figure 54

Figure 55-58

Illustration List

Figure 1. Archive photograph collected from Ana Whitlow.
Figure 2. Archive photograph collected from Ted and Pat Watt.
Figure 3. Archive photograph collected from Matthew Landreth.
Figure 4. Archive photograph collected from Ted and Pat Watt.
Figure 5. Archive photograph collected from Greg Paris.
Figure 6. Archive photograph collected from Sarah Hudson.
Figure 7. Christina Oldfield, *Drawing 1*, 2009.
Figure 8. Christina Oldfield, *Cross-Stitch 1*, 2009.
Figure 9. Christina Oldfield, *Cross-Sitch Home Sweet Home 1*, 2009.
Figure 10. Rachel Whiteread, *House*, 1993. Sourced from Mullins, Charlotte. (2004). *Rachel Whiteread*. London: Tate Publishing.
Figure 11. Mark Robbins, *Thanksgiving: Dad, 82, Mom, 77, 52 years*, 2002. Sourced from Robbins, Mark. (2006). *Households.* New York: The Monacelli Press, Inc.
Figure 12. Bill O'Donnell, *Furrows*, 2007. Sourced from www.billodonnellphotography.com/home
Figure 13. Bill O'Donell, *Poles*, 2007. Sourced from www.billodonnellphotography.com/home
Figure 14. Archive photograph collected from Ana Whitlow.
Figure 15. Archive photograph collected from Samantha Wallis.
Figure 16. Peter Piller, *H11, H24, H13* and *H21*, 2004, from the series *Nicer from the earth*, Group H: *Person in front of a house.* Sourced from Jothardy, Manisha. (2005). Peter Piller. *Camera Austria international*, 89. 22-30.
Figure 17. Archive photograph collected from Sally Doughty.
Figure 18. Archive photograph collected from Fay Misikei Foniti.
Figure 19. Archive photograph collected from Sarah Hudson.
Figure 20. Archive photograph collected from Rebecca Jones.
Figure 21. Archive photograph collected from Joy McIvor.
Figure 22. Archive photograph collected from Steve Oldfield.
Figure 23. Archive photograph collected from Rebecca Paris.
Figure 24. Archive photograph collected from Rebecca Phillips.
Figure 25. Archive photograph collected from Ted and Pat Watt.
Figure 26. Archive photograph collected from Ted and Pat Watt.
Figure 27. Archive photograph collected from Ted and Pat Watt.
Figure 28. Archive photograph collected from Miriam White.
Figure 29. Joachim Schmid, *Archiv*, 1986-1999, (installation detail). Sourced from Maconald, Gordon, and Weber, Jon S. (2007). *Joachim Schmid Photoworks 1982-2007.* Brighton, England: Photoworks, Gottingen, Germany: Steidl and Saratoga Springs, NY: Tang.

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Appendix A

The Archive

Documentation of Developmental work

- text based cross-stitches
- test installations

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