

Kira Russell '26

Project Title: *Memory in an Empty Mall*

Major: Architecture

Minors: Engineering and Music

Hometown: Ithaca, NY

Faculty Advisor: Wes Hiatt

When I was ten, my family adopted two kittens from the SPCA in my hometown mall. My memory of them is inseparable from the place they came from. The SPCA has been closed for many years now. In its place sits a dark room with dusty arcade machines. Walking through that mall now is nostalgic and sad. The fluorescents buzz, music echoes overhead, and empty storefronts line the walls. That quiet sense of loss, I've come to learn, is something many people share.

Regional shopping malls were designed as civic centers where suburban communities could gather, eat, and work. Developers stripped that vision away in favor of profit, focusing entirely on the health of the anchor stores. When e-commerce arose and the 2008 recession drove families toward big-box discount stores, those anchors and the social life built around them collapsed. As their commercial function fades, the communal identity and memory of these spaces remain intertwined with their physical structure.

This project documents Lehigh Valley malls through spatial mapping, photography, and oral histories, with a focused case study on Whitehall Mall. Five memory books explore themes of senses, food, work, family, and community. The sixth book invites guests to contribute their own memories.

Website Short Bio:

Kira Russell '26 is an Architecture major with minors in Engineering and Music. Her project, *Memory in an Empty Mall*, documents the collective loss of social space embedded in the decline of regional shopping malls in the Lehigh Valley through spatial mapping, photography, and oral histories. Kira is originally from Ithaca, NY. Her faculty advisor is Wes Hiatt.

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