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As You Were Sleeping

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As You Were Sleeping

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
Nora Yamazaki Heineman

As You Were Sleeping is a series of portraits of my family as they sleep. In this project, I wanted to explore my relationship with sleep and what it means to be outside of sleep while still in the company of it. There is an intense commonality in our connection to sleep as humans. While you can't share your sleep with someone, you can be asleep together in the same bed or the same room, though you are no longer in the same mental space. You cannot communicate with someone when they are asleep.

I started thinking about this project because of a conversation I kept having with people about their sleeping habits. I noticed we all have anxiety about sleep, and falling asleep. There is a shared experience of when you are trying to fall asleep and can't and the more time passes, the more stressed out you become and the more awake you feel until finally there's that moment when you decide to give up trying, giving in to a sleepless night. We have all experienced the moment sleep becomes unattainable when you want it the most. I thought that there was something beautiful and comforting about this inherently individual experience being so universal.

I have traveled back and forth from Japan all of my life- between two countries with a twelve-hour time difference. During these trips, I spent a lot of time awake during sleeping hours and became aware of a "sleep space": a room or place dominated by sleep and permeated with stillness. In this realm, the presence of the people asleep is felt though they are inaccessible. The sounds of their slow breathing, their shifts from one side to the other, all become part of the background. People may be physically present, but in sleep they become more like objects in the landscape.

This observation led me to think about what settings we are sleeping in, and what landscapes we are becoming a part of. What are the objects we are joining to create this

landscape? I started to pay more attention to bedside tables. Like everything else around sleep, the objects on your bedside table are intimate and tailored to who you are. It is far more acceptable to rummage through someone's bathroom cabinet than their bedside table and even when you share a bed, you rarely share a bedside table. I noticed that we all tend to keep the same kind of objects around us- another facet of sleep that is universal while we feel it is individual.

I like that the scenes in the paintings are slightly illusive- how the longer you spend looking the less sense they make- much like that experience of really wanting to fall asleep. The paintings represent my relationship with sleep- often an observer of it rather than an active participant. The perspective is never perfect and isn't always logical. The light source is often not defined. There is a wonkiness under the representations that lends itself to the idea that while you might recognize the settings they are not yours to enter, only to observe.





