

Sarah Rothberg

Memory/Place: My House

Virtual reality environment, Oculus Rift headset, swivel chair,
CRT television monitor, carpet | 2014–2015

With a lush wall-to-wall shag rug, an old swivel chair, a CRT television, and a virtual reality headset with sound, Sarah Rothberg's installation is immersive to the point of disorientation. By the use of a virtual reality headset, visitors are visually transported out of the family-room-furnished space into an encapsulating digital representation of the artist's childhood home. The viewer's ability to control their exploration through an unusual environment—created by compositing digital 3-D models with old family photographs and VHS home movies—affords viewers an experience not unlike a lucid dream.

Rothberg's installation evokes the same immersive state that inspired virtual experience throughout history: all-encompassing 19th century panoramic paintings, three-dimensional dioramas, the illusion of depth introduced by stereoscopic viewers, and early 20th century military flight simulators, to name a few. By 1987 the term "virtual reality" was born, which catapulted the obscure research into the public eye through bumper-car-sized arcade games and Hollywood films such as the 1992 dystopian tech-thriller *The Lawnmower Man*. The mid 1990s also saw the advent of another technology which promised to change our relationship with a virtual landscape—the Internet, which, consequently, put an end to virtual reality's golden era. Riding the second wave of VR technology, Rothberg cunningly recreates a clunky 3-D environment that is evocative of the aesthetic limits of VR of the 90s—creating a hint of tech-nostalgia that similar to that of Polaroids or VHS cassettes.

Memory/Place: My House provides the viewer an opportunity to consider what makes a place meaningful even if it is only a likeness of a place one once knew. Rothberg's childhood home exists "outside" of our minds but not in our physical reality: the architecture is informed by the artist's memories, the walls are constructed by family photographs, and the digital space is haunted by a series of moments caught on VHS tapes.