

John Whitten

After All My Roamin'

Artist Statement

For the past four years, my job has required extensive travel. My itinerant schedule has led me to identify all too well with the transitory lifestyle of the *ramblin' man*. In preparation for my upcoming cross-country move, my sense of organization has intensified as I edit my possessions down to what fits in a suitcase. Because of this, themes such as containment, portability, and displacement have predominantly driven this work and its installation.

The series of meticulous pencil drawings is a time-intensive study that investigates memory, empathy, and isolation. I exclusively use my family and friends as subjects, giving the viewer an opportunity to empathize with important figures in my life—figures from which I am often removed. The medium and scale of the drawings are determined by one key factor: portability. Since I created nearly all of them while on the road, it was critical that they fit in the bottom of my suitcase.

Video and sound incorporate a time-based element that further explores the ephemeral nature of traveling—the coming and going, the ebb and flow, the swells and depressions. Similarly, the site-specific works draw attention to the immediate environment and acknowledge impermanence. I place a compositional emphasis on the *unseen* as well as the *seen*. This visually charges the negative space and suggests reasons and motivations behind the subject's action. The surrounding space and environment isolates the subject allowing the individual's personality and character to be dissected, radiated, consumed or overwhelmed.

Representation is vital to my work as it enables the viewer empathetic access to pleasures and struggles far removed from their own. Art historian and theorist Kaja Silverman eloquently describes this type of empathy as “remembering other people's memories.”