

Abstract

This dissertation examines how belonging in diaspora is a contradictory experience of being both here and not here, of moving between cultures and never fully fitting a singular national framework. Focusing on the Anglo-Nordic community in the North of England it is investigating how traditional symbols are important in the formation of identity when not belonging to one defined geographical place. I am using autobiography to create a public narrative of my migrant experience, re-writing narratives of home from my new position in diaspora. I am looking at how the work of Swedish painter Carl Larsson, depicting the traditional Nordic red croft as an idyll, functions as a symbol and a 'site of memory' making migrants feel a connection with their former home, aiding their sense of belonging.

My MA by Research project has two components: artistic practice and a written dissertation contextualising this process. Through art practice I am trying to understand how culture comes into being and how experience leads to understanding. I am using performative photography, operating before language and interpretation to access the complexity and contradiction of a particular experience. The dissertation is providing a conceptual framework for the artistic practice analysing the research process leading up to creating the video installation titled 'Stay this moment' and how the audience receives this work.

From memory, I re-created the interior of a traditional Nordic red painted croft using it as a stage for performative photography. In the Nordic nations this type of wooden croft is a symbol of an ideal home and often a subject matter in national romantic paintings. I re-create female stereotypes linked to the idea of nation. Evoking mixed feelings I instinctively represent myself as partially visible, both there and not there. From my position in the UK and through artwork, I transform the national narratives, expressing a more complex and uncertain relationship to place. My artwork and this dissertation challenge the idea of national borders, of nations as homogenous and identities unchanging. I am using Homi Bhabha's notion of 'Third Space' to explore how my artistic trajectory merge cultures, how new cultural forms can come into being and how these forms can question the authority of national narratives.