

Home is where the



Latch-hook
is.

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Latch Hooking + Creating a Sense of Home

A home is often associated with stability. A stability that brings feelings of comfort and safety, a place to rest your body with an ease that isn't possible anywhere else and at best transcends a solely physical space. Ursula K. Le Guin in her short piece, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction", speaks of the alienated role of women and affirms how an individual who is societally deemed to be less than human is actually human:

"if it is a human thing to do to put something you want, because it's useful, edible, or beautiful, into a bag, or a basket, or a bit of rolled bark or leaf, or a net woven of your own hair, or what have you, and then take it home with you, home being another, larger kind of pouch or bag, a container for people, and then later on you take it out and eat it or share it or store it up for winter in a solid container or put it in the medicine bundle or the shrine or the museum, the holy place, the area that contains what is sacred, and then next day you probably do the same again—if to do that is human, if that's what it takes, then I am a human being after all. Fully, freely, gladly, for the first time" (Le Guin 32). The creation of a home being metaphorically linked to a "larger kind of pouch, container for people" brings the definition of the home to a new light. A "pouch" provides the warmth and nurturing textures to make a home comfortable and relaxing. The act of latch-hooking itself is full of the tactile world, each strand passing through the hands of a creator just as the "useful, edible or beautiful" pass through the hands of the human to be later put in a place of temporary safety and stability.

Latch-hooking is a handi-craft that originated in Northeastern Canada and the United States in the mid-1800s, but saw a revival in the 1920s. The origins of the latch-hook are rooted in domesticity and often associated with women living in rural areas. In "As the Locusts in Egypt Gathered Crops", Sharon M.H. MacDonald writes of the commodification of hooked mats in which "affluent urban Americans acquired handicrafts made by "simple" rural folk, eventually realizing large profits through resale when the mats gained mass popularity" (MacDonald 58). The dismantling of the domestic, homely intentions of latch-hooking can be translated into how a home itself is often commodified in the history of residential zoning and stripped of the original intentions of rest and comfort.

The true meaning of a home, the safety net, starts to be stripped away when the focus moves from comfort and stability to commodification. Commodification has imprinted onto the latch-hook craft itself as well as to the physical building of homes. In the history of latch-hooking, the co-opting of a craft originally practiced by rural women by wealthy, upper class women led to a more widespread but also misconstrued knowledge of latch-hooking. The reselling of latch-hook rugs made by rural women who were not compensated for in any way leads to the boiling down of a handi-craft solely to its visual and physical characteristics. The breaking down of latch-hooking to its object form draws parallels to the arbitrary zoning plans made of neighborhoods. The creation of housing developments and zoning for neighborhoods have been historically drawn out with inequity in mind. An L.A. Times article about single family zoning states that “in 1926 the U.S. Supreme Court decided that proposals allowing only single-family homes in neighborhoods were constitutional, even though many supporters of those plans pushed the zoning as a means to segregate their communities, according to the book “Segregation by Design” by Jessica Trounstein, an associate professor at UC Merced”. At the same time of a commodification and deep erasure of rural women from latch-hooking, “a means to segregate [...] communities” took place through how houses and neighborhoods were being zoned out. The unnatural, discriminatory nature of zoning creates an environment detrimental to the original purpose of building a home and in turn creates unnecessary turmoil and fear amongst communities.

Both mass-commodification and inherent discriminatory practices are by-products of an ignorance towards entities who had once “fully, freely, gladly, for the first time” felt human. Going back to a gathering of wants and needs is what best serves an individual’s creation of their own home. A slow pick and build of a home, of a latch-hook rug, is the most rewarding and comforting feeling and one that an act of commodification can never take away from those who deem themselves human.

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