

# Stand-Ins for Home

## A m a n d a M c C a v o u r

by Joetta Maue

**Home is a place that we all yearn for** at different moments in our lives. The installations of Canadian artist Amanda McCavour lead us down a road of nostalgia to revisit the fragile nature and memories of the spaces we call “home.”

Growing up in a suburb of Toronto, McCavour was always interested in the act of making and exploring with different materials. She recalls her fascination in how just a few cuts with a pair of scissors could make a blank piece of paper into a snowflake. While working toward her BFA at York University in Toronto, she focused on drawing, photography, and printmaking. A class that looked at drawing as line led her to work with thread and begin making what she calls “drawings in three dimensions.”

Her technique of using Solvy and her Singer pressure-foot sewing machine to “draw” with thread manifests into highly expressive and multifaceted works of art. Her flattened recreations of domestic settings—complete with life-size chairs, end tables, and knick-knacks—are suspended from the ceiling and wall. In an interview for the popular UK website Mr.XStitch.com, she discussed how the idea of removing what was originally there via Solvy relates to her idea of looking at “the impressions spaces and memories leave behind.” The fragility and impermanence of these representations of familiar objects and places underline her inspiration of memory. She is able to encapsulate the essence of memory through this technique, as the process produces only an incomplete remnant or tracing. She intends for these carefully rendered scenes to be interpreted as personal mementos that will inspire viewers to recall fragments of their own lives.

Moving often over the past several years, McCavour felt the desire for accuracy in

remembering the details of her prior homes. In writing about her work *Stand In for Home*, she states, “Making this piece required me to re-visit, remember, and re-create a space that I called home but that which is no longer mine.” As she delved into the memories of each temporary dwelling, she soon discovered that the moment you leave a place that you once called “home,” it becomes fictionalized. The accuracy she yearned for could never again exist. She goes on to acknowledge that her impulse to create objects out of something as intangible as memory stems from the desire to hold on to the past and the knowledge that she cannot.

McCavour’s creative process and unique drawing technique force her to accept—and even celebrate—the flawed qualities inherent in the act of remembering as well as making by hand. She emphasizes the fact that her works are not real places but “stand-ins” by allowing the viewer to walk all around them. The flattened and synthetic aspects of the work reference her earlier interest in photography. A photograph is able to document a physical reality from a fixed point of view, but its truth becomes fictionalized—subject to interpretation—as soon as the aperture closes. The photograph, like McCavour’s work, becomes a frozen moment flattening space, time, and memory into one. Working from her own composite photographs to make each diaphanous re-creation, she composes the space to include only specific elements within the frame.

In both *Living Room* and *Stand In for Home*, McCavour turns her gaze—and her hands—to specific rooms in former homes. In *Living Room*, she illustrates a specific period in one’s life through the representation of hand-me-down furniture, worn-out everyday objects, small thrift store trinkets, and remnants of a

AMANDA MCCAVOUR *Living Room* Installation view, 10' x 10' x 10' (dimensions variable), 2010–2011. Photo: Agata Piskunowicz.

Produced with the support of the Ontario Arts Council.

All works life-size, made with thread, Solvy, and machine embroidery, installation dimensions variable.

Shown Courtesy of Lonsdale Gallery, Toronto, Ontario.









AMANDA McCAVOUR *Stand In for Home* Installation view, 10' x 10' x 10' (dimensions variable), 2009-2010.  
Produced with support from the Toronto Arts Council. Detail *OPPOSITE PAGE*.



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party strewn about the room. Viewers of McCavour's generation and middle class status may see this work and yearn for the carefree days of college living: a house full of friends and the endless possibilities of youth stretching out ahead.

*Stand In for Home* revisits a very different place in memory. In contrast to the disarray of the morning-after tableau of *Living Room*, *Stand In for Home* captures a tidy scene of contemplation where more intimate interactions could occur within the home. The empty table and chairs are ghostly yet inviting with an intriguing mix of ambiguity and detail. As a result, the viewer cannot help but look at the work as a vignette that triggers memories of late-night talks and close friendships, all framed by the intricate floral wall-paper backdrop.

Memories and homes, like McCavour's work, are vulnerable to shifting emotions, new experiences, and evolving ideas of self. The fragile nature of such thin and delicate work, hung without a sense of ground, is what makes it so powerful. Viewers can relate to the lurking anxiety that any home, so carefully built up, can easily be torn down or abandoned.

McCavour began to move away from this home-based work as her life entered a more settled state of being. Her penchant for notions of impermanence and the past has lessened as she makes her own sense of home with her partner. Recent works venture beyond interior environments to explore imaginary spaces with more playful approaches to scale, abstraction, and technique.

*Floating Garden* is inspired by McCavour's budding desire to set down roots. This need to feel more grounded has materialized in an "ideal" garden that she can fold up and place in a suitcase to take wherever she goes. Utilizing imagery and techniques from the history of her craft and the decorative nature of embroidered samplers, botanical illustrations, and historical textiles, she has created a diverse assortment of flowers. Additionally, she harvests fond memories of her grandparents and time spent in their garden throughout her childhood—creating a quiet place of respite as much for them as for herself. McCavour invites the viewer to walk around and revel in the beauty and wonder of her fictional garden. However, just as her rooms are not part of a home, the flowers are sentimental stand-ins devoid of earthy smells and textures. Ultimately, the viewers are moved by the power of their own memories and left wanting the real thing. This sense of yearning is the real magic of McCavour's work.

This fall, McCavour will be on the move again (with her partner) to attend graduate school at Tyler University in Philadelphia. When asked if this emigration will signal a return to making nostalgia-driven interiors she ruminates: "This past weekend I was going through some of my things, trying to purge old items. I took a picture frame off the wall and realized I wasn't really ready to start dismantling our home. I feel the urge to memorialize our current space. We are moving on to a new chapter in some ways, a new city, a new home, but still I feel as though these moments are fleeting . . . we will have more temporary places in our future."

McCavour again reminds us that life is temporary and, of course, therein lies its beauty.

Amanda McCavour's website is [www.amandamccavour.com](http://www.amandamccavour.com). She is represented by Lonsdale Gallery in Toronto, Ontario; [www.lonsdalegallery.com](http://www.lonsdalegallery.com).

—Joetta Maue is an artist, curator, and writer based in New England. She authors the textile art blog [www.littleyellowbirds.blogspot.com](http://www.littleyellowbirds.blogspot.com) and is a regular contributor to [www.mrxstitch.com](http://www.mrxstitch.com). Her artwork can be seen at [www.joettamaue.com](http://www.joettamaue.com).