Husband and Wife

a marriage of art, craft, and writing

November 14th-20th
The Ellis & UC Galleries, Carnegie Mellon University

Opening Reception—Friday, November 14th
The University Center Gallery
7:00pm

This project has been funded by a SURG grant.

Elizabeth Barsotti
I created *Husband and Wife* as my Bachelor of Humanities and Arts senior project over the course of two semesters at Carnegie Mellon University. I began the project in January 2008. My work included poems, paintings, collections of found objects, furniture, quilts, and handmade books. The project, a marriage of art, craft, and writing, culminated in an exhibition at Carnegie Mellon’s Ellis and University Center galleries in November 2008.

I would like to thank the Undergraduate Research Office at Carnegie Mellon for funding *Husband and Wife* with a SURG grant. Thanks to my advisors, Mary Weidner, Jim Daniels, and Joe Dicey. Also, thanks to the BHA program—especially Franco Sciannamone and Ari Blackford. And, of course, thank you to Linda and Nino Barsotti, Donna Barsotti, Linda Macaluso, Paul Bando, Patrick Smith, Gillian Goldberg, Sue Ferguson, Mary Kiernan, and Eileen Maly for all of your help.

—Elizabeth Barsotti
**Artist Statement**

At its most general, *Husband and Wife* is an inquiry into the nature of duality. What traditions have defined gender as we know it? What is lost, and what is gained through the disintegration of these traditions? Do gender roles deepen or lessen our interconnectedness as creatures of the earth? In matters of art, what are the dangers of drawing distinctions between art and craft? This exhibit is a product of, if not an answer to, these questions. On a more personal level, *Husband and Wife* is the articulation of my belief in preservation and the quiet power of the handmade object. Nests became central to this project because of their natural domesticity. In *Husband and Wife*, human domesticity is juxtaposed against landscape. The voices in my poems are voices wedded to each other and the earth.
Ladder Poem

I wake before the sky turns.
The day waits, wanting.

Silver coins thrown
into the air,

far too many
birds to count.

I know earth, but above is
mystery—

some heavy blanket
tossed down over—larger

than a sea. I will
not kneel to pray

when I should
climb.

Gravity

A wished dandelion.
A seed sent to sow itself,

but now, it begs for tending.
The porches sag while my wife

shucks corn in the rocker—
silk sticks to her fingers as she rips

the husk from the cob. Autumn:
an earth-parade. Each evening

I rake the confetti. There is too much
to consider. The sun shortens its stay.

The leaves rot in the rafters, and I
cannot last the day. I walk to the barn.

There, the giant, sloping roof is also
caving. It all falls in around us.

Even clouds cling to the sky before
their wild and desperate collapse.
The University Center Gallery

Wife
The Farmhouse

stands on broomsticks, spoons
china plates & Ceylon tea
a river of dishwasher & bed sheet sails
rooster or hen, put the children to bed
in the garden weeds peck up again
bourbon tongue, clawfoot tub
stones in the fountain & coins in the sink
the wood grain dances
everything leaks.

Vengo

I till the fields, my arms laden with corn.
My back is bent. I am ripe and ready
for harvesting. September, the edges
of paper, curling. I brown butter in a cast
iron pan. The heat reaches. My body is sore,
but I am ready. I peel a pear. I swallow it.
The sky turns pewter. I hang shirts
on the line and it rains. They become
translucent. I reach for them, my fingers
long and quiet. I am swallowed by dampness.
In the kitchen, grits thicken on the stove. Clouds
move to fill the gutters, and I kneel to pray.
Questions

Where are my blue socks? Where is my coat?
Where are my keys? Where is my hat?
My briefcase—where is my briefcase? Where is my hat?
Where are the children?
Where is my head? Where is my wife? Who am I protecting?
Where is my sword?
Do I need a sword?
Do I need a father?
Where is my wife?
Where is my mother?
Where is my sword?
Who am I protecting?
Where is my hat?

Husband

Elizabeth N. Barsotti
Adam

Gatekeeper, shivering in the garden.
Daylight streams through tassel-flower—
devil's rattle. Night is brighter still.

Dreaming keeps a weary mind awake,
but sleep returns like rain, little
droplets of memory. A day's work—

a curse worth keeping. Fell hand timber
from the full to the change. Kill fat swine
for bacon, and shear sheep at the moon's increase.

Winter Poem

I carved a polished bird
from a tangled nest.

The cotton or the corn—it doesn't matter:
Men grow both with thorny gloves, braced
against the weather, but winter's

getting thicker. The men in town turn themselves
to the glass or to the mine. Either way,
the heart sinks deeper in the chest.

There is a constant white of snow. The air
becomes a zipper pulled up hard.
Recipe for Songbirds

Wait for the cat to deliver, then pluck the tiny feathers. Line the sparrow bowl.

Cook the birds crisp enough to eat bones and all—

bones like lace, bones like straw,
bones that are not bones at all.

And pile the sparrows over polenta. Stretch their thin spindles toward the middle.

Garnish with rosemary near the little feet.
Mad Moon

We argue, and
afterwards, he breaks
a glass against the wall.
He is proud of the torn
paper—the clipped blossoms
in a field of yellow, the delicate
stems, white as cotton
bleached in the sun.

Outside, sheets hang
in the moonlight—the night
so still it seems to beg for more
his clamoring, but I offer nothing.
My skirt billows in the wind.
Inside, I hear him—his noisy breath,
and I think of him as water
hitting the tin roof.

I am wet sheets, pulling
down the line.
Hunger Moon

He says years are only for counting, but
at some point, we stopped kissing
on the mouth. Years like acres of wood.
Trees cut—years we needed the money.
Silt runs down off the hill where the trees
used to be, turns the bathwater gritty
& gray. On the front porch, moths
still dance. The floodlight imitates
the moon. On the back porch, a damp
rotting woodpile. He showed me how to count
years by the rings in the trunk, but
he didn’t need to show me how to count.
Years by leaves in the gutters,
by the space between us in bed.

Creature

The morning is heavy. The skin
between my breasts thins like cloth.

Spells and tightness of breath. The anxious
creature edging out. I am learning
to carry two buckets from the well:
great boulders beneath me.

Strength is unpredictable.
If only I could sculpt the hills
to ease my passing. I miss the best
light of the afternoon. From the top,
I watch the day settle in and go.
I am entering another kind of silence.

The sharp corners of doubt—
bitter fruit in my mouth.

Desire peaks.
It all escapes me.

Evening and a slow kind of ache.
I wrap my ankles. When I fall,
the ground reaches—tries to claim me.
I forfeit the armor of my self.

This dark earth—a live thing
swallowing us whole.
Milk Moon

Night is the tugging
at my shirt and the blankets
in the cradle. No voice
yet calls out mother.

Cries demand me. Hours
dissolve, our soft world
attracting lint and morning
dew. The moon drifts in

and out like sleep while
the cuckoo plays another
waltz, while our sheep grow
restless with my counting.

Rest and Cleansing Moon

I want to lie down on a yellow bed
and watch night’s creases open.
I’ve watched you for five years now.
I loved you in July under a moon
of claiming. I took you as if to make you.
I smothered night with a peeking
dawn and now I wait for sunset. Join
me under the cleansing moon. We’ve walked
far enough to rest. This journey can wait
till morning. For now, let’s hide
from the constant expectation of the sun.
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