

Magpies don't steal shiny things

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“Art is not about itself but the attention we bring to it.”

— Marcel Duchamp¹

The use of the found object in art has been viewed as laziness by the general public and some of the artistic community and this has caused anxiety for me as an artist. The act of collection, transformation, and repurposing is embodied and documented in my compulsion to collect and preserve the ephemera of everyday life. By using objects, artists have re-contextualized what art can be, and how we view it. The aesthetic choices of artists born at the end of the age of Modern Art (roughly 1850-1950) have been influenced by the hundred or so years before them. My focus is how contemporary artistic society has continued this tradition.

A few terms that need to be explained to understand the meaning used here: firstly *craft* which is defined as “work or objects made by hand.” I will be using the ideas around craft to mean things created by people outside of the artistic conversation. That is to say, it is more about the act of making rather than the final form. This will coincide with the word *folk* in this sense meaning “created by the common people.”² Usually folk or primitive art is thought of as art made by non-artists for their own communities rather than the artistic community, and here folk and craftwork will talk about art that is created in pursuit of the making rather than the elevation of the idea.

Other terms are: *ephemera*, defined as “things that are important or useful for only a short time”³, here will be used to define the objects used in found object situations and creative pursuits, regardless of the time they lasted as objects. Later in the essay I will speak at length

¹ “Engineering Jobs Fair in Munich,” 1957. accessed November 4, 2016. <http://themunicheye.com/news/Marcel-goes-to-Munich,-the-Mondf%FChrer-comes-home.-1347>.

² “Folk.” Merriam-Webster.com. 2016. <https://www.merriam-webster.com> (8 October, 2016).

³ “Ephemera.” Merriam-Webster.com. 2016. <https://www.merriam-webster.com> (8 October, 2016).

about the *liminal*⁴, (“barely perceptible”) *pastiche* (“an artistic work that imitates historical styles”)⁵, and *instauration* (“restoration after decay, lapse, or dilapidation”)⁶, but will spend time explaining the context when we get there. Finally there will be a distinction made between the “found object” and the “Readymade”. Here I will be using the “found object” to describe works that use nontraditional materials to create art, while the “Readymade” will be after the Duchampian ideals, taking objects and using the concepts and placement as the transformation rather than changing of the objects as materials.

While I am going to explore the historical context for many of the topics in depth, the main essence of the essay will focus on contemporary artists as well as the ideas and aesthetics of Rococo and Victorian styles. Folk story and legends will be used as evidence, as well as comedy podcasts, Tumblr posts, and Yahoo Answer’s. Art should be accessible to everyone, and thus the sources and inspiration I gather should come from accessible places as well. And though I have found inspiration from the Fluxus, the Surrealists, and Art Nouveau movements and styles, they will not be a focus of this paper.

To give relevant contemporary context to this essay I will be focusing on artists born after 1950, under the belief that while they are influenced by the culture of the time period I'm speaking about, they are not a direct part of it. The following artists deal in some kind of collection, found object, and readymade style of work, while dealing with various means of memory, reclamation, and storytelling. These arts were chosen for the relevance and stylistic resemblance to my practice.

Cornelia Parker, an artist from England, was born in 1956. She studied at the Gloucestershire College of Art and Design, as well as the Wolverhampton Polytechnic University of Reading⁷. Known mainly for her large scaled installation and conceptual work, Parker utilizes found objects, curiosities of famous events and people, and apocalyptic gestures to take over spaces and leave very unsettled feelings in her viewers. Through her use of the

⁴ "Liminal." Merriam-Webster.com. 2016. <https://www.merriam-webster.com> (8 October 2016).

⁵ "Pastiche." Merriam-Webster.com. 2016. <https://www.merriam-webster.com> (8 October 2016).

⁶ "Instauration." Merriam-Webster.com. 2016. <https://www.merriam-webster.com> (8 October 2016).

⁷ Cornelia Parker. "Cornelia Parker, 'cold dark matter: An exploded view' 1991." Accessed October 30, 2016. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/cornelia-parker-2358>.

found object, which already holds many ideas and associations on its own, Parker transforms the conversation through explosions, suspensions, squishing, stretching, and titling.⁸



Fig 1. Cornelia Parker, *Thirty Pieces of Silver*, 1988-89.

In her piece *Thirty Pieces of Silver* (1988-89)(fig1), Parker collected over a thousand spoons, forks, knives, tubas, plates, candlesticks, cigarette cases, and other silver objects,⁹ and once procured, had them steamrolled. In a darkly cartoonish fashion these once precious and materialistic items ceased to be, while transforming into something else entirely. The work is comprised of the flattened items, suspended by hundreds of very fine fishing line, into 30 discs,

⁸ Cornelia Parker. "Cornelia Parker, 'cold dark matter: An exploded view' 1991." Accessed October 30, 2016. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/cornelia-parker-2358>.

⁹ Cornelia Parker. *Thirty Pieces of Silver*. Tate. 1988. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/parker-thirty-pieces-of-silver-t07461>.

about 30 inches across¹⁰ (fig 2). When installed they are always arranged slightly levitated above the ground, and in orderly rows, the actual makeup of each disc has changed as it has been exhibited over the last 30 odd years.



Fig 2 *Thirty Pieces of Silver*, detail.

Thirty Pieces of Silver uses many different metaphors and imbedded allegories, from the idea of the destruction of beauty, to the creation new beautiful things, to the supposed life and death of a consumer item. That the silver pieces would have been heirlooms but have lost that value in their destruction, to the repeating number 30 in both scale and size, threes being a holy number, or the title referring to the biblical story of Judas betraying Jesus for 30 pieces of silver with a final kiss,¹¹ all of these are stories of what silver can mean. There is also the multi-faceted

¹⁰ Cornelia Parker. *Thirty Pieces of Silver*. Tate. 1988. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/parker-thirty-pieces-of-silver-t07461>.

¹¹ Luke 22:48, *The New King James Bible*. Thomas Nelson. 1979.

definitions of the word “silver;” “silver tongued” in relation to the way one speaks, “silver spoon” having come from wealth and privilege, “silver lining” things might still be okay.¹² *Thirty Pieces of Silver*, by virtue of using the found object, can be transformed into many ideas and concepts, while still holding onto many meanings and ideas throughout its discs and strings.

Transitional Object (PsychoBarn) (fig 3) is a recent installation, and recently de-installed, large scale installation commissioned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, was shown on their rooftop garden and exhibition space.¹³



Fig 3 Cornelia Parker, *PsychoBarn*, 2016.

PsychoBarn is a 5/8th scale red house, modeled after the 1960 Hitchcock film’s house in *Psycho*, which had been modeled after Edward Hopper’s *House by the Railroad*, painted in 1925, created from a disassembled barn from upstate New York that was scheduled to be demolished.¹⁴ ¹⁵ The house is about 30 feet tall, about 2 stories, but representing a three-story house. It is just small enough to fall into the uncanny category, but just large enough to be

¹² Cornelia Parker. *Thirty Pieces of Silver*. Tate. 1988. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/parker-thirty-pieces-of-silver-t07461>.

¹³ Cornelia Parker, *Thirty Pieces of Silver*. Tate, 1988. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/parker-thirty-pieces-of-silver-t07461>.

¹⁴ Cornelia Parker. “The Roof Garden Commission: Cornelia Parker, Transitional Object (PsychoBarn).”

<http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2016/cornelia-parker>. Accessed October 2016

¹⁵ Cornelia Parker, “The Roof Garden Commission: Cornelia Parker, Transitional Object (PsychoBarn).”

<http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2016/cornelia-parker>. Accessed October 2016

overwhelming. Red and white, peeling paint, and a scalloped tin roof; decrepit as it may be, this is a beautiful home. But the best part, the part is that after months in the out-of-doors in New York City, it has been strangely lost its smell. Before, you could smell the hay and the wet grass; and the animals that must have once been inside of the barn. The heat of the day had helped push out those ephemeral, liminal, moments.

For me, the strange thing about this piece, and the environment it has existed in, I wondered if after people had taken their photos with it, and of it; did they forget it was art? In the first hour I was with the piece that spring, I saw a half dozen people lean against the siding of the house. As if it were a real home, and we were at a barbeque or some other familiar social gathering, the house ceased to be a work of art and became part of the space around us. When I returned in the fall, the smell had gone. Strange that the urban weather had taken away a smell when the materials had always been outside, but the way people interacted with the house had not changed. I sat and watched the house for a long time. The way people approached it, almost in wonder, but as soon as the picture was taken, the exploration stopped, and it faded into the background, as homes often do.

Like Cornelia Parker, my work speaks to the narratives that live inside of the objects around us. Pulling and pushing ideas and stories from them as we as artist and viewer, imbue attributes upon them. By using both the readymade and the found object as the material for the transformation of ideas, as well as posted titles and statements, we further the concepts behind our work.

Janet Cardiff, and her husband and artistic partner George Bures Miller both use objects, sound, interaction, and exploration to create spaces that confront the viewer rather than let them become a part of the space. Cardiff is a Canadian artist, born in 1957. She attended the Queen's University and the University of Alberta respectively.¹⁶ Known for her "audio walks" and installations, Cardiff often uses sound and sound equipment as the medium of choice in her solo works. As she started to collaborate with her husband in 1995, her works transformed from

¹⁶ "Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller." <http://www.cardiffmiller.com/>. Accessed October 2016

primarily sound, to more solid installations of the ephemera around sounds and the way we experience them. Both visually and emotionally, their works began to become unforgettable objects in the mind of the viewer, something experienced through touch, sound, and the exploration of forms.

Many of these pieces were part of their own show in Chelsea, New York, at the Lühring Augustine Gallery. When walking into the first gallery to approach *Marionette Maker* (2014) (fig 4), you were bathed in a blue light, (in other places this work had been exhibited this has not always been the case) this transformed the way I observed this work. The piece itself is a small camper. There is an overhang with three theater seats under it, and lights and sounds surround you. As you approach the camper, you can see lights and movements coming from inside, and the inside is a sight to behold. Filled with puppets and objects, mechanics, and motors, I was filled with a sense of wonder; it was like I had stepped into a dreamscape.



Fig 4 Janette Cardiff and George Burns Miller, *Marionette Make*, 2014.

In the back window of the camper is a life size model of Cardiff, sleeping peacefully, in a white silk night gown, hands crossed over herself in an almost corpse like fashion. Small figures, monsters, and musicians dance and whirl on top of her (fig 5). Created using parts of children's toys and white flesh colored clay, they move using a mechanized series of wires and fans. From the uncanny form of Cardiff, there are smaller places to explore in any hidey hole or secret place the artists could find. One space contained a small lake and forest, with a model of the camper on the side. Another contained a boat, sailing in a storm, on an ocean created from the tulle of a hanging dress. If you are seated in the theater seating you are shown an operatic singer and her accompanying pianist, performing in front of the oven of the camper, where a frozen lake and trees can be seen, the lights changing as if with the waning sunlight of an ending day. At one point in the cacophony of sounds a set of boots is heard, and a spoon hitting the side of a metal sink. One might assume this is just a sound element, but upon further exploration the viewer will find it was practically made, using boots on a machine to stomp on the floor, and a spoon on a string and motor to hit the side of the actual sink inside of the trailer.



Fig 5 *Marionette Maker*, detail.

Another piece in this show; *Experiment in f minor* (fig 6), also uses found objects. This time two old folding tables, the long kind, brown and cracked, are covered in speakers without their boxes. It was also very dark in this room, with the only lights being bright spotlights on top of the piece. The room had an eerie feeling about it. As we approached the piece and our shadow fell over the speakers, the music begins, guitars and droning tones ; we realized our shadow cast over the objects set off a sensor. We were creating sound as much as Cardiff and Miller had allowed us to. In a moment of wonder and play, we were continuing the legacy of sound and the relation of the objects, to what the speakers themselves were once made for, moving towards an uncertain future and a forgotten past.



Fig 6 Janette Cardiff and George Burns Miller, *Experiment in f minor*, 2015.

Through both of these pieces there is a sense of wonder, dread, exploration, and the discovery of sound, sight, and light. Both of these works employ the found object in different ways. *The Marionette Maker* operated through the transformation of objects, in their movements

and their meanings; to *Experiments*-using the 'readymade,' not changing the physical attributes or even the purpose, but rather taking away the mechanical origins of a system of telegraphing music, to becoming the music instrument itself. In my own work I have been exploring and experimenting with video and sounds and how these different forms of media and medium transform the found objects in exciting and meaningful ways.

While a portion of my work is about the stage and how the movement and sounds of objects can evoke feelings, I also have found that the collection as a whole can make a powerful installation.

A self-described installation artist, born in 1954, Mike Kelley attended the University of Michigan, and the California Institute of the Arts, Kelley had an extensive exhibition record over the 30 years he showed before his death in 2012. While he often worked on collaborative projects, with Paul McCarthy and Tony Oursler, here we will be focusing on pieces that use toys and other soft sculptural materials.¹⁷

When I normally think of Mike Kelley's work I think of soft sculptures. But because of the type of collection-based work I do, the *Memory Ware Flat* series (2000 to 2006) (fig7) is meaningful to investigate. These pieces are huge, framed, and stuccoed with toys and pieces of things. The name of the piece based on the Canadian folk practice of collection and preservation, these pieces are memorials to stuff.¹⁸ The work collects and hoards things that become large enough to fill your vision. Vibrating colors fill the space to become bleak rectangles of browns and greys, while others spark with life. (fig 8). Kelley once stated, "I playfully give new 'life' to unused studio material and discarded formal and thematic considerations in a manner similar to memory ware's revitalization of cast-off objects."¹⁹ While this, was more about the art making, rather than the sentimentality of his earlier found works, these pieces still live in the realm of nostalgia.

¹⁷ "BIOGRAPHY/BIBLIOGRAPHY." June 16, 1981. <http://mikekelley.com/biography/>. Accessed October 2016

¹⁸ Memory Ware Flats." http://www.skarstedt.com/exhibitions/2012-09-13_mike-kelley/. Accessed October 2016

¹⁹ Memory Ware Flats." http://www.skarstedt.com/exhibitions/2012-09-13_mike-kelley/. Accessed October 2016



Fig 7 Mike Kelley, *Memory Ware Flat*, 2006.



Fig 8 *Memory Ware Flat*, detail.

After Kelley's suicide the public was invited, through Facebook, to contribute to a spontaneous memorial at his former studio recreating the 1987 piece *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid and The Wages Of Sin*.²⁰ The memorial created was called an "alter of unabashed sentimentality."²¹ This is probably the best way to describe the original piece as well: a chaotic assemblage of handmade dolls and blankets Kelley had found in thrift stores, he did not designate to whom more "love hours" are owed, but rather describes the condition of loving something so much and not getting it in return, much like the items that have been used in this sculpture.²² In the visual composition based on Jackson Pollock's large drip paintings, Kelley

²⁰ "Whitney Museum of American Art: Mike Kelley: *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid and the Wages of Sin*." June 15, 2006. <http://collection.whitney.org/object/7317>. Accessed October 2016

²¹ Whitney Museum of American Art: Mike Kelley: *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid and the Wages of Sin*." June 15, 2006. <http://collection.whitney.org/object/7317>. Accessed October 2016

²² Whitney Museum of American Art: Mike Kelley: *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid and the Wages of Sin*." June 15, 2006. <http://collection.whitney.org/object/7317>. Accessed October 2016

uses toys, blankets, bits and bobs to create a piece reminiscent of a Action Painting, filling your entire sightline with knit and stiches of collected toys.²³

The studio practice I have cultivated is about the collection: going to thrift stores, yard sales, poking around online, at lost and founds, and free shelves, are the materials I use to make art. By using these cast offs, donations, and the general trash of everyday life, I use the ephemera of life to represent concepts from childhood to death. Like Kelley, my work often transforms the stuff from just stuff, to something else entirely.

Even though I am working to find the transformative element of the found object, I am still intrigued by how the context of the object can provide the transformation. Like Duchamp's Readymades in a more contemporary context, the master of the found object as transformative art could have been Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Gonzalez-Torres was born in 1957²⁴ and worked mainly with the Readymade, to speak about the AIDs epidemic and the people he loved who would die from the virus, which would tragically take him as well in 1996.²⁵

Gonzalez-Torres' work *Untitled (Perfect Lovers) 1990* (fig 9), consists of two plain black and white wall clocks, each clock is battery powered, which were started at the same time. Eventually as the batteries die, the clocks become out of synchronization; out of time. Because of the way mechanical things work, one may die before the other. There is something dark and unnerving that two things, and two people, could be the same age yet one may die, while the other continues on. *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* was specifically about Ross Laycock, his lover, who was ill at the time. Even with the tension they were forced to endure with while living together, they had to move forward with time.²⁶

²³ "Whitney Museum of American Art: Mike Kelley: More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid and the Wages of Sin." June 15, 2006. <http://collection.whitney.org/object/7317>. Accessed October 2016

²⁴ "Felix Gonzalez-Torres - Artist." May 13, 2016. <http://www.andrearosengallery.com/artists/felix-gonzalez-torres/>. Accessed October 2016

²⁵ "Felix Gonzalez-Torres - Artist." May 13, 2016. <http://www.andrearosengallery.com/artists/felix-gonzalez-torres/>. Accessed October 2016

²⁶ "Dallas Museum of Art: "Untitled (Perfect Lovers)." <https://www.dma.org/collection/artwork/felix-gonzalez-torres/untitled-perfect-lovers>. Accessed November 2016



Fig 9 Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)*, 1990.

As with the last piece, *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* (1991) (fig 10) is another piece pertaining to Gonzalez-Torres's lover, Ross Laycock. After Laycock died in 1991, Gonzalez-Torres created a pile of candy. The individually wrapped, multicolored candies were one of many piled pieces Gonzalez-Torres would make in the last few years of his life.²⁷ Consisting of 175lbs of candy at the start of the day, the weight of Laycock at his healthiest, viewers are invited to take pieces of the pile, essentially breaking down this symbolic body of Laycock once again. Mimicking the way the virus wastes away the body of the victim; the pile withers and fades away. Each day the pile is replenished by whoever owns it at the time, and the cycle begins again.²⁸

²⁷ Art Institute Chicago. <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/152961>. Accessed November 2016

²⁸ Art Institute Chicago. <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/152961>. Accessed November 2016



Fig 10 Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* 1991.

In collecting and arranging, Gonzalez-Torres, and I both use these tactics to elevate the found objects, and Readymades, transforming the way the viewer experiences the work.²⁹ Often viewers do not understand or appreciate how found objects can be transformed into art. While it has taken me a long time to recognize and accept that it is allowed in my own work, artists like Gonzalez-Torres, and those who came before him like Marcel Duchamp and Joseph Cornell, paved the way for me to create the work I am making today.

In exploring the why's of the work I make, researching the history, the traits, theories, and concepts, the idea of instauration was brought to my attention.³⁰ The dictionary definition of instauration is the remaking of something, but in this context instauration is the idea that you and your stuff are linked.³¹ An example from literature would be in the story, *The Velveteen Rabbit*

²⁹ Iversen. "Readymade, Found Object, Photograph." *Art Journal* 63, no. 2 (2004): 45-57.

³⁰ Lunning, Frenchy. Personal communication speaking of the work of Etienne Souriau, October 31, 2016

³¹ Souriau. Étienne. *The Different Modes of Existence*. (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2015). Quote taken from galley version with different pagination.

by Margery Williams.³² In the story, a toy rabbit becomes the favorite toy of a little boy after his favorite toy is lost (fig 11). The rabbit is roughed up and falling apart after being played with so much. The boy gets sick with scarlet fever and the doctor order all his books and toys burned. The velveteen rabbit is very sad and he cries. A flower grows where his tear fell, and a fairy comes to him. Because the little boy loved the velveteen rabbit so much, the fairy turned him into a real rabbit. In the book, the following conversation happens between velveteen rabbit and the skin horse:

“Real isn't how you are made,' said the Skin Horse. 'It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real.'
'Does it hurt?' asked the Rabbit.
'Sometimes,' said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. 'When you are Real you don't mind being hurt.'
'Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,' he asked, 'or bit by bit?'
'It doesn't happen all at once,' said the Skin Horse. 'You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand.’”³³

³² Margery Williams. “The Velveteen Rabbit.” 1922. <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/williams/rabbit/rabbit.html>. Accessed November 2016

³³ Margery Williams. “The Velveteen Rabbit.” 1922. <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/williams/rabbit/rabbit.html>. Accessed November 2016

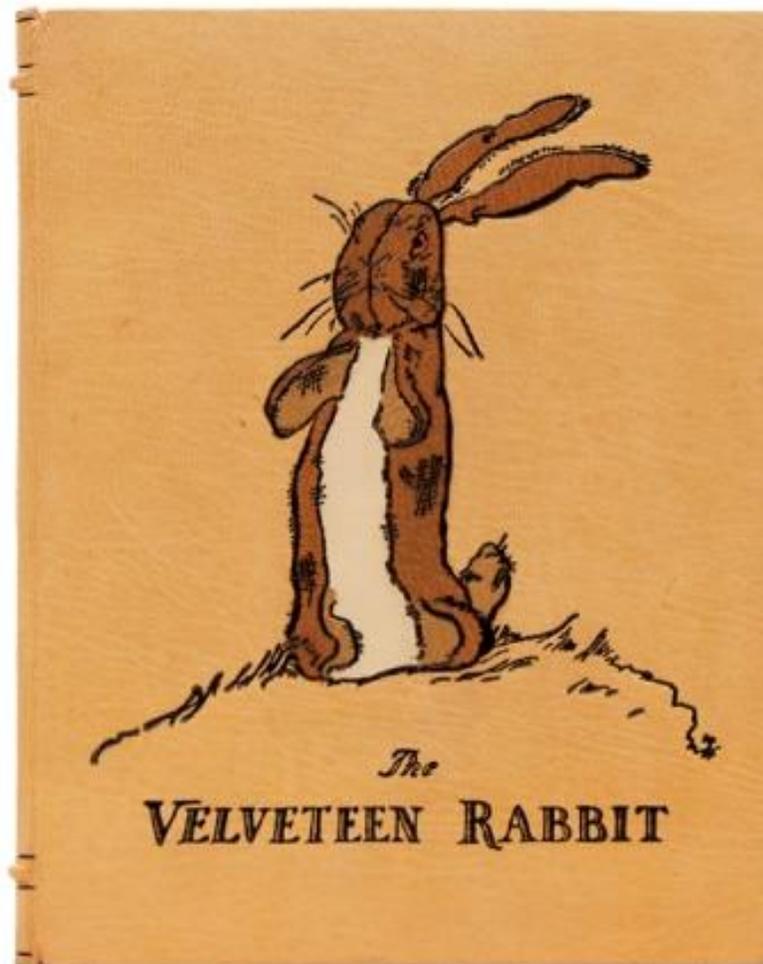


Fig 11 Cover of *The Velveteen Rabbit*, Margery Williams, 1922.

The idea that the things we collect and surround ourselves with, and love, seems to become part of the narratives of our lives. The little stories and moments become attached to objects we cannot bear to lose, are the things that become the clear representations of existence. An example of this is the souvenir. Spoken about in *The Artificial Kingdom*: “The souvenir does not automatically recall the remembrance, conjuring the lived moment and from there unleashing mythical time. Like the cultural fossil, the souvenir is unable to bring back anything beyond the immediate perception that triggers the process of remembrance.”³⁴ That is to say the stuff we collect, the things we buy to remember, become touchstones for how to recall memories. The book goes on “If the souvenir is the commodification of a remembrance, kitsch is the

³⁴ Olalquiaga, Celeste. *The Artificial Kingdom: A Treasury of the Kitsch Experience*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999). 78.

commodification of the souvenir.”³⁵ Kitsch is often seen as a form of low art, and often women’s work is seen as kitschy and not worthy of conversation.

As an example of kitsch is the dollhouse a craft that has persisted for girls and women: a toy, a craft, and an art form in itself. Dollhouses can contain many narratives. It is a blank slate that becomes a stage for children to understand and explain to themselves the dynamics of their lives. This can also be a place for inventive storytelling. From the book, *Playing at Home*: “Part of the appeal of the doll’s house as an object of play and curiosity lies in its seductive contents, the dolls and domestic fittings that nestle inside it, which can be reorganized and added too, echoing the aspirations and fantasies of our ‘real’ adult live. The inside can be revealed on the outside, providing a space of play that is shaped by social norms and desires. But at the same time, its function as a toy; enables the child to play-act.”³⁶ In my own dollhouses, I have chosen to leave the spaces free of people or doll forms, rather than implying the past or future presence of a figural element. This suggests some kind of meaning that can be in flux, and allow the viewer to project upon the spaces a narrative I have begun to tell. This is a back and forth exchange of play.

Storytelling has been a main focus of much of my art and practice. In the last year I have completed a collection of objects I find, photographing them for a piece I called *thou shall not covet*. From the credit card I found on the sidewalk outside of the hospital, to a piece of the sculpture I found in New York, to the heroin needles I could not leave on the sidewalk; I cannot help but explain and explore where these things come from, and why I was compelled to keep them. Though sometimes I feel like these stories are too ephemeral to explain even to myself, for me, storytelling is something that happens in the moment, not always written but often spoken, used in work, and passed from me to my audience.

I have been accused many a time of being a thief with the work I make and the materials I choose to use. Mostly in jest, it is the idea that I find so many interesting things, that is baffling

³⁵ Olalquiaga, *The Artificial Kingdom*, 80.

³⁶ Gill, Perry. *Playing at Home: The House in Contemporary Art*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2014) 87.

to many. As someone asked on Yahoo Answers “What is that bird that’s famous for stealing things?”³⁷ The answer is: the magpie of course (fig 12).



Fig 12 The suspect, European Magpie.

The Magpie, according to *Webster’s Dictionary*, has three distinct definitions. The first, unsurprisingly, being the bird itself. But the other two fit my narrative a bit more literally: “A person who batters noisily” and “one who collects indiscriminately.”³⁸ There’s a reason it is a nickname I have been given. Not often do you hear men referred to as being “chatty” in a negative light, for this is most often a women’s issue. The woman-as-magpie correlation is purported to be because of the connotations of women who speak out; much to the annoyance of some men.

The third definition is the most relevant to the topic at hand: “One who collects indiscriminately.”³⁹ Hoarders, collectors, and even perhaps curators: all could be given the title of “magpie” as collectors. But as a derogatory title, I still suggest that it is a derogatory female insinuation. The woman who collects and holds onto the family heirlooms and elements of our history, from the family bible,⁴⁰ to the children’s drawings and personal mementoes that are

³⁷ “What Bird Is Famous for Stealing Things?” March 1, 2009. Accessed November 5, 2016.

<https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090228184111AAVQPmn>

³⁸ “Magpie.” July 23, 2016. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100126266>. Accessed November 2016

³⁹ “Magpie” Merriam-Webster.com. 2016. <https://www.merriam-webster.com> (8 October, 2016).

⁴⁰ Kalčík, Susan J. and R. A. (Rosan A.). Jordan. *Women’s Folklore, Women’s Culture*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985) 44.

passed down from woman to woman. These items may seem to the outside (male) to be frivolous and unnecessary. But, for many women, these items are the proof we have a history; this ephemera that is evidence of our continued history and importance in time. By using this history, and the idea of the ‘magpie’ who collects and hoards, I propose the objects of everyday life, transformed and transfixed as found objects and Readymades, are the commemorative and celebratory elements of the work of the women we came from. Ideals of beauty and ornament have pushed these celebratory movements towards something that can be seen as just decorative. From *The Artificial Kingdom*: “Ornament is not a luxury, but, in a certain state of mind, an absolute necessity.”⁴¹ Life is barely worth living without beautiful things around us. The Victorians believed this in much of what was done. The book goes on. “One way or another- imagination of the 1840s and 1850s with a fever that made it known as a passion or mania: *pteridomania*, the mania for collecting ferns, one of the major fads of the Victorian era.”⁴² Because much of the collection lives at home, and the domestic home was the realm of women, many of the aesthetics of the time were cultivated by these women.

While the Victorian era is really just when Queen Victoria was alive, (1837-1901); stylistically, Victorian as an artistic style is very similar to, and influenced by the Rococo, but in England. I am focusing on specifically the collecting of pre-1950’s and contemporary women, it is important to touch on the aesthetics of ‘the collection.’ The Rococo and Victorian ideals of femininity, collection, and the culture of death and mourning as specific objects and lore hold important concepts in the work I am making in my art. By definition, Rococo is the style of late Baroque; very ornate, voluptuous, often full of scrolls and asymmetrical patterning, usually French.⁴³

The concept of “Victorian Clutter” evolved from the idea that the Victorian sensibilities of decoration would be collecting many objects popular at the time, and hanging it throughout your living space. These were described as a sort of mini-museum, which were also known as ‘cabinets of curiosity.’⁴⁴ Dating back to the 1500’s the tradition of display of collection is echoed by the Victorian. These were collections of the macabre, the ephemeral, flora, fauna,

⁴¹ Olalquiaga, *The Artificial Kingdom*, 46.

⁴² Olalquiaga, *The Artificial Kingdom*, 47.

⁴³ Snodin, Michael and Frances Schram. *Rococo: Art and Design in Hogarth’s England*. (The Museum; 1st Edition 1984) 27.

⁴⁴ Davenne and Fleurent, *Cabinets of Wonder*, 22.

everything that could be collected and displayed. These objects maintained the idea, to visitors, friends, and family, of the worldly and educated nature of the owner.⁴⁵

In the book *Cabinet of Wonder* by Christine Davenne and Christine Fleurent respectively, the act and display of the curiosity cabinet was described. While the curiosity cabinet as a concept was created in the 16th century, the popularity reached a pinnacle in the 19th century:⁴⁶ “From the Renaissance to the French Revolution, the cabinet of curiosities displayed disparate objects in a single place. Our culture continues to gather diverse objects in one setting.⁴⁷ The return of the cabinet of curiosities may express a desire to build connections between past and present and between collectors and artists. Formerly, the collector, the arranger of worlds, was not considered an artist but rather an amateur—‘one who loves’ according to the etymology. On the other hand, artists ever since the Renaissance identified themselves as creators of works ex nihilo, or ‘out of nothing.’”⁴⁸ (Fig 13) While many artists are still doing this creating out of nothing, by using objects already there, we are making out of everything!

David Gross states in his essay “Objects from the Past”: “We are collectively speaking, surrounded by ‘things’, many billions if not trillions of material objects of every kind,” but goes on to say that we must, to be able to conceptually understand the amount of things, place them into categories, he calls these “natural things” and “humanly fashioned things.” Collections and collectors have always found reasons for the things they are drawn to amass. Gross suggests: “We interact with these man-made objects and become socialized through them, and they in turn become humanized through us as a result of the social uses we give them.”⁴⁹ There is discovery in play.

⁴⁵ Davenne and Fleurent, *Cabinets of Wonder*, 60.

⁴⁶ Davenne and Fleurent, *Cabinets of Wonder*, 5

⁴⁷ Davenne and Fleurent, *Cabinets of Wonder*, 6

⁴⁸ Davenne and Fleurent, *Cabinets of Wonder*, 6

⁴⁹ Neville, Brian and Johanne Villeneuve, eds. David Gross “Objects from the Past”. *Waste-Site Stories: The Recycling of Memory*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).



Fig 13 A room calling itself a ‘cabinet,’ an older term for ‘room.’ Museo di Ferrante Imperat, Naples 1599.

Even today we are elevating our objects through the use of collection, curation and organization, from the personal, to the academic, and the museum. Artists like Taryn Simon, who makes photographs of confiscated items at airport security, uses these methods. Instead of placing the actual item into a case, she has documented and collected them into a book: *Taryn Simon: Contraband*.⁵⁰ In this book we are only given photos and titles like “chicken foot” or “drugs” or “counterfeit purse” without any other context (fig 14). But, with the stark white/grey backgrounds we are forced to confront the absence of context, and place our own context onto these objects.⁵¹ Mike Kelley used framing and grout to collect and display the collection he had amassed. Felix Gonzalez Torrez put his collection on the floor, and invited people to take it

⁵⁰ Simon, Taryn and Ulrich Obrist, *Taryn Simon: Contraband*. Updated and extended edition. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2015). 5

⁵¹ Taryn Simon and Hans Ulrich Obrist. *Taryn Simon: Contraband*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2015. 6

apart, stipulating that the owner of the piece continue the collection daily. But is that the final death of the person the piece represents? How might death play a part in the way we collect?

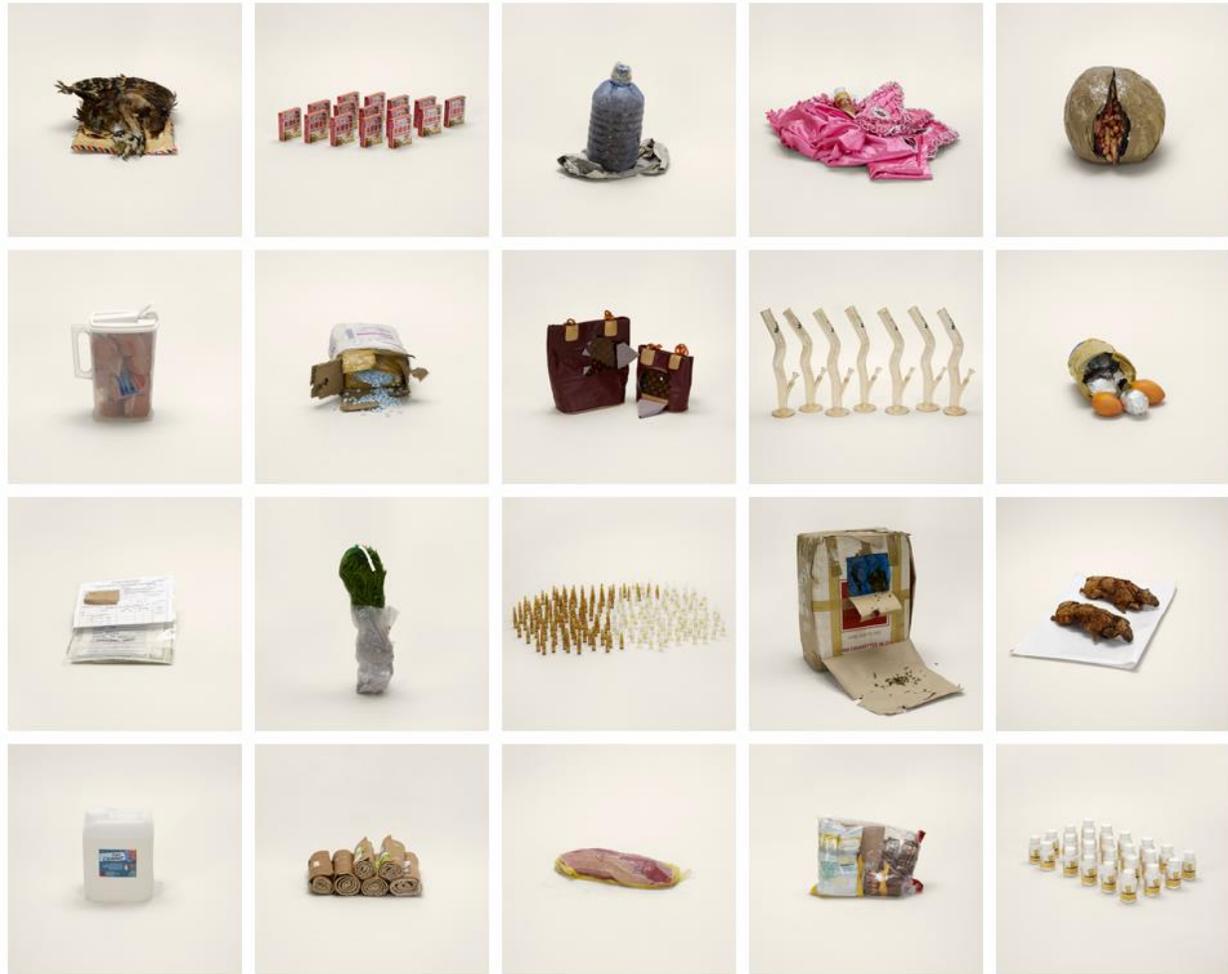


Fig 14 Taryn Simon, *Contraband*, 2010.

The aesthetics of the memorial, the grotto, and the Victorian mourning objects, have been a driving force in much of my recent work, sometimes only peripherally, but even in my more playful pieces I am interested in the way things look. I like to think of it as a witchy aesthetic, a dragon's hoard, a child's play room. Maybe the way we perceive work is more important than the reasoning behind a piece.⁵² The idea of "pastiche" which is the neutral imitation of a work from a past period has always been a part of my work. Much like the default Victorian aesthetics

⁵² Koren, Leonard. *Wabi-Sabi For Artists, Designers, Poets and Philosophers*, 1st ed. (Berkeley, Calif.: Stone Bridge Press, 2008) 18.

of the dollhouse, I also use what I call “Hollywood Victorian,” a series of stylistic choices that keeps the traditions alive, but is not entirely an accurate portrayal of that, or any other, era. Preservation of the memory is really what the Victorians experienced as a compulsion to preserve and collect manifested through mourning objects. Again from *The Artificial Kingdom*: “The change changes brought about by the aura’s shattering are not limited to its dismantling and dispersion- and ensuing obsessive collection- but also consummate a centuries old sense of loss manifested in a highly visual aesthetics of saturation, artifice, and melancholia.”⁵³ We are afraid of being forgotten, and we are afraid of forgetting. All cultures have collected the ephemera around us and we have collected the ephemera of the past, to learn and to grow.

While I am interested in the memorialization of the Victorian aesthetics, I am using the idea of Victorian Clutter as a reference to the actual action of hoarding. I am interested in how that looks and what beauty can be found there.

Hoarding however, as collection, and ephemera around the condition and action, is something I have been exploring my entire life. From the way my grandmother’s home was filled with ephemera from every point in her life, to my mother’s storage tubs and trash bags of silk flowers and Christmas decorations. The idea of hoarding decorative items, those knick-knacks that pepper my life, has always been at the forefront of my identity. I did not realize that this is not something everyone experienced until much later into adulthood. Climbing over piles and digging through boxes of stuff to find new things as a child; exploring through the memories through items that had been so important to my mother, and her mother before her, was my playground, and the only way I knew how to experience life.

Hoarding, as a diagnosis, has existed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, also known as the “DSM5.”⁵⁴ Up until 2013 it was seen as a specific form of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, but is now a unique diagnosis. Hoarding is different from collecting in that it is a not something that is done for pleasure, but rather a compulsion which

⁵³ Celeste Olalquiaga, *The Artificial Kingdom: A Treasury of the Kitsch Experience*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999). 19

⁵⁴ ADA. “Hoarding: The Basics.” Accessed October 10, 2016. <https://www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd/hoarding-basics>.

⁵⁵ Mataix-Cols, D and RO Frost, A Pertusa, LA Clark, S Saxena, JF Leckman, DJ Stein, H Matsunaga, and S Wilhelm. “Hoarding Disorder: A New Diagnosis for DSM-V?” *Depression and Anxiety*. 27, no. 6 (March 26, 2010): 556–72. Accessed October 30, 2016. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20336805>

starts to take over the living and working spaces of the individual.⁵⁶ People in hoarding situations often do not recognize exactly what is happening, just as the women in my family did not. They see these objects as important, even things that outsiders would see as actually being garbage. Not always, but sometimes, collections that were started in earnest by people with compulsive tendencies will develop into hoards that become uncontrollable.

Hoarding is a compulsive act. While Hoarding, capital H, is something that takes over the life of the sufferer, the act of hoarding does not have to get out of control. While minimalism is very trendy today, even for Adolf Loos, over 100 years ago, wrote about tattoos as criminal ornamentation, and the lack of ornamentation is a sign of wealth, for lower class and the poorer of society, hoarding is a sign of protection.⁵⁷ What can be seen in the historical definition of what a 'hoard' is; specifically a personal hoard is "a collection of personal objects buried for safety in a time of unrest."⁵⁸ Poverty, depression, economic hardship, by living and growing up in hard situations where the items you need might not be there, leads to the hoarding of replacements. For me this started with shoes. Because I buy all my shoes second hand, I started buying the same shoes over and over. I found one kind I liked, and every time I saw them at the store I would buy them again. What if something happened? What if they got a hole and then I could not replace them? I had six pairs of the same shoes! I knew logically that did not make sense, but that was my logic. I have also heard of people buying a newer TV, but saving the old one just in case the new one broke. Saving and holding on to the extras, forms a layer of protection around you, solving problems that have not happened yet.

While hoarding has been classified as an unfortunate disorder to have, the act of 'gathering' is not particularly unusual. We like stuff! We live in a consumer culture that glorifies shopping and buying. But the act of collecting and curating specific things is something lots of people do. Rocks, stamps, feathers, small things that have themes, but the curator of these collections do not always have a motive beyond "I like this thing!" The presentation of these collections, like the curiosity cabinet, is a worthwhile pursuit. A healthy drive to collect and document the pleasures in these objects can be good. And if you get really good at it, the

⁵⁶ ADA. "Hoarding: The Basics." Accessed October 10, 2016.

⁵⁷ Loos, Adolf, and Adolf Opel. *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays*. Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1998.

⁵⁸ "Hoard", Merriam-Webster.com. 2016. <https://www.merriam-webster.com> (8 December, 2016).

collections you have made could be donated to an institution, to tell others about the objects and meanings you have collected.

Another way to create a collection that can become a more professional, culturally acceptable way to hoard and curate the objects of others, is in the curatorial position of the museum. There are many different types of museums covering different objects; the historical, the art, the science, the macabre, the religious. Each of these being the depository of our stuff, but also because of their placements in the museum, these objects are elevated in the public consciousness. The act of collecting is given relevance, and the hierarchy of the importance of these items in our collective memory is changed. Summed up well from the book *Junk*: “The systematic classification and categorization of such objects was linked to the development of the museum as an institution. Objects extracted from their cultural contexts, and become defined by a range of imposed criteria such as chronology, shape, material and location. Subsequently, collections of objects and the ways in which these have been organized and represented have taken on a significant role in constriction collective memory and history.”⁵⁹

The idea of ephemera-in-collection is a large part of my practice. It took me a long time to accept that, to call myself a found object artist, but I constantly have to explain what that means. I believe the found object – as well as the ‘Readymade’ after Duchamp -- as artistic materials are the next logical step for making work in the 21st century. As art has moved forward, and new technologies are created, we do not really need to labor the same way our artistic foremothers and fathers had to. This leaves us space to use what is already around us to convey the messages and concepts we are interested in. Why would I make a box from scratch when this one is already here? It already is full of memory and history, so why would I not use it? Almost every found object I could use will already have inclusive meaning, just because of the way we create and interact with our stuff. Again from *Junk*, “In contrast to the souvenir, the collection offers example rather than sample, metaphor rather than metonymy...The collection does not displace attention to the past: rather, the past is at the service of the collection, for whereas the souvenir lends authenticity to the past, the past lends authenticity to the collection.”⁶⁰ That is to say when

⁵⁹ Whiteley, Gillian. *Junk: Art And The Politics Of Trash*, 1st ed. (I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2010) 35.

⁶⁰ Whiteley, *Junk: Art And The Politics Of Trash*, 35.

the collections are put on a pedestal we are able to put our own memories against it, rather than them being the real memory, they become a vessel and a touchstone for those who see it.

As I am writing this from the perspective of one woman, this may not be a universal truth, but from media and growing up with other women and families around me, I can only assume my conclusion is a correct one: mothers hold onto their children's things so they do not forget that it happened; childhood goes so quickly. For the mother, and the other adults around these children, childhood is over in a flash. The ephemera around the child, from the first lock of hair, to the bronzed booties, to the teddy bear, and christening dress; these are items that women have kept, as evidence maybe, or as memorials to the children they love, and sometimes of the children they lost.

Because of the sentimentality around the toys and mementos of childhood, nothing has presented as more compelling as these ephemeral objects I collect and document. Expanding more on the story of the *Velveteen Rabbit, or How Toys Become Real* by Margery Williams, the concept of the real and imaginative play is something many people seem to think does not exist any longer. But children, like the boy in the story, can become fascinated by mechanical toys and things that make noises and do things -- but often the more traditional dolls and stuffed animals remain the favorites long after children become adults. Most people I know still have one or two stuffed animals from their childhood, and there is something to say for why we do that.

In Brian Sutton-Smith's *Toys as Culture*, he explores how toys become currency and cultural touchstones for many.⁶¹ He states: "throughout the millions of years of human history most infant humans grew up without a soft toy or plaything of any kind. It is apparently perfectly possible to be a human without the aid of a soft toy."⁶² He goes on later in the book to add: "Although we can agree that children grow up in a world which today is governed by symbolic media, and that among the media toys play an increasing role in providing the child a substitute for real experience and give them what Barthes has called "an alibi of nature," we will need

⁶¹Brian Sutton-Smith, *Toys As Culture* (New York, N.Y.: Gardner Press, 1986) 44

⁶² Sutton-Smith, *Toys As Culture*, 44.

some measure of the extent to which this pervasive influence controls and dominates the mind and times of children.”⁶³

The idea that children did not always have a substitute for “real experience” is a fair point. But the practice of toys used to help children discover how to accomplish a task is not all that unreasonable. Whether it be like the Inuit’s giving their children small sleds to train for mushing dogs,⁶⁴ or today giving kids kitchen play sets and pretend computers. All of these toys are showing the child how they can relate to the world they are growing up in. I propose that soft toys teach children not only a sort of responsibility towards a possible pet, even in play, but also shows them empathy towards something outside of themselves, that gives nothing in return. We put love into these objects and by the love we feel from this inanimate object, we begin to be able to project those emotions onto “real” things as well.

During my research, one of the books about the Victorians I was looking into was just a collection of illustrations of household, factory, and farm objects,⁶⁵ in particular, dressers, weather vanes, and wheel barrows. These somewhat pedestrian ephemera of every day life, were elevated in this book, through the collection and documentation in specific large groups, of 20 to 100 and more objects. This type of organization in hoarding is really the main difference between the DSM5 and anthropology. There are so many people who see the value in the objects around us, and those people who collected objects through history, are really the only reason we are able to enjoy them today. These bits and bobs of the domestic, purged by many, are precious to our understanding of who we are now. By saving these somewhat-unimportant everyday things, we place ourselves in linear time and gives ourselves a historical context.

Appealing to this historical context, turns the museum into a memorial and reliquary. By this I mean the museum has become a place of reflection and study of the objects, the art, the natural, and the other. A reliquary, by definition is, a container for holy relics, objects to be worshiped and not passed by. Susan Crane, in her book *Museum and Memory*, wrote: “The modes of collecting, organizing, and displaying that characterize the museum have been translated into the

⁶³ Sutton-Smith, *Toys As Culture*, 65.

⁶⁴ History, Canadian Museum of. “Civilization.Ca - Historic Inuit Art - Toys.”

http://www.historymuseum.ca/cmhc/exhibitions/tresors/art_inuit/inart18e.shtml. Accessed January 2017

⁶⁵ Gloag, John. *Victorian Comfort: A Social History of Design From 1830-1900*. (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1973)

very way that publics think about themselves and about their cultures. Museum provide us with objects that are being preserved, saved as memory triggers and archival resources, not only for entire cultures, but at the same time for each individual in that culture.”⁶⁶ That is to say the stuff around us, the objects that inhabit our spaces, are the things that tell us about who we are, and let us better understand other cultures. Later she says “...all museums are a stage, and all the artifacts merely players, that have their entrances and their exits, and one artifact in its time plays many parts.”⁶⁷ The idea of the artifacts taking on roles plays heavily in what is relevant to the type of work I make. The objects I find, collect, and curate create a space inside the installation as the actors and set pieces of the concepts I am working through. The installation and context of the objects creates an elevation of the objects to be more than what they originally were. By changing the space itself we alter the reality of what the viewer will experience.

Contemporarily, the work I am creating is not completely off the cuff. The jokes I have heard since starting to make found object work and about other artists, was that we were just placing bananas on pedestals and calling it the universe. But stuff is not the universe, unless you want it to be. The stuff around us, the stuff we collect, the documented, the undocumented, the thrown away, the protected, it is and, becomes us; we are generators of these objects. The culture of collection, memory, preservation, play, display, all are things relevant in contemporary art and in the work I am creating.

Artists like Mike Kelley who collected the crafts of others and arranged them into a new landscape. For Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and his piles that were a portrait of mourning; inviting the viewer to consume his loved ones, replenishing and starting the process over again each day. When the candy is gone, when it stops being produced, and the pile ceases to be able to be replenished does the art cease to be? Cornella Parker’s contextualized pieces use of spaces, transforming objects and artifacts have become almost apocalyptic. Janet Cardiff collects both objects and sounds, creating spaces both through objects and dioramas, creating dreamscapes and ethereal planes. In my own work I am striving to transform and reorient the beauty I see in the objects I collect. By using the objects, allowing them to be the art, through processes of molding

⁶⁶Crane, Susan A. *Museums And Memory*. 1st ed. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000) 5.

⁶⁷Crane, A. *Museums And Memory*. 18.

and casting them, arranging, documenting, and to engage concepts such as play and childhood memory. The hoard of objects I work with become elevated.

In my piece titled “homestead/a small cluster of homes”, I am recalling a few specific memories. I know it can be incredibly pedantic to talk about how your art has been influenced by your childhood, but all of this, the art I am driven to make, is because of these memories. When I was a child my mother dealt with depression. I didn’t understand what that was then, just that in her this manifested through mid-day naps and piles of things around our home. My dad always joked about mom’s piles, even today, when she doesn’t do that anymore. But when I was a kid, there were always piles of stuff all over our living areas: clothes, plastic flowers, decorations, and books. Normal stuff, but in major quantities. One place that this was most evident was our garage. It was a detached building in our backyard, almost the size of the first floor of the actual house. My dad’s little gym was in there, and a small workshop with all his tools. But the part that mattered to me was on the right when you walked through the barn style doors. It was a pile, from what I remember, the size of a small mountain, of trash bags, and cardboard boxes, and plastic tubs; just a giant hoard of things. And for me, as a small girl, this was one of my favorite playgrounds. I didn’t have any other kids in my neighborhood, and my brother was too loud, but this pile was magical for me. I would spend hours climbing it, and digging through it. Exploring, finding interesting things. It also had a very memorable smell of silk flowers and musk. I would climb to the top of the pile and look out the window into the yard. I would dig down into it and find something new every time. It was just this weird space that always felt like it was changing and growing.

We moved from that house when I was about 11 or 12. And my mom was forced by my dad to throw a lot of these objects away. When we got to our new house we almost never had piles like we had when I was a kid. The attic and basement had stuff, but never to the extent that it had been. There was never this weird place to go to anymore. I feel like I have always been searching for a place like this, a strange safe place that was constantly giving me something. In this final work I am attempting to create a semblance of this memory, of cardboard boxes, and silk flowers, of objects and movement and light, something to try to communicate this magical

space I remember. I am both making a representation of this memory, and evoking it in a new form.

I will continue to explore the collection, the found, the Readymade, the referential, and the hoarding behavior and memories I have inherited from the women in my life. Inspired by the Pointe City Apartments in Johannesburg South Africa, as well as the biblical Tower of Babel, the piece I have created for my final thesis installation is a eight foot by five foot tower created with dioramas of living spaces, scenes of the outdoors, hordes that have become collections, and a living mouse. The mouse was caught from a humane trap and taken care of for this piece. The mouse, along with the lights, became the kinetic elements and the surprises that encourages the viewer to explore further.

The Ponte City Apartment complex was erected in 1979. This 56-story tube-shaped building, was built with the intention that the apartments inside would have windows on both the inner and outer surfaces(Fig 15)⁶⁸. But because of the height and other factors the lower parts of the building are very dark, and because of lack of upkeep and crime, the building's first three floors had filled with trash (Fig 16, 17). People continue to live there even today. The building that has become full of darkness, garbage, and crime, still has love and life within it because of the people and families that live there.

⁶⁸ GmbH, Emporis. "Ponte City Apartments, Johannesburg | 103534 | EMPORIS". Emporis.com, 2017. Web. Accessed Mar. 2017.



Figure 15, Ponte City Apartments. AP



Figure 16, Interior Ponte City Apartments, AP

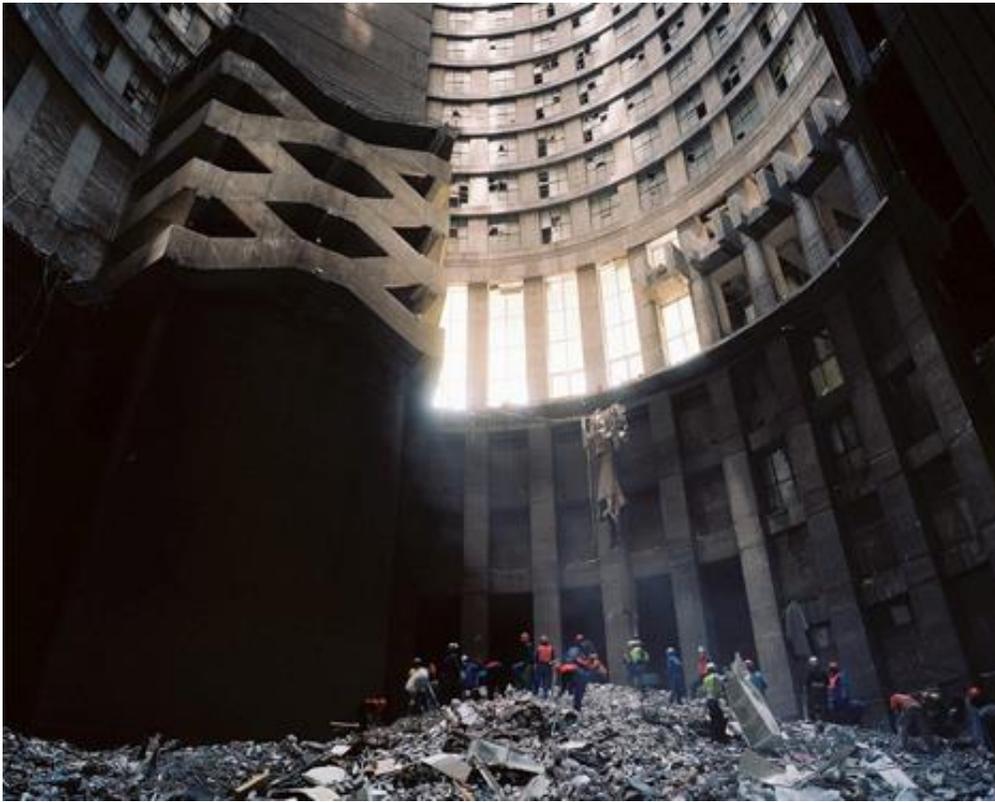


Figure 17, Interior Ponte City Apartments, AP

The biblical Tower of Babel comes from the Book of Genesis where the people moved towards the east and agreed through the common language to make a building tall enough to reach heaven⁶⁹. The God of the Old Testament is fairly vengeful and temperamental, so when God found out what the people were attempting to do God came down and changed their speech to many languages so that they could no longer work together. This structure is often depicted as conical and spiraling(Fig 18). In this piece, in the silence of the people who are no longer in these domestic spaces, I am allowing other's words and narratives on them.

⁶⁹ Genesis 11:1-9 *The New King James Bible*. (Thomas Nelson, 1979)



Figure 18 Valckenborch, Lucas van, The Tower of Babel, 1594

Taking influence in the formal shapes of these buildings as the inspiration for this piece, my structure is made of cardboard boxes, metal tins, doll houses, and other containers, to build a calamity of a doll house like building. The boxes open to the outside of the tower, towards the viewer, while the inside of the tube/tower will be a pile of objects, referential to the Pointe Apartments' trash pile. This pile is visible through the windows in each space. I have chosen to utilize the cardboard shipping box for a number of reasons. Primarily, because I respond to what is around me in my art, and the boxes are a convenient vessel. I also enjoy them aesthetically, for their ubiquitous shape and influences in popular culture. The cardboard box also draws on those specific memories I recall in creating this pile. While these may reference shipping and travel, the final form of the project will be packed up and shipped away individually. Separating from the entire form and continuing its artistic life elsewhere.

There are a few specific dioramic living spaces I will focus on. While the original intention was to create 30 rooms, the end result being more than 100. Narrative has been employed in much of this piece, showing little moments of life throughout the piece. Spilled cups, knocked over chairs, packed up boxes, unmade beds, piles. I tried to show these spaces as

if someone was recently there, or coming back. What I tried to create are small safe spaces for myself. But my favorite part of this entire project has been sitting with visitors on my floor, exploring the rooms and moments. A weakness, and sometimes the strength, of my work is that if I am not there to tell the stories and engage it, then the piece only partially exists. Does this make it a sort of performance? I like to think so. I also like to think that when I tell a story, then that person will tell that story to someone else, and the narrative moves around the room as a game of telephone. The main facts stay the same but the little details change with each retelling. Becoming an oral narrative and history shared in that space, which bring more to the piece than if I had never told it.

Much like Geoff Sobelle's performance "The Object Lesson," in which Sobelle tells stories using the objects on the stage, which is set up like sprawling attic or dreamscape; I am telling stories and collecting memories in cardboard boxes.⁷⁰ In "The Object Lesson," Sobelle tells a narrative that brings the audience into the stage literally by sitting on the stage together, and into the memories of the performer, by telling a story with the audience as the actors and the objects as the setting. In my work I am creating a stage for the objects. These objects are literally installed on a stage in this case, I am both a curator and a facilitator for an untold story.

To focus on a few moments in this larger narrative of living and domesticity I would like to point out the space I refer to as the "After Party" room where two chairs – signals to the people who are not there -- are surrounded by the remnants of a party. There is a dark humor in the spilled glass and the fallen chair. A reference, perhaps, to drunken behavior.(Fig 19)

⁷⁰ Sollebe, Geoff. "NYTW / The Object Lesson". NYTW. N.p., 2017. <https://www.nytw.org/show/the-object-lesson/> 22 Feb. 2017.



Fig 19, "After Party"

Another space deserving of attention would be the "Shut In" room. A room that is basically trashed, with a pile of cardboard and dirty, sooty walls. The rocking chair faces the window, a gun and spit bucket accompanying a forgotten watch. (Fig 20)



Fig 20, "Shut in"

Mixed in with these more completed room there are also smaller moments of the domestic scenes now empty. Not as actual rooms, but as moments of them, narrated by a grandfather clock(Fig 21), a floral rug (Fig 22), a reading nook in a lime green ledge (Fig 23), and a kitchenette with a spilled cup of tea (Fig 24). These are moments that a person might pass through, but would not be remembered of as the heart of the home.



Fig 21, Grandfather clock



Fig 22, a floral rug



Fig 23, a reading nook



Fig 24, a spilled cup

Throughout the piece there are also changes of scale. While most scenes stay in the 1:12 scale of commonly found doll house furniture, there are a few that are slightly larger, and some much, much, smaller. This was a choice that was made both of convenience and because the

various shifts leave the viewer slight disoriented to who and what would live in these places I have given them. (fig25)

How do I write a conclusion? I have talked about half a dozen artists, even more works, theories, stories, and ideas. I have collected, researched, and documented everything I have been trying to put into words over the last two years and beyond that. I have tried to bring all of this together into a legitimate story, something that you can learn from, something not so high brow that I would fall asleep reading it, with a little humor and a little darkness. Art should be comforting, art should be fun, even in its most serious times and concepts; art should say something. And that something doesn't always have to be big, it can be as large as the viewer needs it to be. In the diorama I have tried to contain a narrative with many endings. A place that the viewer, much like a child at play, can project themselves upon. Something that isn't necessarily a happy thing, something tinged with darkness at times, and other times light.

I don't know exactly what any of this means. But I know that I want to set a stage for happiness and joy in others, and sometimes joy comes from pain. The feeling of being left behind, and in starting over; in all of these moments, in the spaces I have created in *homestead*, I have attempted to explain myself. Every project I have ever created has been a self-portrait of sorts, a place in which I have tried to work out who I am, and what I am doing. I have been lost and I have been found, but the journey continues. In this piece I have tried to find the intersecting aesthetical values of Janet Cardiff, the repurposing and darkness of Mike Kelley, the simplistic beauty of Felix Gonzalez Torres, and the grandness of scale and meaning behind Cornella Parker's installations. I hope to bring together these concepts, and the joy I find in them, as I move forward into my artistic career and life.



Fig 25. *Homestead*

Plate List



Fig 1. Cornella Parker, *Thirty Pieces of Silver*, 1988-89.



Fig 2 Cornella Parker, *Thirty Pieces of Silver*,



Fig 3 Cornella Parker, *PsychoBarn*, 2016.



Fig 4 Janette Cardiff and George Burns Miller, *Marionette Make*, 2014.

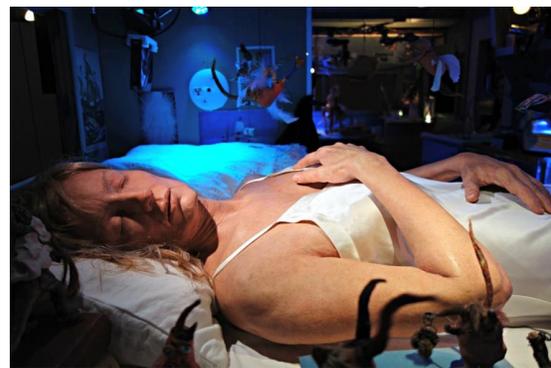


Fig 5 Janet Cardiff *Marionette Maker*, detail.



Fig 6 Janette Cardiff and George Burns Miller, *Experiment in f minor*, 2015.



Fig 7 Mike Kelley, *Memory Ware Flat*, 2006.



Fig 10 Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* 1991.



Fig 8 Mike Kelley, *Memory Ware Flat*, detail.

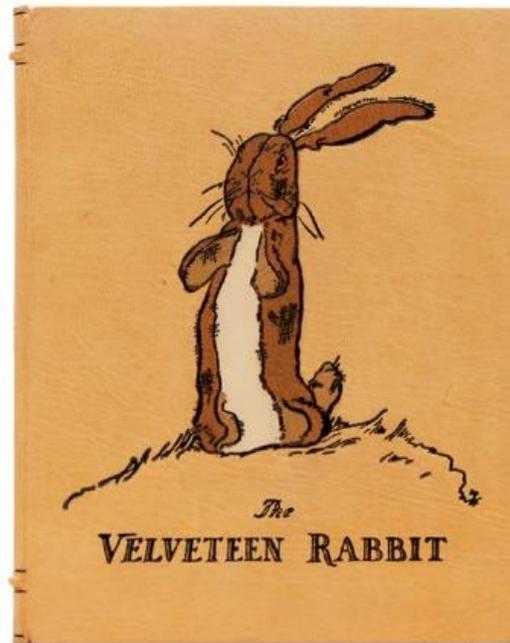


Fig 11 Cover of *The Velveteen Rabbit*, Margery Williams, 1922.



Fig 9 Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)*, 1990.



Figure 18 Valckenborch, Lucas van, The Tower of Babel, 1594

Fig 20, Jesse r Lentz, "Shut in"



Fig 21, Jesse r Lentz, Grandfather clock



Fig 19, Jesse r Lentz, "After Party"



Fig 22, Jesse r Lentz, a floral rug





Fig 23, Jesse r Lentz, a reading nook



Fig 24 Jesse r Lentz, a spilled cup



Fig 25. Jesse r Lentz, Homestead

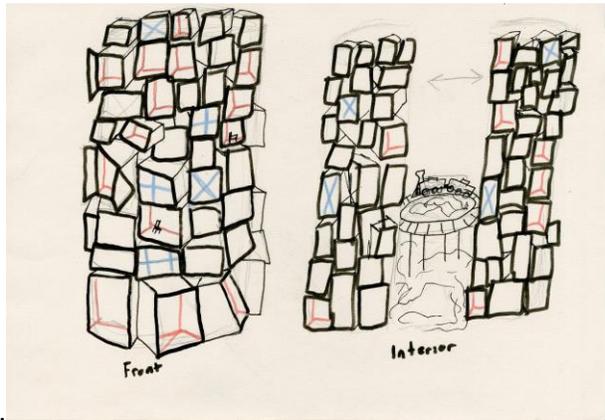
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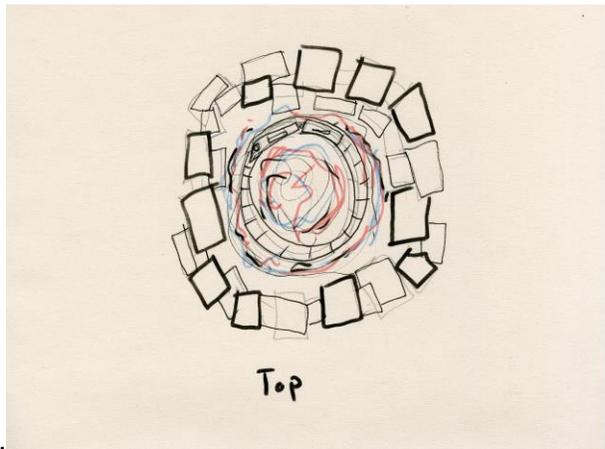
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Work Sample Identification List



1.

Sketch of *homestead*. Pen on paper. 2017 8x11



2.

Sketch of *homestead*. Pen on paper. 2017 8x11



3.

Interior structure of *homestead* wood 2017.96x60x60



4.

Portrait of the artist with structure of *homestead*. 2017



5.

In progress of structure of *homestead*. Wood and boxes. 2017. 96x60x60.



6.

In progress of dioramas. Cardboard boxes, doll house furniture, lights. 2017. Variable dimensions.



7.

Portrait of artist with *homestead(small)*. Cardboard boxes, doll house furniture, lights. 2017. Variable dimensions.



8.

homestead(small). Cardboard boxes, doll house furniture, lights. 2017. Variable dimensions.



9.

Entrance for stage installation of *homestead*. 2017



10.

homestead. Cardboard boxes, doll house furniture, lights. 2017. Installation. Structure 102x72x72



11.

homestead. Cardboard boxes, doll house furniture, lights. 2017. Installation. Structure 102x72x72



12.

Detail *homestead*. Cardboard boxes, doll house furniture, lights. 2017. 10x12x12



13.

Detail *homestead*. Cardboard boxes, doll house furniture, lights. 2017. 10x12x2



14.

Detail *homestead*. Cardboard boxes, doll house furniture, lights. 2017. 6x6x6



15.

Detail *homestead*. Cardboard boxes, doll house furniture, lights. 2017. 4x4x4



16.

Detail *homestead*. Cardboard boxes, doll house furniture, lights. 2017. 15x12x12



17.

Detail *homestead*. Cardboard boxes, doll house furniture, lights. 2017. 15x12x12



18.

Detail *homestead*. Cardboard boxes, doll house furniture, lights. 2017. 8x12x12



19.

Detail *homestead*. Cardboard boxes, doll house furniture, lights. 2017. 8x12x12

20



Portrait of the artist with *homestead*. Cardboard boxes, doll house furniture, lights. 2017. Installation

Video

Clip of installation walk through. 2017. 52 seconds

Video 2

Clip of installation walk through. 2017. 2 minutes 19 seconds

