



**Tracy Spencer-Stonestreet**, *Teapot*, from *Dragging*, pigment print mounted on acrylic

## artist biographies

**Courtney McCracken** (b. 1990, Jacksonville, Florida) received her BFA in Sculpture at the University of North Florida. She is currently enrolled as an MFA candidate at the University of Georgia in Athens where she lives and works. She was granted the Graduate Dean Award and looks forward to instructing classes at the Lamar Dodd School of Art within the year. Her research includes sculpture, installation, and drawing. Laborious processes such as casting, crochet, cut paper, and metal-smithing are used to create a dialogue concerning the domestic home and the idea of possession. Her work has been shown regularly throughout the Southeast region, including at the National Conference for Cast Iron Art At Sloss Furnaces in Birmingham, Alabama.

**Tracy Spencer-Stonestreet** (b. 1981, Bonn, Germany) is a mixed media artist and lives and works in Hampton, VA where she is an Assistant Professor of Fine Art at Hampton University. She received her MFA in Studio Art from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She has a BA in Art & Design and History from NC State University College of Design and has taken graduate coursework in Art History and Studio Art at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, NY. She was a resident at Artspace in the summer of 2013, received a North Carolina Arts Council Artist Fellowship Award in 2012, and the Logan Award from UNC-Chapel Hill in 2011, among numerous other honors. Her recent exhibitions include the Exhibition of NC Arts Council Grant Recipients at CAM Raleigh, *The Power of Habit*, Neil Britton Gallery, Virginia Wesleyan University, VA, and *Intrusions of Grace*, Lorrie Saunders Art Gallery, in Norfolk, VA.

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### design

Graham McKinney

on the cover, from top:

**Tracy Spencer-Stonestreet**, *Bowl*, from *Dragging*, pigment print mounted on acrylic

**Courtney McCracken**, *Or Something*, acrylic, fiber

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Artspace inspires creative energy! A non-profit visual art center, Artspace presents award-winning exhibitions, educational programs, and artists' studios open to the public. The Artspace Artists Association has more than 120 members, 30 of whom maintain studios at Artspace. Artspace is open to the public Tues.-Sat., from 10 AM-6 PM and on the first Friday of each month for the First Friday Gallery Walk until 10 PM. Studio hours vary.

Admission is free; donations are appreciated. Guided tours of exhibitions and artists' studios are available for groups of 10 or more. Located in Historic City Market in Raleigh at the corner of Blount and Davie streets, Artspace is supported by the North Carolina Arts Council; by the United Arts Council of Raleigh and Wake County; by the Raleigh Arts Commission; and by individual members, corporate donors, and private foundations.

For more information, please visit [www.artspacenc.org](http://www.artspacenc.org).



**Courtney McCracken**, *House Held*, detail, acrylic, fiber, straight pins, thimble, needle, magnet

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# Redefining Ritual

Courtney McCracken &  
Tracy Spencer-Stonestreet

April 4–May 31, 2014  
Gallery 2



# Redefining Ritual

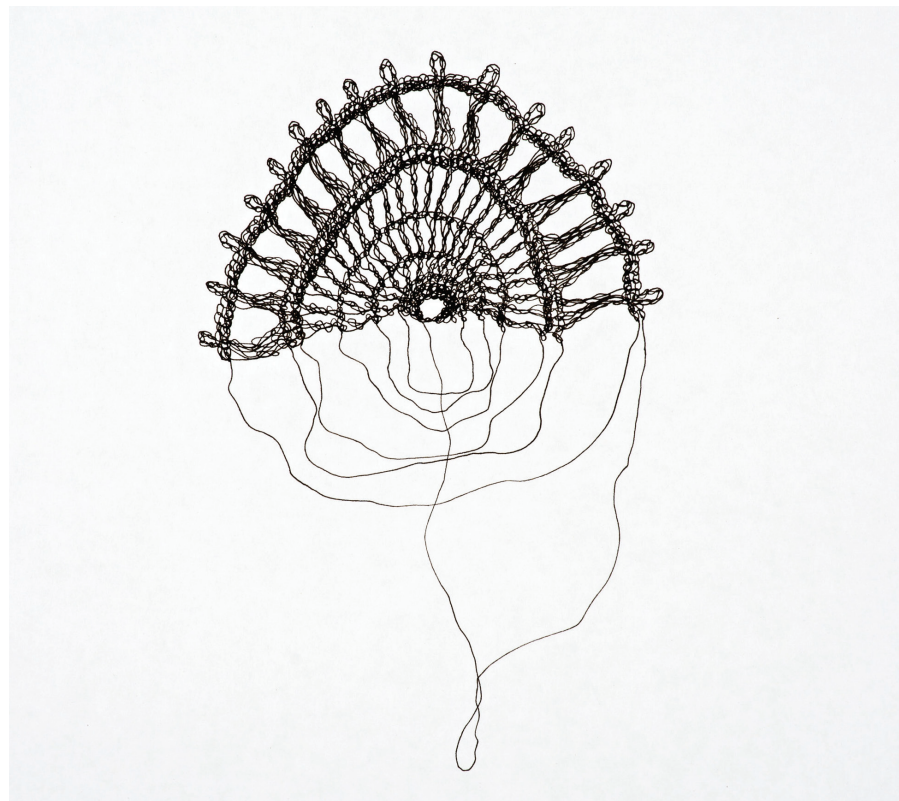
## Courtney McCracken & Tracy Spencer-Stonestreet

This exhibition brings together work by artists **Courtney McCracken** and **Tracy Spencer-Stonestreet**, women whose innovative voices take on the traditions surrounding domestic culture. They ask what it means to inherit dated ideas of femininity in domestic and artistic realms.

They give us an idea of how complex it is to make femininity an empowering characteristic in the 21st century. Spencer-Stonestreet visualizes the process as a literal burden, and McCracken makes it appear at times ambiguous and at times an entanglement. Their subject matter highlights hard work and uncertainty, undermines myths of ease and domestic tranquility, and is thus feminist in spirit.

Spencer-Stonestreet's artwork was created during a month-long Artspace residency in 2013. *Dragging*, her video performance, began with a female performer being tethered with ropes to an entire formal dining room set (including place settings, silverware, centerpieces, and a pitcher). The woman then walked three miles along a rural road in Wake County, bordered by a hog farm, dragging the dining set all the way.

Performed during the steaming hot month of July, the artist explains, "part of the aesthetic of the resulting video is the real effort that it takes a person to pull such a load with just their body." The actual



**Courtney McCracken**, *Following a Thread to the End #6*, ink on masa paper

pieces were exhibited, attached to ropes and arranged along the ground, at the Contemporary Art Museum (CAM) Raleigh earlier this year. The installation looks like an elaborate, catered picnic had an abrupt and dramatic ending.

In addition to the video, Spencer-Stonestreet documented *Dragging* with before-and-after photographs. She exhibits them as diptychs, with each object before it was dragged on the left, and after it was dragged on the right. They are photographed in a straightforward manner, centered on a white background. Their lack of setting highlights the performance's effects on the objects. The scrapes, tears, and dirt call up other types of ruin associated with the home such as domestic violence, theft, and foreclosure.

The most powerful thing about the *Dragging* series is the many narrative possibilities that stem from the power of suggestion. Spencer-Stonestreet highlights the fragility of physical things that, despite their solid presence in our home, are not immune to the ravages of time or changes of heart.

Similarly, Courtney McCracken's work, in her words, "creates a dialogue concerning the home and the idea of ownership." Her sculptures, installations, and drawings upend expected ideas about function and decoration as marks of material success, organization, and stability. Creating her work with crochet and embroidery, and using recognizable objects such as handkerchiefs and chandeliers, McCracken adds elements of unusual design or uncertainty.

The sculpture *House Held* is inspired by a doily. Crocheted from ivory fibers, it has recognizable textures and patterns, but it is three-dimensional, with pins stretching it into five different parts of a rectangular acrylic frame. *House Held* does not perform its usual function of laying flat to protect furniture from scratches while providing a decorative flourish. It has become an object of formal appreciation. She thereby treads that familiar and sometimes fraught line of craft versus fine art with her laborious process.

Cultural icons such as Martha Stewart make the decoration and maintenance of the home seem like an effortless and fun pursuit. The elaborately appointed sets in Stewart's magazines imply that there is someone to stay at home to create them, extending the myth of a happy homemaker. In reality, most contemporary families require two incomes in order to afford the cost of living. McCracken's work, then, engages the range of reactions—ranging from anxiety to satisfaction—of keeping house.

She builds imbalance or disorder into ordinarily nurturing objects, such as embroidering "or something" in red thread on a white handkerchief. The handkerchief raises a question rather than simply being embellished with a pattern or a monogram, reminding us that the foundations of our domestic histories are sand, ever-changing, and not bricks and mortar.

Her series *Following a Thread* is composed of cut paper and drawings in elaborate, radiating patterns. The drawings represent intricate though incomplete weavings. For this author, they recall Penelope, Odysseus' wife, of Greek mythology. Odysseus is away at war, his fate unknown. Penelope vows to remarry after weaving a burial cloth. However, she unweaves part of it each night until she is miraculously reunited with Odysseus. Her repetitive work is thus ultimately rewarded.

McCracken's drawings ask why we still see effort of this kind as satisfying, and why we celebrate such visualizations of busywork. McCracken



**Tracy Spencer-Stonestreet**, *Dragging*, detail, video performance

and Spencer-Stonestreet create artwork that asks how best to live amongst traditional expectations of feminine roles and how these related expectations continue to shape us.

**Shana Dumont Garr**  
*Director of Programs & Exhibitions*

### viewer's guide

What are some domestic traditions that a parental figure passed on to you? What do you think these artists are saying about traditional domestic roles?

Martha Stewart, an influential cultural icon, presents masterful examples of domestic arts. How do you think she would react to this exhibition?

What are the most important skills an artist can have? Is it technical skills, such as photography, crochet, and fabrication, or critical thinking skills such as generating ideas?

How do these artists make us question the role of "art for art's sake" or the difference between craft and fine art?