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Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

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Small Vanities

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"...the things that surround us are inseparable from who we are. The material objects we use are not just tools we can pick up and discard at our convenience; they constitute the framework of experience that gives order to our otherwise shapeless selves"

(Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton [16]).

Small vanities, then, are the pleasures derived from the interaction with these material objects. In the following photographs, this interaction occurs twice. First, as a conversation between myself (the photographer) and the subjects - their display and distribution of material items, coupled with their own sense of place within the home shape my view of them. Secondly though, there is a conversation between the viewer and the prints on the wall. While the subjects are displaying themselves alongside inanimate pieces to form a cohesive whole, the flattening and redistribution of this "information" then shapes the viewer's understanding of both subjects and objects. Going forward, these pieces, framed and hung alongside the accoutrements already described will give even further meaning to this concept of social interaction between people and things.

In photographing material goods, the work is inherently tied to concepts of privilege, class, and a form of social hierarchy. However, what you see on the wall is not, in fact, an emblem of any of the aforementioned concepts, but a visual illusion. A recreation of the ideas themselves that the viewer alone can ascribe meaning to. What interests me is the second conversation I talked about above. How does the viewer's relationship to these images imbue them with a further sense of power, or detract from it? The interaction with these images becomes a small vanity for the viewer themselves.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, and Eugene Rochberg-Halton. "The Nature of Things." *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp. 13-17.