



Shouldn't You Be Working?

100 YEARS OF WORKING FROM HOME

547 E Circle Drive
East Lansing MI 48824
broadmuseum.msu.edu

Always free + open to all.



On view at the MSU Broad Art Museum
Jun. 10–Dec. 17, 2023



Shouldn't
You Be
Working?

SHOULDN'T YOU BE WORKING?

100 YEARS OF WORKING FROM HOME

TERESA FANKHÄNEL

Associate Curator

The home has been a site of labor for millennia. Despite this long history, it was only toward the end of the 1800s that higher education institutions began to treat domestic work as a subject worthy of study. One of the United States' early schools of home economics was founded at Michigan State University in 1896. It allowed women to attend college and earn a professional degree at a time when many schools denied them access to higher education. Today, the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University (MSU Broad Art Museum) occupies the location where the last practice house of MSU's School of Home Economics once stood. Such houses were based on the idea of vocational training and allowed students to test and improve practical skills in management, bookkeeping, planning, and homemaking. A steady decline in academic home economics teachings toward the end of the 20th century made the practice house obsolete. It was vacated in 2001 and, not adaptable to new uses, torn down in 2008 when the new museum building was planned.

The exhibition *Shouldn't You Be Working? 100 Years of Working from Home* explores how work in the domestic sphere has undergone tremendous changes over the last century. Drawing from the museum's own collection, it presents a wide variety of labor practices connected to the home, past and present: from nannies and homemakers to manservants and temporary construction workers, and to the wide variety of home-based practices by Indigenous craftspeople. Working from and at home has always been a hotly contested battleground for political and societal ideologies, and religious persuasions. In the

exhibition, a newly reproduced series of images from MSU's former School of Home Economics and images from the MSU Museum's holdings, which focus on depictions of patriarchal gender and colonial stereotypes, address the range of responses over time.

The advent of new technologies such as the personal computer and, even more so, the introduction of the internet in the '90s has opened up the home to an unprecedented number of workers. The recent pandemic was a watershed moment, which fundamentally brought into question previous ideas of a work-life balance. Traditional boundaries between work and leisure, and between the home and the office, have become increasingly blurred.

Adding to the historical images in the exhibition, ten contemporary architects and artists explore this new domestic frontier in works that reflect the digital turn. Jay Lynn Gomez and Guanyu Xu trace lineages of gender and sexual orientation, national origin, and migration history in the interiors they depict. Faith Holland and Marisa Olson embody recent influencer lifestyles and the trappings of the home office. Chris Collins and Keiichi Matsuda explore what it means to be a cog in the wheel of a world full of independent artificial intelligences and constant connectedness. Won Kim and Theo Triantafyllidis zoom out to capture the way our homes and all those in them adapt to changed labor practices. Angela Washko and Jon Rafman dream about and play with parallel digital worlds that reflect and refract our current lives.

This current technological shift includes innumerable varieties of remote work, which coexist and often overlap with older forms of traditional domestic labor. For some it has been a liberating development that opens up both the timing and place of work; for others it has had the inverse effect: increasing the workload and expected hours as well as adding a new layer of digital surveillance. What lies ahead remains uncertain.

The exhibition includes a steel mockup that recalls one of the former practice apartments of MSU's School of Home Economics. It is superimposed onto Zaha Hadid's—the architect of the MSU Broad Art Museum—immense gallery space as a monument to the site's former occupants and as a physical framework for the exhibition. And just as the practice house was once used as a place where students could rehearse the skills of homemaking, it is now a sandbox for rehearsing the future, where new forms of domestic labor practices can be tested, questioned, enjoyed, and revised by everyone.



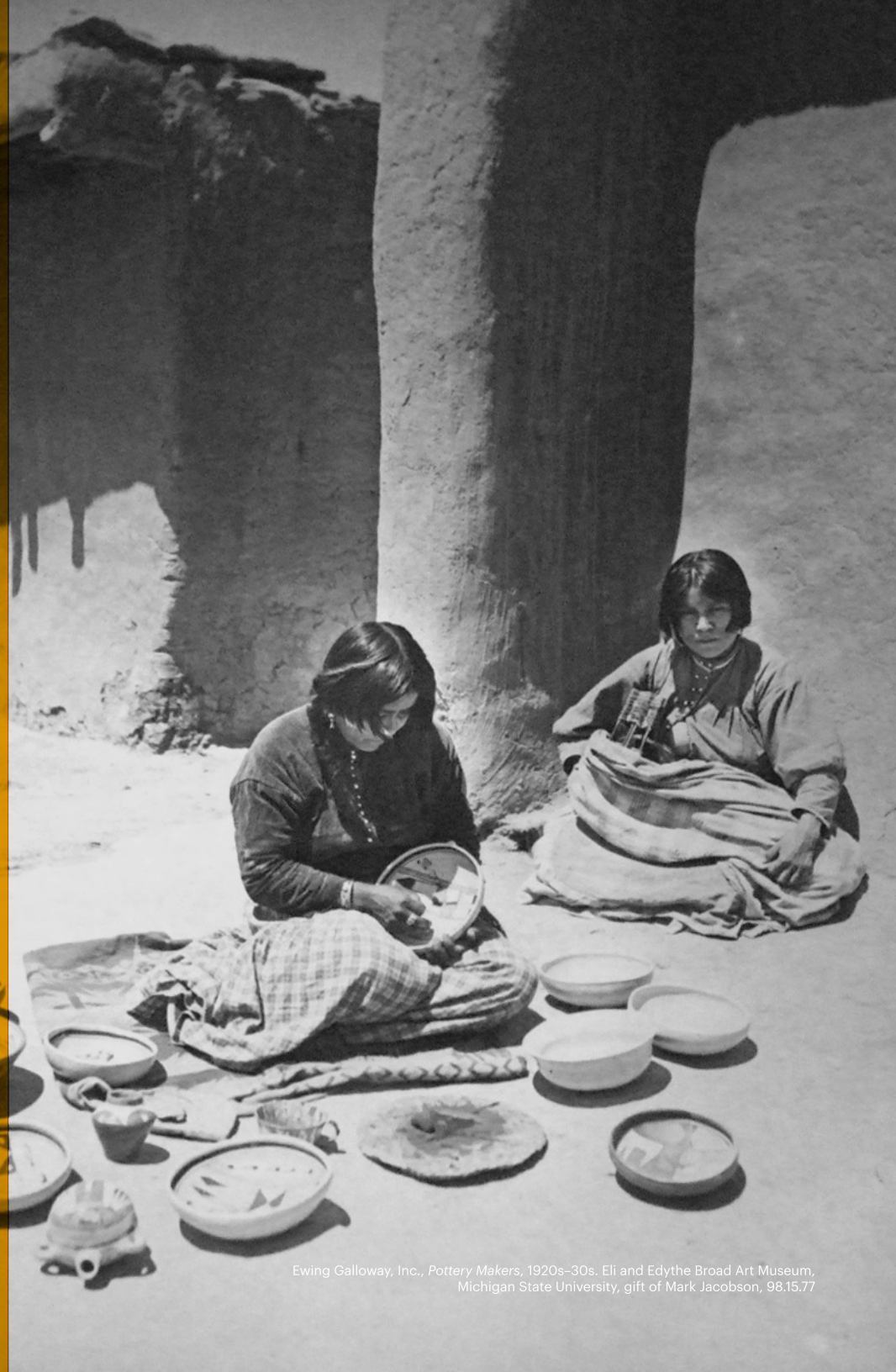
Theo Triantafyllidis, *Ork Haus*, 2022, live simulation video. Courtesy the artist.



Won Kim, *Enclosed: Living Small*, 2014, inkjet print. Courtesy the artist.



Marion Post Wolcott, *A Member of the Fred Wilkins Family Making Biscuits for Dinner on Cornhusking Day, Tallyho, near Stem, N.C.*, 1939, printed 1982. Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, Michigan State University, purchase, funded by the Emma Grace Holmes Endowment, 2006.33.1



Ewing Galloway, Inc., *Pottery Makers*, 1920s–30s. Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, Michigan State University, gift of Mark Jacobson, 98.15.77

WHEN HOMEMAKING BECAME A PROFESSION

THAÍS WENSTROM

Curatorial Research and Administrative Assistant

The rise of industry in the United States in the late 19th century created a new consumer culture. To help with the transition from producing goods to their consumption, Ellen Swallow Richards, an activist for consumer education and the application of scientific and management principles to the family, met with a small group of “domestic scientists” in Lake Placid, New York, to create the American Home Economics Association in 1909. The association was dedicated to improving living conditions in the home, the household as an institution, and the home’s place within a larger community. Based on the idea of vocational training, this group of scientists created a curriculum for schools and universities to teach women how to buy and make household goods, perform household tasks more efficiently, manage budgets, and use resources wisely. This was the beginning of a discipline that played a significant role in giving women access to higher education and an inspiration to build careers in science and other fields.

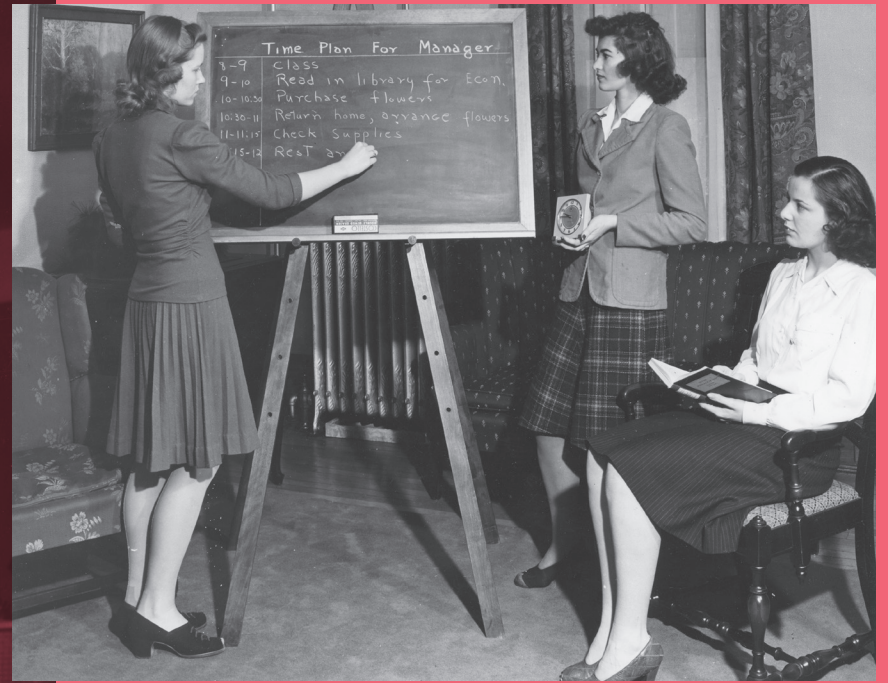
Michigan State University was one of the nation’s first to teach home economics when it opened its new, dedicated school in 1896. At this land-grant institution, agriculture, nutrition, and food were closely related to the field of home economics. Even today, the presence of the school, which merged with the School of Human Ecology in 1970, can be felt on campus. The MSU Broad Art Museum now occupies the site of the school’s last practice house, built in 1946. This is where generations of prospective homemakers, interior designers, childcare professionals, and home economics teachers could put their skills in management, bookkeeping and planning, cooking and cleaning, and event planning to the test. Archival images reveal the inside of these practice houses, a commonly added on-campus living situation, where students spent six weeks with a resident advisor. The photographs in

this brochure show students in study groups, in practical cooking classes, and performing time-management activities, as well as students checking their lab equipment and testing and measuring new household appliances. Also included: the first male student in the School of Home Economics. Carl Dahlbeck from Lansing enrolled after returning from World War II and majored in dietetics to become a dietitian in a veterans hospital. Other firsts, such as the first student of color, are harder to ascertain. Home economics remained a primarily white middle-class undertaking until well into the postwar years.

The school’s carefully curated promotional images emphasize the modern take on homemaking as a serious profession. Home economics was more than cooking and sewing. Contrary to the common stereotype, the study of homemaking did not imply that women should dedicate their lives only to managing home, family, and domestic chores. In fact, the founders believed that the knowledge earned through home economics teachings and the use of evolving new technologies would give women more time and opportunities to grow. Students were taught to use technology to improve their routines, and the lasting impact of their studies helped generations transition into a new era of consumer goods.

Though most universities no longer offer home economics programs, recent years have seen an embrace of a new domesticity by both men and women—the pandemic reinforced the relevance of home economics. The need for face masks encouraged many people to get their sewing machines out, homemade sourdough bread rose in popularity due to a yeast shortage and suddenly everyone was trying to make their starter from scratch. Podcasts of all types now provide listeners much-needed guidance on relationships, parenting, budgeting, and environmental crisis. Social media fuels the DIY trend, with home improvement projects, makeup tutorials, and arts and crafts, recipes, canning, and gardening ideas. In a society in which people are trying to produce less waste, save more money, and be more self-sufficient, the values of home economics still provide answers.





Records of the MSU School of Home Economics, courtesy Michigan State University Archives & Historical Collections.

FINDING A HOME IN THE COLLECTION

DALINA A. PERDOMO ÁLVAREZ

Curatorial Assistant

Sometimes home is a place of absence. For the exhibition *Shouldn't You Be Working?* the museum acquired works by two contemporary artists, Guanyu Xu (b. 1993, Beijing) and Jay Lynn Gomez (b. 1986, San Bernardino, California), who explore the concept of working at home via immigration experiences.

Xu's *Resident Aliens* series began in 2019 in Chicago. Grappling with the complexities of his visa process, Xu was inspired to express the complicated and transient conditions immigrants experience in the United States. Xu follows a thoughtful process: Over two sessions, the artist first photographs the space of a temporary resident in the US from different perspectives to create a fractured portrait of the dwelling. For a second visit, he brings the printed photos and intermingles them with images from the person's private collection—places visited, favorite foods, and family archives—creating a temporary art installation that he photographs again to produce the final work.

The MSU Broad Art Museum invited Xu to East Lansing to make two new works in collaboration with international students at MSU and acquired one work from the Chicago sessions, *AK-08102008-05032021* (2021). Titled after the participants' initials, the date they immigrated to the United States, and the date of the installation, this format speaks to identity and identification in relation to the bureaucracy of the immigration process, in which individuals are reduced to a case number. Xu's work addresses the often dehumanizing and disorienting experience of immigration, as well as the power in creating one's home.

Gomez's practice makes invisible labor in Los Angeles visible. She is inspired by her own experiences as a former live-in nanny in the Hollywood Hills and as the daughter of formerly undocumented Mexican immigrants. While working in such a lavish neighborhood, Gomez was struck by its pristine upkeep by majority Latinx workers during the day, who disappeared once the wealthy residents returned. Beginning in 2011, Gomez would rip out ads and photo illustrations from magazines her employers were throwing away, such as *Architectural Digest*, *Vogue*, and *Vanity Fair*, and then paint faceless laborers on the pages, modeled after the people who worked inconspicuously alongside her. This work resulted in her *Magazine* series. Gomez felt these were scenes she could not paint herself—she could only paint the figure onto the page as a response to the erasure.



Jay Lynn Gomez, *Flor in Landon's Room*, 2014. Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, Michigan State University, purchase, funded by the Emma Grace Holmes Endowment, 2022.36.1

JAY LYNN GOMEZ

Artist

People move in and out constantly in this Beverly Hills community, the Hollywood Hills, West Hollywood. A lot of it is so well-kept but people don't really focus on it, they just accept the reality. Whereas I started wondering, why are people coming up here working? Such as people like myself that actually were living in the home [of the wealthy families], versus those who were living elsewhere and were just driving up on their days of work.



Guanyu Xu, *SK-08122023-03102023*, from the *Resident Aliens* series, 2023. Michigan State University, purchase, funded by the Nellie M. Loomis Endowment in memory of Martha Jane Loomis, 2023.2.2

GUANYU XU

Artist

As a person living in a foreign country, the concept of home is constantly shifting. I use home to probe the connections between personal, familial, and societal. For my project *Resident Aliens*, I seek connections and collaborations as I enter the homes of people who share similar experiences in forming new existences.

WHAT DOES WORKING FROM HOME MEAN TO YOU?

JUDITH WALGREN

Associate Director, Professor of Practice, Photojournalism and New Media, MSU School of Journalism

As a Gen-X Cusper who worked for a start-up, the idea of “working from home,” or domestic labor, evokes multiple meanings. I can remember when mothers were expected to stay home and also when mothers were expected to get back to work. And working for a start-up took “domestic labor” in a new and equally problematic direction, fraught with burnout and exploitation.

JESSICA FLORES

Instructor, Interior Design Program, MSU School of Planning, Design, and Construction

Working from home, I have a purpose to fulfill. I find joy in the daily pursuit of my purpose. I’m a convivial companion to my husband, a loving mother to our children, a heartfelt hustler when running my small business, and an encouraging instructor to my students. I change hats often, and working from home looks different each day for me. This is my purpose and I lead with intention and optimism in working from home to fulfill this purpose.

ANJAM CHAUDHARY

DEI Program Coordinator, MSU International Studies and Programs

I am a night owl, so working from home gave me the opportunity to pace my work according to my most productive hours in the day. I am able to manage my tasks around my energy prime time to increase productivity and take breaks during my efficiency plunges.

ZACH KAISER

Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies, MSU Department of Art, Art History, and Design

The words “working from home” should—rather than being a mere recognition of, or worse, a surrender to, a world of haggard parents and corporate surveillance—also elicit an image of a very different kind of world, one where socially necessary labor is shared by everyone, a world where we all work less and live more. Perhaps its contemporary dystopian connotations can incite the radical action needed to make this different world a reality.

OLIVIA MOREA

Student Assistant to the Registrar at the MSU Broad Art Museum

Working from home is, like many things, both good and bad. My experience working from home came with the pandemic in 2020 when my college classes were pushed to an online format. I found the experience isolating in some ways, but comfortable in others. I learned to slow down, take time for myself, and connect to friends, family, and my art practice in unconventional ways.



Chris Collins, *Today's Modern Office*, 2016–ongoing, video series. Courtesy the artist.



John Edward Saché, *Dhobie (Washerman)*, ca. 1870. Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, Michigan State University, purchase, 89.16.23

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank artists Chris Collins, Jay Lynn Gomez, Faith Holland, Won Kim, Keiichi Matsuda, Marisa Olson, Jon Rafman, Theo Triantafyllidis, Angela Washko, and Guanyu Xu for their trust and collaboration.

We extend our gratitude to our colleagues across Michigan State University who shared their knowledge and collections with us for this exhibition: Kaveh Askari at the Film Studies Program; Lynne Swanson and Marsha MacDowell at the MSU Museum; the librarians and archivists at the MSU Archives and Historical Collections; Judy Walgren at the School of Journalism; Linda Nubani and Jessica Flores at the School of Planning, Design, and Construction; Anjam Chaudhary at the International Studies and Programs; Zach Kaiser at the Department of Art, Art History, and Design; and Scott Friend at Facilities Information Services, Infrastructure Planning and Facilities.

ARTISTS:

ANGELA WASHKO (BITFORMS GALLERY, NEW YORK)

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN

B.J. SMITH

CHRIS COLLINS

EWING GALLOWAY, INC.

FAITH HOLLAND (KELANI NICHOLE, TRANSFER)

GUANYU XU

IMRE BENKÖ

JAY LYNN GOMEZ (CHARLIE JAMES GALLERY, LOS ANGELES)

JIM GOLDBERG

JOHN EDWARD SACHÉ

JON RAFMAN (ADÉL ERDEI-MELLIS, SIMONE MANWARRING, ANDREAS SCHLEICHER LANGE AT SPRÜTH MAGERS, BERLIN)

KEIICHI MATSUDA

LATON ALTON HUFFMAN

MARION POST WOLCOTT

MARISA OLSON

RICHARD J. BROWN

RUSSELL LEE

THEO TRIANTAFYLLIDIS (ALKISTIS TSABOURAKI, THE BREEDER, ATHENS, AND ALISA MICHAIL, SLIMETECH STUDIO, ATHENS)

WALKER EVANS

WON KIM

Cover: Keiichi Matsuda, *Merger*, 2018, video, 4:02 min. Courtesy the artist.

Shouldn't You Be Working? 100 Years of Working from Home is organized by the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University. This exhibition is made possible through support from the Alan and Rebecca Ross Endowed Exhibition Fund. The exhibition is curated by Associate Curator Teresa Fankhänel with Curatorial Assistant Dalina A. Perdomo Álvarez and Curatorial Research and Administrative Assistant Thais Wenstrom.

The Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University (MSU Broad Art Museum) connects people with art through experiences that inspire curiosity and inquiry. Presenting exhibitions and programs that engage diverse communities around issues of local relevance and global significance, the MSU Broad Art Museum advances the University values of quality, inclusion, and connectivity. Opened on November 10, 2012, the museum was designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Zaha Hadid and named in honor of Eli and Edythe Broad, longtime supporters of the university who provided the lead gift.