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Detritus In Situ

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DETRITUS IN SITU

By

Ariel Lavery

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DETRITUS IN SITU

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis document to two people who have made this journey possible.

I have followed this path, in large part, due to my father's unfaltering belief in my potential as a creative producer. His inspired visions for my future taught me to follow a life dedicated to bringing ideas to the world.

Of course, I would never have made it this far without my mother's tireless support. Her hard work and everlasting energy have always been an inspiration to me. She has been

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ABSTRACT

DETRITUS IN SITU

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ARIEL LAVERY, B.F.A. UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

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This thesis paper explores some of the cultural phenomena that influence my conceptual framework and describes the logic behind the formal decision-making that defines my work. Beginning with a description of the nature of the materials and environments I appropriate, this thesis aims to deconstruct the layered system of binaries that build the logic behind my work. The concerns in my work circulate around domestic consumption and the *objects detritus*, a term coined in the paper, that are produced as a result. However, rather than allow the *objects detritus* to remain cast-aways of a culture of excess, my work reincorporates these objects as materials in conglomerate sculptures. This thesis depicts the complex of ideas that help delegate how these conglomerate works come into being.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Our domestic spaces are abstract realms. The materials that makeup our living spaces are deemphasized in service of establishing “cohesive” interior living environments. However, the individual, living in accordance with their own means and practices, often creates an environmental pastiche made up of various historical and cultural markers. We have a propensity to fill our homes with nostalgic objects. Our homes are curiously unfamiliar as the custodians of our most intimate places. As we fill them with trinkets, paint and paper their surfaces, and furnish every corner, our homes become abstract entities of market taste.

My work instigates a natural progression of objects, materials, and aesthetic signifiers from the abstract realm of the domestic. Found objects are retrofitted into sculptural composition and asked to perform functionally in the manner of home construction. Counter aesthetics and techniques are employed at every corner. One decision directly effects every subsequent decision. My work is self-reflexive, working from a system of binaries which are produced out of a combination of institutionally learned behaviors and contemporary modes of living/making.

In the following paper I will discuss various informants to the logic behind my work. The found objects originate from an abstract realm of “Junkspace”, around which we maneuver on a daily basis. These objects’ significance as viable material is discovered through my own processes of assembly. Determining my own role as the collector/maker of pastiche conglomerations is wrapped into the

concept of the work, especially in regards to my own home occupancy. The found objects and the absurdist situations I create for them signify the abstract realm we occupy. My work performs a natural development of engagement with this site. As an inhabitant of the abstract realm of the domestic, a realm that is inherently 'non-site', my work disturbs conventional domestic role-play.

CHAPTER 2 DEFINING THE “STUFF”

Objects Detritus

Detritus:

1. Wearing away or down by detrition, disintegration, decomposition.
2. Matter produced by the detrition or wearing away of exposed surfaces, especially the gravel, sand, clay, or other material eroded and washed away by aqueous agency; a mass or formation of this nature.
3. a. *transf.* and *fig.* Waste or disintegrated material of any kind; debris.
b. An accumulation of debris of any sort.¹

The objects I have been utilizing carry the history of time and culture. They find sanctuary on yard sale tarps and thrift store shelves, catalogued according to color, size, and assumed household regions. Should they not reach this stage of survival they tend to be abandoned by the roadside; fragments of the interior furnishings of the households they once occupied. These *objects detritus* represent inevitable decay, producing a state of anxiety. They are the ruins of past domestic emplacement and cheap design trends.

From the point of their production, everyday consumer objects are presumed to have a short lifespan, serving one or two functions in a single household before being discarded for the next iteration. Often these objects fall apart while still in use, having performed beyond their intended years. Perhaps they are more appropriately described as ruined objects by virtue of their scarred surfaces, broken latches, rusted hardware, and food encrusted handles. They have passed their shelf life.

¹“detritus”, Oxford English Dictionary,
<http://www.oed.com.silk.library.umass.edu/view/Entry/51341?redirectedFrom=detritus#eid>, accessed on January 3, 2013

These particular objects are facsimiles of “high” design. On their surface, they mimic coveted brand name objects, while their material makeup is most often plastic, particleboard, or some other aggregate of moldable materials. They serve as affordable options of interior design for a middle and lower class consumer market. In a market driven by advertising stimulus over need, there is an inherent niche in producing affordable knockoffs for a class with less means.

With the advent of machine production, the creative process with material engagement was replaced with machined processes. A repetitive stitch pattern or a hand-forged finial can be mechanically reproduced in mass quantities. Objects are often defined by their embellished surfaces, themselves falling into the realm of embellishment in the larger context of usable objects. Thus, when they are discarded they represent the “wearing away of” the exposed surface of a global economy.

Junkspace

The hand of the worker today produces excess. Early industrialization in the form of the loom, the printing press, and the steam powered engine, among others, originally increased quality in consumer products. Objects of the consumer market products today are less enhanced by their machined fabrication as much as they are replicated. Modern life may have been fatefully destined for the “cheap” and the “fast” with the advent of machining and locomotion.

Our contemporary environments can be described as “Junkspace”—a term coined and extensively articulated by Rem Koolhaas in his essay *Junkspace*.

Junkspace is what remains after modernization has run its course, or, more precisely, what coagulates while modernization is in progress, its fallout.²

In our current historical condition, the hegemony of Modernism has passed without a moment of epic failure defining its endpoint. Thus, we are left in an ideological realm of machined production and aesthetically driven material usage.

The built... product of modernization is not modern architecture, but Junkspace. Junkspace is what remains after modernization has run its course, or, more precisely, what coagulates while modernization is in progress, its fallout. Modernization had a rational program: to share the blessings of science, universally. Junkspace is its apotheosis, or meltdown...³

The free market economy has all but eliminated locally produced products. Every need, practical or superfluous, is defined and solved by the private market. These predefined needs extend into our domestic realms, constructing a picture of the 'domestic' that we aim to match. Universality is the engine that drives Modernization of product production: accessible function and design. No longer are consumers 'burdened' with the eclectic taste and style of the artisans they do business with. The market re-presents artisanal goods as premixed versions, presenting a sort of pastiche of high design, the irony of which consumers pay no head. "Junkspace thrives on design, but design dies in Junkspace."⁴

Junkspace becomes manifest in the formal enquiry of work by artists like Jason Rhoades and Thomas Hirschhorn. Accumulation of materials and objects in a space denies viewer occupancy. This state of ordered chaos is a fundamental formal quality of the work. In Thomas Hirschhorn's installations, there are clear methods of ordering that reflect the methodology of the archive, but the visual/material

² Rem Koolhaas, "Junkspace", *October* (2002) 175.

³ *ibid.* 175

⁴ *ibid.* 177

experience is so arresting that it becomes difficult to immediately register specific information such as objects and spatial dimension.



Figure 1: Thomas Hirschorn at the Gladstone Gallery, New York, NY 2012

My works are a reorganization of Junkspace. Found objects are of paramount importance as they originate from this realm and act as representatives of an abstract reality. The material state and quality of the objects, as well as their cultural implications, communicate a specific cultural placement as objects of peripheral significance. The wall shelf incorporated into *Linear Progression of Chest, Shoe Organizer, Shelf, Napkin Rings, and Broiler Pan* evidences a late 1970s style through its dark stained surface and combined Art-Deco/Art Nouveau design motif, a style

which is no longer highly desirable or fashionable. The cultural identity of the shelf signals that of detritus. Further evidence of its state of detrition is evident within a missing section of the ornament at the top of the shelf. The ornament has been fractured in a clean straight line, revealing its assembly process with a failed lamination.



Figure 2: Detail image of *Linear Progression of Chest, Shoe Organizer, Shelf, Napkin Rings, and Broiler Pan* showing a failed lamination

These are objects we might rather condemn to the elements, leaving them at the mercy of nature. Instead they are repurposed for another consumptive marketplace. In their descent to ruined materials, these objects are allowed “accommodation between nature and culture, the artificial object sliding imperceptibly towards an organic state...”⁵ Suspended in this descent and now acting as a functional part of a conglomerate sculpture, the objects’ newly acquired status reflects Modernism’s

⁵ Brian Dillon, “Introduction: A Short History of Decay”, *Ruins: Documents of Contemporary Art* (Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2011) 13

ideological explanation of technological evolution “...in which the arrow of change moves toward ever increasing complexity...”⁶, yet continually avoids entropic collapse.

Residual Affects of Modern Schools

Modernism in the contemporary mind is production, efficiency, consumability, replicability, and universality. It introduced smooth surfaces, linear forms, rhythm, repetition and continuity as the elements of design. Bauhaus initiated a desire for modern space by implementing the language of Modernism into institutionalized education. It was, and is, promoted as a universal language of design for the masses. But the lack of concern for humanized spaces led to uninviting and disengaged spaces and products.

Modernist spaces do in fact appear exclusive and empty of people, if not indeed as fundamentalist statements or the products of general right of use. Their artifacts do not show the general signs of use, they withhold any patina that would show their aging process. These spaces—and up to the present day this has been, with a few exceptions, the problem with architecture that is greedy for space—represent a special ordering of life, empty contrived statements, along with their own enthusiastically felt emotion in the face of fictitious economic rules.⁷

Thus began the Bauhaus aesthetic hold on the logic and purpose of design to this day.⁸ The viability of consumer products are defined by their pristine surfaces and monumentality over functional affectivity.

The residue of Bauhaus in contemporary culture exists in contradiction with their original “Art and Craft” motto. The language of surface and minimal shapes in

⁶ Richard Sennet, The Craftsman (Richard Sennet, 2008) 124.

⁷ Michael Erlhoff, “Strange Forces – Three Possible Retrospective Takes on Spatialized Modernism”, Bauhaus (Könemann Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 1999) 589.

⁸ 80. Idib.

Bauhaus was ideal for movement toward a machine driven aesthetic. However, the philosophy behind design in Bauhaus superficially persists. With an increasingly globalized economy, modern design language is reproduced through mimicry, diluting the original intension behind the aesthetic and utilitarian unity. Cheaply designed and fabricated products fill the same middle-class market niche as the nostalgic themes discussed earlier. The diluted philosophy is partially accountable for the cyclical behavior of the consumer as they invest in and dispose of inadequate products.

CHAPTER 3

CRAFT IN A CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

The action of creating objects

The fabrication of these works is driven by a survivalist mentality; made with rudimentary carpentry skills and referencing specific crafting techniques. Objects are retro-fitted to nest within and adjacent to other objects, trimmed out, cut in half, and disassembled to make way for their companion objects in the construction of the whole. Raw materials are cut and formed to match the size and shape of the objects detritus. Complex joints are fashioned and techniques exploited to resemble crafted objects. Allusions to the carpenter's hand appear in the armature of the sculptures.



Figure 3 (left): Detail of *Linear Progression of Chest, Shoe Organizer, Shelf, Napkin Rings, and Broiler Pan* showing lathed section of maple leg

Figure 4 (right): Detail of *Linear Progression of Chest, Shoe Organizer, Shelf, Napkin Rings, and Broiler Pan*

Throughout this process of fitting, joining, and crafting the complete sculpture, moments within the sculpture disrupt the normative experience of a wholly Modern sensibility. The coupling of the crafted details with the object detritus functions to polarize the aesthetic logic within the sculpture, problematizing the binary logic of machine aided craft versus industrially produced objects. In addition, the conceptual delineation between the treatment of raw materials and the treatment of consumable objects is disrupted when an object is cut in half and used structurally, just as it is when a raw material is framed and featured within the sculpture. Given the long history of the found object in the gallery, beginning with Duchamp's Urinal, these objects detritus are newly tasked with performing structurally. Although composed, the combinations of surfaces and categories of materials in the work represent non-conformity with sound design principles.

The Machine Making Us

My decision to use a Modern approach to craft, with all the shop tools this particular institution provides, engages a concept of craft specific to post-industrial means in the institution. The sculpture student develops a peculiar relationship to the shop, which I will address later. The relationship between humans and machinery in the Modern Western world is generally one in which humans either attempt to subvert the machine or navigate its omnipotent authority with total complicity.

Our complicity is obvious at first glance. Overproduction, overconsumption and globalization are widely recognized political problems, which increasingly threaten global economic sustainability. These issues have been a hotbed of debate for decades and need little elaboration save, here, a poignant quote.

Today, we are everywhere surrounded by the remarkable conspicuousness of consumption and affluence, established by the multiplication of objects, services, and material goods... We are living the period of the objects: that is, we live by their rhythm, according to their incessant cycles.⁹

-Jean Baudrillard

Collectively, we are blatantly aware of our complicit consumptive behavior. The individual is subsumed in this complicity; individual's are not typically equipped to produce their own goods. There is widespread anxiety about the machines we produce. To the inexperienced user, machines are like autonomous creatures, with their own will and behaviors. They can be tamed to heed the hand of the user, but can severely harm the person who lacks respect or knowledge for their capabilities.

For many, the solution is to reinvest in the pure, unadulterated use of the handtool. Crafters' circles, for example, return to rudimentary tools that allow them quick material engagement without extensive training on dangerous machinery. Their insistence on the hand harkens back to a "Puritan" nostalgia. Sales of handmade ceramics, textiles, furniture, etc. have a market value outside commercial markets. Some go to extremes in their denial of contemporary technological means and revert to a centuries earlier standard of living. In an effort to purify themselves of the guilt and anxiety shared by the rest of the Modern world, these "revivalist" artisans live off the grid. I have personally known a handful of people living this way

⁹ Jean Baudrillard, "Consumer Society", Selected Writings (Stanford UP, 1988) 29.

in rural parts of Maine, Colorado and New Mexico. In every group, there was shared elation at beating the system, which was accompanied by implications of struggle and doubt that come with working in a small localized community.

Richard Sennett devotes a Chapter to machines in his book *The Craftsman* that begins with human relationships to the first machines in the workshops of Renaissance England and ends with early Twentieth Century American Expositions. One of his examples of the most acknowledged piece of impressive machinery at the Great Exposition of 1851 as that of the robot called Count Dunin's Man of Steel.

Seven thousand pieces of steel, forged into plates and springs, composed a metal man in the shape of the Apollo Belvedere whose one arm stretches out before him as for a handshake. At the turn of a crank this metal figure began to expand, the springs and wheels within him pushing out concealed plates, so that he retained the perfection of Apollo Belvedere's form but became the size of a welcoming Goliath...¹⁰

This recount of an early example of our obsession with machinery previews his ensuing discussion of the concept of the "heroic struggle" with machinery. The struggle is acted out in the shop when one seeks to master the use of the machine. With the production of the Man of Steel, "man" dominates the technology he has created by recreating it in his own image, without any function outside of the production of "the impression of his own power."¹¹

Today's industry resembles a naturalized state of human production, having evolved into a complex ecosystem over the last couple of centuries. The laymen experiences the built environment as if it is naturally occurring fixture in the landscape.

¹⁰ Richard Sennet, *The Craftsman* (Richard Sennet, 2008) 111.

¹¹ 112. *ibid.*

While objects are neither flora nor fauna, they give the impression of being a proliferating vegetation; a jungle where the new savage of modern times has trouble finding the reflexes of civilization. These fauna and flora, which people have produced, have come to encircle and invest them, like a bad science fiction novel. We must quickly describe them as we see and experience them, while not forgetting, even in periods of scarcity or profusion, that they are in actuality the products of human activity, and are controlled, not by natural ecological laws, but by the law of exchange value.¹²

- Jean Baudrillard

Early marvel at machinery of the nineteenth century was an novel, indexical experience. Today, we marvel at the surface of things. Appreciating a car for its external attributes, for example, is typical behavior of a potential owner. Unless educated about the internal processes of the machine, most of what a consuming audience will see is the surface of the car, accompanied by the bellowing sounds of the motor and the performance capability.

Contemporary relationships to the built environment are generated out of a system of commercial availability. Limited items are available for home repair. Our Modern commercial environment mimics the economy of the natural environment, but with an imposed organization.

In a recent article by Michael I. Norton, Daniel Mochon, and Dan Ariely entitled “The IKEA effect: When Labor Leads to Love”, the authors deconstruct what makes IKEA such a appealing alternative to already finished and assembled products.

... when people imbue products with their own labor, their effort can increase their valuation. And while some labor is enjoyable (building a bear with one’s nephew) and some labor allows for product customization (making a bear with one’s alma mater’s logo) – both of which might increase valuation – we suggest that labor alone can be sufficient to induce greater liking for the fruits of one’s labor: Even constructing a standardized bureau, an arduous, solitary task, can lead people to overvalue their (often poorly constructed) creations. We call this phenomenon the “IKEA effect”, named in

¹² Jean Baudrillard, “Consumer Society”, Selected Writings (Stanford UP, 1988) 29.

honor of the Swedish manufacturer whose products typically arrive with some assembly required.¹³

The local hardware store operates under similar auspices as those of IKEA or Build-a-Bear. The concept of the hardware store allows the Western world to continue domestic life “after Modernity”. For the “handyman”, the broken cabinets and dripping faucets do not define his/her standard of living. Rather, broken appliances and furnishings provide opportunities for labor in the home, developing a sense that one lives in a home of their own making.

Assuming a Role

The sculpture student learns how to use shop tools and techniques, learns shop etiquette, and handles raw materials in a privileged, academic environment. The obvious major difference between the student and the employee is in what they are producing. A university-sponsored shop is organized around giving the students a variety of experiences with the utmost in safety standards, while manufacturing shops are organized around specialized production. The sculpture student can drift from tool to tool and experiment with different materials and methods. They tend toward a survey approach to the shop as opposed to becoming very skilled at a specific task. Thus, the resultant work coming out of the shop will, for the most part, be in the category of proficient. My own objects display this same standard of production. They appear to function proficiently for the tasks assigned to them, regardless of their unorthodox usage of material and techniques.

¹³ Norton, Mochon and Ariely, “The IKEA Effect: When Labor Leads to Love”, Journal of Consumer Society (2011) 4.

Sculpture education is driven, in some respects, more specifically than any other medium, by the lived experience in the shop. Consistent with Liam Gillick's assertion that "the art becomes a semi- autonomous aspect of lived experience, for the artist as much as for the viewer"¹⁴, sculptural education is comprised of the community environment that is formed around the production space just as much as the classroom curriculum. In the art school model, students become oriented with their area of emphasis, wearing the affiliated clothing, walking the affiliated walk, and talking the affiliated shoptalk. Conversations about materials and techniques permeate the production space, yet it is all developed under the expectations of what constitutes a functioning sculpture studio. A post-industrial world produces a post-industrial aesthetic, in which the machines of industry are appropriated into intellectualized realms of production.



Figure 5 (left): Richard Serra, *The Matter of Time*
Figure 6 (right): David Smith, *Three Cubis*

Contrary to the large heroic metal sculptures of Richard Serra or David Smith, for example, my work is a self-reflexive intellectualization of industrial means. Combining the mimicry of handcraft in a found object with an element that

¹⁴ Liam Gillick, "The Good of Work", *E-Flux* (E-flux Journal, Aug 2010) 7.

is actually crafted calls attention to those means. The found object is an environmental element of a post-industrialized society, fabricated outside to the post-industrial community. The handmade element is produce within for the purposes of artmaking, fabricated within the post-industrial community. The awareness of origins is important to deciphering the conceptual implications of my work.

By producing work for myself in response to an external community, I am fulfilling an established role as a producer of art.

It is quite appropriate for artists to co-opt working models and turn them to their own ends, from the factory to the bar and even to the notion of the artist's studio, as specific sites of production that be used to either mimic established daily structures or deliberately avoid and deny them. Categorizations of art are not limited to what is produced but are connected more deeply to how things might be produced. It is necessary to focus on production rather than consumption (including the new formalism of responsible didactic criticism) if one is to unlock art's potential...¹⁵

What is production and why does it take on a different aesthetic connotation in sculpture than other traditional media? In my mind, sculpture exists with us, in our environments until we rarify it by placement in a gallery. The modes of sculptural production are often similar to the modes of production of the built environment.

The dilemma in suburban American living exists between the desire to have all the comforts of our contemporary environments without the capacity to maintain them. Robert Pirsig sarcastically describes his friend's mentality when addressing his leaky faucet: "If you're trying to fix a faucet and the fixing doesn't

¹⁵ 3. *ibid.*

work, then its just your lot in life to live with a dripping faucet.”¹⁶ The anxieties that accompany participation in consumer culture have motivated me to follow a path confronting these anxieties through the means of the institution.

I have recently become interested in the concept of the hacked object. The hacker/maker is a new species of craftsman that has particular appeal for younger generations. Publications like MAKE magazine and a multitude of burgeoning “hacker spaces” are evidence of a growing interest in self-altered products, be it out of economic need or an interest in developing a skills-based practice.¹⁷ Often these craftspeople just have a propensity for disassembling and reassembling objects for personalized use. Whereas yesteryear’s craftsman was working to make beautifully carved wooden sculpture, or impeccably joined wooden boxes, this burgeoning community of young makers aims at engaging with modern concepts of machine aided production. By defining objects’ potential and unleashing that potential using additional materials and objects the hacker/maker can create functional amalgamations that humanize industrially produced objects. This “Making Do”, a phrase coined by Michel de Certeau, is a process of undermining the established system within the means of the individual.

These modes of use—or rather reuse—multiply with the extension of acculturated phenomena, that is, with the displacements that substitute manners or “methods” of transitioning toward an identification of a person by the place in which he lives or works. That does not prevent them from corresponding to a very ancient art of “making do.”

¹⁶ Robert Persig, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry Into Values (Harper Perennial, 2005) 15.

¹⁷ Information on Make Magazine can be found online at <http://makezine.com/>. Additional information on hacker spaces, including a blog devoted to current hacker spaces can also be found here.

The last role with which this work is concerned is that of the male producer. Although the female craftsperson is no longer relegated to textiles, ceramics, jewelry making, etc., the realm of woodworking, metalworking, and all around handiwork is still defined culturally as masculine in orientation. Sennet's discussion of the "heroic" endeavor to empower oneself with the most advanced technology of the time remains curiously blind to the use of terminology and history that focuses on a male perspective of craft, with a few examples throughout of significant female figures who engage in "women's craft". The use of the term "hero" has undeniable male connotation.

The presence of gender specificity in the art object is very significant in my practice. When I encounter a work of art that does not appear to be gender specific I am always curious about the identity of its producer, especially if it utilizes modes of craft. Without expressive clues as to the gender of the artist, the default role always seems to be male. I am not interested in assigning value to the switching of gender roles through expressive means, but I am insisting that this type of manual labor takes a stance on gender associations. Moments within the sculptures combine modes of making that can be associated with gender specificity. The replacement of half of an amazon box with polished steel, which contains a fork and a scrap of upholstery in *Linear Progression of Fork, Amazon Box, and Cigar Case*, inserts a male oriented industrial material into the realm of the feminine domestic. The hard, shiny, and permanent, must conform to the soft, demure, and mobile. This is the nature of our domestic environments. The armature and hard materials, which

provide stability to the home, are covered over with appliques and soft materials that connote a female presence.



Figure 7: *Linear Progression of Fork, Amazon Box, and Cigar Case*

My work disobeys historical expectations of sculpture that linger in a contemporary context: skilled craft, faultless use of tools, material suitability for structural and aesthetic integrity, and a masculine aesthetic sensibility. Rather, these works exhibit a willful, playful ineptitude. This disruption of conventional expectations acknowledges the “game” of artistic activity that Nicholas Bourriaud defines in the first chapter, “Relational Form”, of his book *Relational Aesthetics*.

Artistic activity is a game, whose forms, patterns and functions develop and evolve according to periods and social contexts; it is not an immutable essence... A certain aspect of the

program of modernity has been fairly and squarely wound up (and not, let us hasten to emphasize in these bourgeois times, the spirit informing it).¹⁸

These works reorganize the “program of modernity” in a pastiche of compositional, material, and process based principles. The use of certain techniques as compositional decisions illustrates the “game” of art making by the nature of one compositional element undermining another. This is the “resistance” in the work, which acts in congruity with Liam Gillick’s description of “the entropic quality of art’s structural and critical trajectory”¹⁹. The *Linear Progressions* embody an active resistance against convention by favoring an “action-based” logic over a “results-based” logic.

¹⁸ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Leses Du Réel, 2002) 11.

¹⁹ Liam Gillick, “The Good of Work”, *E-Flux* (E-flux Journal, Aug 2010) 7.

CHAPTER 4

MATERIAL SPECIFICITY

Earlier, I discussed the economy of the found objects with regard to their aesthetic integrity and visible record of use. The categorical identity of these objects as detritus is important in beginning to understand one dichotomous relationship within the work, but does not account for the vernacular of the individual objects. My work disrupts Koolhaase's ardent descriptions of an entropic Junkspace by finding delight in the abundance and variety of materials available for adoption. Objects detritus are like building blocks, furthering the constructed narrative with additional connotations. Their motifs are emphasized within a system organized out of visual causality. For example, when a series of components have come together that require the presence of an additional structural support, the addition will fit within the total conglomeration out of a combination of aesthetic and dimensional necessity. The level of détournement expressed in the sculpture determines the aesthetic necessity of further disruption in style and technique.²⁰ Détournement is achieved by fusing an uncomfortable amount of visual noise in the space of one sculpture via contradictory and opportunistic combinations of objects and materials in a series of "minor détournments". During fabrication, if one part of the sculpture seems to recede into the compositional space of the rest of the piece, I try to disrupt the focal point by increasing the noise of the receding part to achieve

²⁰ Guy Debord and Gil J Wolman, "A User's Guide to Détournement", Situationist International Anthology (Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006) The position of these sculptures as distortions and reversals of industrial productivity has the same aim of "extremist innovation" as that of the Situationists in their détournement of specific media influences.

an equivalency in frequency. “It is the most distant détourned element which contributes most sharply to the overall impression, and not the elements that directly determine the nature of this impression.” (pg 16, Debord and Wolman)

Motifs in the work (two examples are an emblem of the lion and the unicorn in the English code of arms, and two Dutch girls conversing in front of a thatched roofed house) are saved for their conspicuously saccharin displays of nostalgia and class. It brings to mind a culture in which, as Arjun Appadurai describes it, “...your own past can be made to appear as simply a normalized modality of your present.”²¹ It reflects a culture imbued with “nostalgia for the present” as described by Frederick Jameson.²² The motifs are non-specific historical references derived from specific lineages of history.

²¹ Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy” Theory Culture & Society (1990) 31.

²² 29. *ibid.* Appadurai quoting Jameson’s terminology.



Figure 8: Detail of English cote of arms in *Liner Progression of Fork, Amazon Box and Cigar Case*

The motifs are printed or embossed on imitations of rare crafted objects using cheap, moldable materials. A leather skinned cigar box with the English coat of arms embossed on the top could be seen as an object displaying sophistication in taste and class. But to reproduce that object in black plastic with gold paint alters the significance of the original. The object in reference becomes nothing more than an image of the original display of affluence and privilege. These reproductions are the image “that exists after the object”, in the same manner as a photograph records only the imagined object and cannot account for its totality.²³ Every nostalgic motif is a reproduction of the original aesthetic statement. These moments reoccur throughout the work, evoking an awareness of our tendency to appropriate a visual

²³ Maurice Blanchet, “Two Versions of the Imaginary”, *The Space of Literature* (University of Nebraska, 1989) 2.

history through decoration. The 'kitsch' market is creating out of a desire for affordable renditions of upper-class ornamentation.

Visual pattern and ornament often seem to have an aesthetic sensibility I have mostly encountered in New England. Certain motifs reflect a hybrid of Puritan/English/Irish/Shaker styles. The tight floral patterns on the wallpaper mimic the thick foliage one sees out the window of an old New England home, nestled in the forest. Dark wood stain and added florets are aspects of New England furnishings I find more prevalent here than other areas of the country. (This is in contrast to the linear, horizontal patterns and almost neon colors in patterns from the Southwest, for example.) The experience of densely populated objects in the home—trinkets stacked on a fireplace or furnishings filling every corner of a room—continue as one moves outdoors, with similarly stacked rocks, bushes and trees competing for growing space.



Figure 9: Detail of two Dutch girls in *As We Continue to Move Forward*

Connotations of the regional and economic lie beyond those of the visual. Raw materials are almost always acquired through commercial means: big box stores selling all the unitized materials as if they grew right there in the store. The regional origin of lumber products does not concern the average consumer. Thus, raw materials are seen as just that: raw, without a history prior to the shelf.

Found objects represent localized materials. They are localized not because of their place of production nor from the origins of their material makeup, but from their history of use as objects. They have undergone a process of becoming localized. These objects, though products of an industrial, global economy, still retain their regional specificity and use.

Recognizing the qualities of a material requires a familiarity that only comes from working with it. How can one anticipate the way a 2 x 4 will disintegrate into

long fibers, when a screw or nail is ripped out? Or the way a piece of clay will keep a record of its handling? Robert M. Pirsig illuminates this conception of material properties throughout his book *Zen in the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.

... I've noticed that people who have never worked with steel have trouble seeing this—that the motorcycle is primarily a mental phenomenon. They associate metal with given shapes—pipes, rods, girders, tools, parts—all of them fixed and inviolable, and think of it as primarily physical. But a person who does machining or foundry work or forge work or welding sees “steel” as having no shape at all.²⁴

The casing on a motorcycle, for example, is identified as a “part”, a consumable in itself, when it might be most aptly described as material, given its volume and surface treatment. The conception of objects and forms as “inviolable” is in large part due to the way we procure these objects. Parts are sold in bunches, as if we are picking cherries off a tree that grows in our abundant garden. We replace parts that fit naturally into their appropriate receptacles, everything having evolved together through a naturally occurring logic. The action of cutting an object in half disregards this predetermined concept of the consumable and acknowledges it as viable material rather than impermeable and fitted. But cutting through the object, retrofitting it for the sculpture and asking it to perform structurally calls attention to our complicit expectations.

This idea of material and form is non-specific to the regional origins of the material. The only concerns for consumers are that of function and fit. Material makeup comes into play when considering the longevity, strength or aptitude of a certain material while performing its intended function. But rarely will the

²⁴ Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (Harper Perennial, 2005) 99.

consumer ask to see the specs on the origins of the elements of the part, the total mileage accumulated in collection of the elements, or even the specifics about the site of the manufacturer.

Suppose we attempt to use materials harvested from our immediate natural environment to build our homes, fix our plumbing, machine our hardware. As anyone can imagine, this would be nigh impossible. Our modes of production are so far removed from our immediate environments that we cannot live sustainably within our own regional contexts. Rather, we live in a global material context. We can replant entire ecosystems in favor of flora more conducive to human needs. Thomas Thwaites traveled over nineteen hundred miles and spent nine months collecting the materials necessary to construct a simple toaster.²⁵ The idea behind his “Toaster Project” stemmed from the same concerns for a global loss of regionally specific use of materials that I have been discussing.

²⁵ Thomas Thwaites, The Toaster Project: Or a Heroic Attempt to Build a Simple Electronic Appliance from Scratch (Princeton Architectural, 2011) 13.

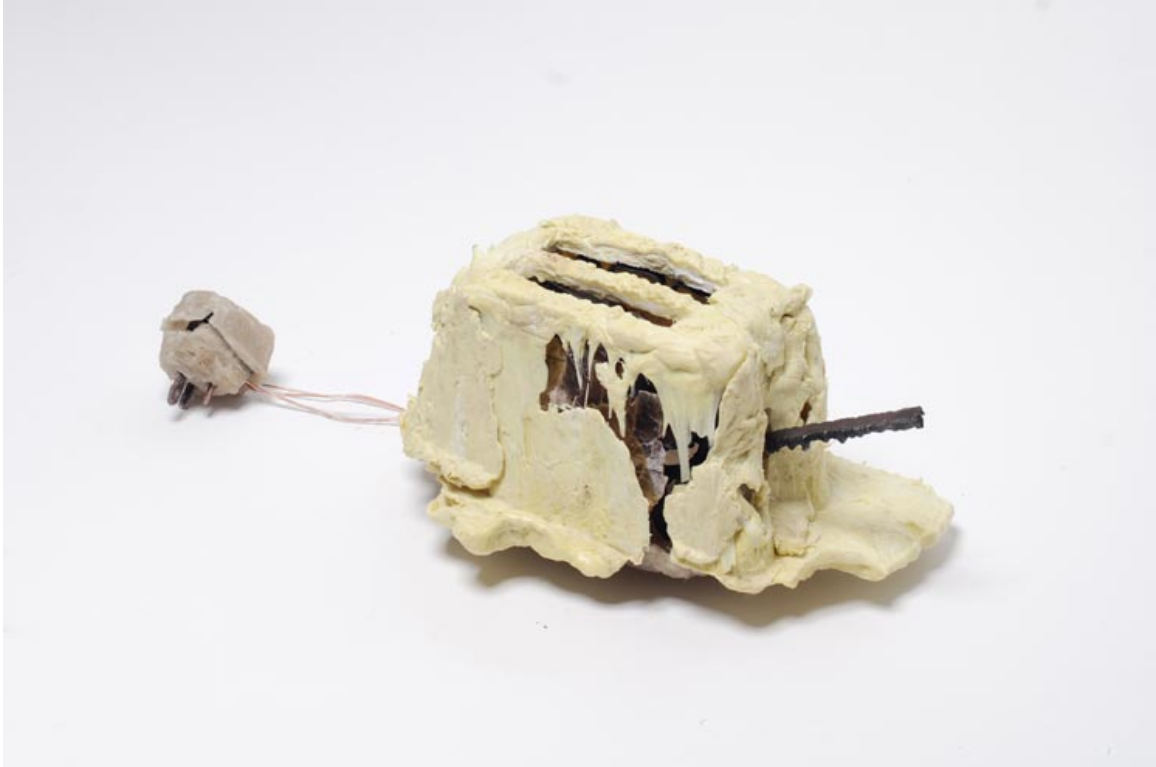


Figure 10: Thomas Thwaites, *Toaster Project*

The contrast in scale between consumer products we use in the home and the industry that produces them is I think absurd – massive industrial activity devoted to making objects which enable us, the consumer, to toast bread more efficiently. These items betray no trace of their provenance.²⁶

Thwaite's endeavors are, however, not totally in vain. There is a population of people who are attempting to create material economies based around producing and selling locally. Following the trend of locally produced food products, I recently heard a story on National Public Radio about a place in Minnesota called Wood from the Hood. Their mission is to reclaim discarded trees from urban neighborhoods in Minneapolis to build flooring, make home improvements and furniture, etc.²⁷

²⁶See <http://www.thetoasterproject.org/page2.htm> for information on "The Toaster Project".

²⁷ See <http://woodfromthehood.com/>, accessed on March 4, 2013 for information on Wood from the Hood.

Until the use of local raw materials in constructing our homes and economies becomes sustainable and common, it is romanticized in our memories. Henry Glassie speaks about the thatched roofs in his Ireland home with fondness, praising the handymen that built the thatched roofs of their houses from home grown and harvested crops and describing the shift in community structure, local economy, and vernacular aesthetic with the introduction of the metal roof.

Not from the perspective of a privileged observer, whether cynical or sentimental, but from the perspective of the people who live the life, we can sum things up. In the shift from local to imported materials, there is a loss in environmental efficiency and a loss in beauty. There is a gain in permanence, which is compensation for a loss of skill and social connection. The loss of the pleasure taken from a job well done, and the burden of the need for cash, must be set against the prestige that is supposed to accrue to the one who purchases expensive objects. Become a consumer, one reorients...²⁸

The advent of industrially based home building required a reorientation of what constituted regionally specific aesthetic and material tendencies. Because we no longer have the technical means, the knowhow or the communities in place to reengage locally driven material markets, living local includes the use of found objects. One particularly clever family living in Temple, Maine used found objects, in unconventional ways. For example, they incorporated a cellular plastic sheet they found on the roadside into a greenhouse that was built into the hillside. Running water through the cells to warm it for baths and clothes washing doubled their use of the sheet. Living local is taking advantage of what is already locally available.

The conversation about vernacular architecture is relevant here. American homes being built along the East coast beginning in the late 1800s began to combine elements and styles from multiple cultural origins, creating a the American

²⁸ Pg 28, Henry Glassie, *Vernacular Architecture*

hodgepodge vernacular. Glassie asserts that this mixing vernacular defines much of what American domestic design looks like, plastic replicas and all. Furthermore, it performs a post-modern pastiche in which we become lost with relation to our specific locale.

...the twentieth century (a period that begins about 1920) is characterized by people who consume houses, reshape them through remodeling, and make them habitable through the organization of goods into domestic environments. People buy houses with an eye to their sale, and the home is less the house than it is a collection of portable furnishings that can be arranged familiarly in rented apartments, or in restored old houses, or in plastic-clad Queen Anne Revival-French Provincial mansions and suburbs.²⁹

²⁹ Pg 146, Glassie, Vernacular Architecture. (Material Culture, 2000)

CHAPTER 5
THE SITE OF THE DOMESTIC

The non-specificity of our domestic environments leads me to a conversation about Smithson's "Provisional Theory of Non-sites".

It is by three-dimensional metaphor that one site can represent another site which does not resemble it—thus *The Non-Site*. To understand this language of sites is to appreciate the metaphor between the syntactical construction and the complex of ideas...³⁰

The elements of domestic spaces that govern our engagement with our own homes—Modern design, the machine, the mobility of materials, and the gendered, aesthetic experience of consumerist objects – are all part of the complex of ideas with which I am concerned. These are the elements of domestic spaces that govern our engagement with our own homes. In the work, these ideas are alluded to through the misuse of materials and impending ruin of the system that supports the objects. Moments that seem totally unstable, on the verge of collapse, yet simultaneously constructed to appear this way, act as metaphors for the archetypal homeowner's experience. *Linear Progression of Fork, Amazon Box and Cigar Case* sits atop the jointed surface of *Conglomerate Pedestal*, a system that relies on the specific placement of a cabinet in order to be functional. These moments represent a pandemic of disengagement with our domestic spaces as a result of market driven domesticity. The language of "illogic" performs that disengagement.

³⁰ Pg 364, Smithson, "A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites" accessed online at [Robert Smithson](http://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/provisional.htm), <http://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/provisional.htm>



Figure 11: *Linear Progression of Fork Amazon Box and Cigar Case on Conglomerate Pedestal*

Motifs that show up superimpose sentiments of historical appropriation over tenuous constructions. These motifs act as stand-ins for what would result from intimate relationships with materials and objects, developed over time. In this respect, consumerist objects are representational of the site of the home rather than specific, as Smithsonian's transported earthworks are. Surrounded by representations of domesticity, we are living in our own abstract environments. Our environments are further abstracted by the invisibility of the raw materials used to construct our spaces. Continuing previous discussion about the displacement of materials, the contracted home retains little connection between the site and its material specificity. As we enter the home, we are inserted into two centuries of

architectural progress informed by mass production and locomotion. This aspect of the history the home is not highlighted as a selling point, but rather a fundamental, although invisible, aspect of all contracted homes. The home that acts as a non-site also acts as a blank slate for the consumer, freeing up the possibility for one's personally choreographed system of nostalgic signifiers.

Transcending our memories of all the houses in which we have found shelter, above and beyond all the houses we have dreamed we live in, can we isolate an intimate, concrete essence that would be a justification of the uncommon value of all of our images of protected intimacy?³¹

This is the aim of the market—to tell us the essence of our homes and what it looks like. More important than how we exist in our homes is the maintaining of contemporary domestic spaces. Our imaginations go only so far as the market suggests. Bachelard describes the imagination as a developer of the essence of home. "...We shall see the imagination build 'walls' of impalpable shadows, comfort itself with the illusion of protection..."³² This is the behavior of our imagination the market appeals to.

Home Depot displays condense the materials to a fraction of the normal household installation. Through these modularized spaces, we retain the capacity of imagining these installations in our homes because they are fragments of a larger context. Suggestions of modularity in my work appeal to the imagination, but do so in a way that destabilizes the viewer. The material displays are ambiguous in their aim, failing to interpolate the viewer's domestic investment. *Linear Progression of*

³¹Gaston Bachelard, "The House. From Cellar to Garret. The Significance of the Hut" *The Poetics of Space* (Beacon, 1994) 4.

³² 5. *ibid.*

Siding, Spindles, Joist, Cutting Board, and Table Leg is compartmentalized space. It is folded up and transported easily and upon display, opens and functions synonymously. The display function is all that is required for our imaginations to sweep us away, into a dream of the home we covet.



Figure 12 (left): Image of Home Depot displays of compressed shower units.
Figure 13 (right): *Linear Progression of Siding, Spindles, Joist, Cutting Board, and Table Leg*

Decisions in the installation spawn from a very similar need for showcasing and simultaneous denial of consumability. The wall protrudes into the space at an 80 degree angle which initially throws off any expectation of the square angles that create most of our spaces. One enters the gallery to see the back of the wall left unfinished, exposing the drywall, firewall, and wiring that produce the embellished functionality of the other side. The opposite side of the wall is finished with multiple vintage style wallpapers cut at varying widths and framed with molding. At the far end of the wall, the section that extends into the center of the gallery, the wallpaper is applied in full strips, covering top to bottom. As the wallpaper

coverage reaches the corner, where gallery and erected wall meet, the strips become more fragmented. They become increasingly horizontally oriented and molding is situated within the composition, leading the eye around the corner and down toward the *Rest Easy, We're Here* (see Figure 19). The wallpaper and molding are addressed as both environmental attributes and objects of embellishment as the nature of their application to the walls change.

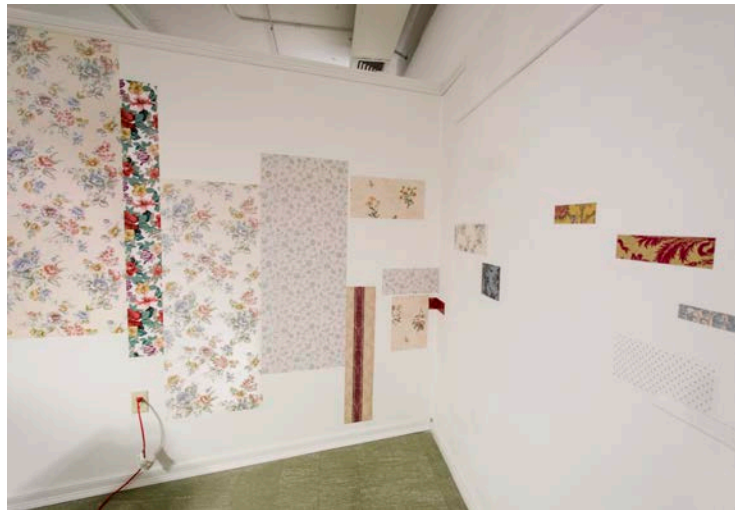


Figure 14: Detail of electrical box on back of wall

Figure 15: Detail of wallpaper and molding

Syntactically, every part of my work performs a failure, on the part of the maker, to follow conventional standards of consumption. There is a willful confusion about the intended applications of objects and materials. The work demonstrates a deficiency of the utilitarian aptitude of these domestic objects via the proficiency of their use as formal, representational units.

The reversal in logic between the domestic sphere and the sphere of high art addresses the specific objects' lack of suitability for the domestic environment. The home is supposed to be one of our most functional and intimate spaces, when, in actuality, we have normalized the loss of operability and user agency. (This harkens

back to the earlier mention of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* when John, the narrator's friend, accepts that his leaky kitchen faucet is an aspect of domestic life he is destined to live with.) With this in mind, what *is* the site that is our home? We see it displayed in the media as a place of comfort, ease and beauty, a place that awaits our return as we labor through the weekday. The continued production of domestic products relies on ideal notions of the home... ideals that we may experience for the first few months of a new product's lifespan, which eventually fades as they fall out of style and into disrepair. The actual experience of the home is filled with the anxieties of keeping up and up-keeping. Without the love of labor informing our notion of what the home is, we end up in a dichotomous relationship with our desire for a personalized dwelling versus an inability to construct it. The reality of market driven domesticity, with all its deficiencies, is standardized in the syntactical construction of these absurdist machines.

CHAPTER 6

...AND TO DEFINE THE WORK

In each chapter I have laid out a set of concerns generated from the elemental makeup of my work. My discussion of each of these concerns aims to layout before you the complications of the themes with which my work grapples. I see these works as formal expressions of layered systems of binary logic, which stems from the inevitable pendulum swing between the languages of Post-Modernism versus Modernism. I have laid out in the following table both sides of each theme addressed in the work:

Table 1: Shows layers of binaries considered

Modern Logic	Post-Modern Logic
Raw Materials	Found Objects
Sound Building Techniques	Impulsive Methods of Constructing
Functionality	Embellishment
Machine-Made	Hand-Made
Non-Site	Site
Viable	Discarded
Viable Work	Non-Viable Work
Male Oriented Aesthetic	Female Oriented Aesthetic
Global approach	Local/ Regional Approach
Non-Specificity in Motifs	Historical Specificity Through Visible Wear
Material Invisibility	Material Connotation

My expressive, ad hoc approach to building is grounded by these sets of binaries. The layered system of logic co-opted by absurdist gestures establishes the final, overarching polarity that unifies the layers. The work is idiosyncratic by nature and can be immediately identified as such, whereas other themes emerge more slowly. It is through a logical gesture, that these elements come together in a critical enquiry. The work calls the viewer to action, asking him/her to consider the

method of its making and what that method might suggest about the viewer's own environmental engagement.

Peculiar construction techniques require investigation. Upon close inspection, details suggest devotion to the "correct" treatment and placement of each object. In *Linear Progression of Chest, Shoe Organizer, Shelf, Broiler Pan, and Napkin Rings* there are several examples of unnecessary decisions made that follow a purely aesthetic impulse. The routed out 2 x 4 frame makes way for an embedded broiler pan. Slotting is recreated around the sculpture, mimicking the slotted broiler pan. A metal plate is treated with baked on food to create a surface one would expect from the broiler pan. Cords of different types are duplicated in their roles as harnesses.



Figure 16: Detail of *Linear Progression of Chest, Shoe Organizer, Shelf, Broiler Pan and Napkin Rings*

A methodology derived out of naiveté and incomprehension, is visibly displayed in the objects through these moments of superfluous and aesthetically driven labor. Again, this alludes to a culture of environmental disengagement via inappropriate material/object applications.

Despite the flippant style and gesture of the objects, their development is inherently formal. The objects themselves must be retrofitted to the dimensional specifications of the sculpture, which means they must be dimensionally apt to do so. Examples such as the spindles fitted into the joist, the wall shelf fitted into the shoe organizer, and the fork fitted into an amenable compositional narrative within the Amazon box demonstrate this multi object acquiescence. Each of these

decisions germinates from a concern for spatial continuity, rhythm, and balance between compositional elements.

This work breaks from those fundamentals by applying economic means to the practice of material specificity. The material specificity in my work is guided by my daily activities. The work reimagines design sensibilities in our domestic objects in the context of contemporary anxieties of overproduction. Without overwhelming the viewer in the manner of Hirschorn's or Rhoades' expansive installations, these works can be examined and, with time, an understanding of the objects and methods of construction can be derived. The objects retain their autonomy while assimilating into the overall composition, just as they are meant to do in the home.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The themes in my work are not particularly new or unexplored. Artists and non-artists alike have been exploring the Western world's obsession with suburban expansion and the modernization of the home ever since the movement first began to tickle our imaginations. The anxiety that ensues out of the cycle of consumption we are now invested in has naturally produced groups of people whose only concern is to subvert the system that perpetuates that anxiety.

While my work germinates from a critical viewpoint of our level of domestic engagement, it parades a playful dichotomy with its underlying concepts. All the work is experimental in nature and new gestures are appearing constantly. The work poses the question, "Who really wants this image of the perfect home?" Are these materials and objects *really* the stuff of our lives?!

The emotive power of these works evokes a spectrum of mixed emotions, which we feel as implicated consumers. They are not hopeful, but they are not gloomy. They are not didactic, but they are not complicit. They walk a line between the polarized emotions and behaviors associated with domestic consumption. These works flourish out of the unremitting internal struggle of the average consumer.

SUPPLIMENTAL IMAGES



Figure 17: Installation shot of East side of gallery



Figure 18: Installation shot from Southwest corner of gallery



Figure 19: Installation shot from West side of gallery, picturing *While Realizing Our Full Potential* and *Rest Easy, We're Here* situation within erected wall and wallpaper installation



Figure 20: Installation shot showing *While Realizing Our Full Potential* with erected wall and wallpaper background

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

This exhibition consisted of sculptures, an erected wall, wallpaper and molding that wrapped around the gallery, and a drawing.

Every sculpture utilized found objects as the basis of their form. A combination of building materials, raw industrial materials, Do-It-Yourself products, and interior decorating materials were used to complete the constructed compositions. Processes in metal fabrication, wood, mold making, and electrical wiring were utilized to build the sculptures.

The wall was erected in order to break up the gallery and create a sense that the work was enveloping the space, in the manner of installation. It was erected at an 80° angle off the South wall of the gallery in order to call further attention to itself as combinatory sculptural and environmental factor of the exhibition. A 10 inch 2 x 4 was mounted on the ceiling onto which an edge support was toenail attached.

Wallpaper and molding was hung in large strips on the erected wall and extended around the gallery in smaller strips attached using rubber cement. The drawing on the far wall was hung using artist tape and Masonite.

West Herter Gallery

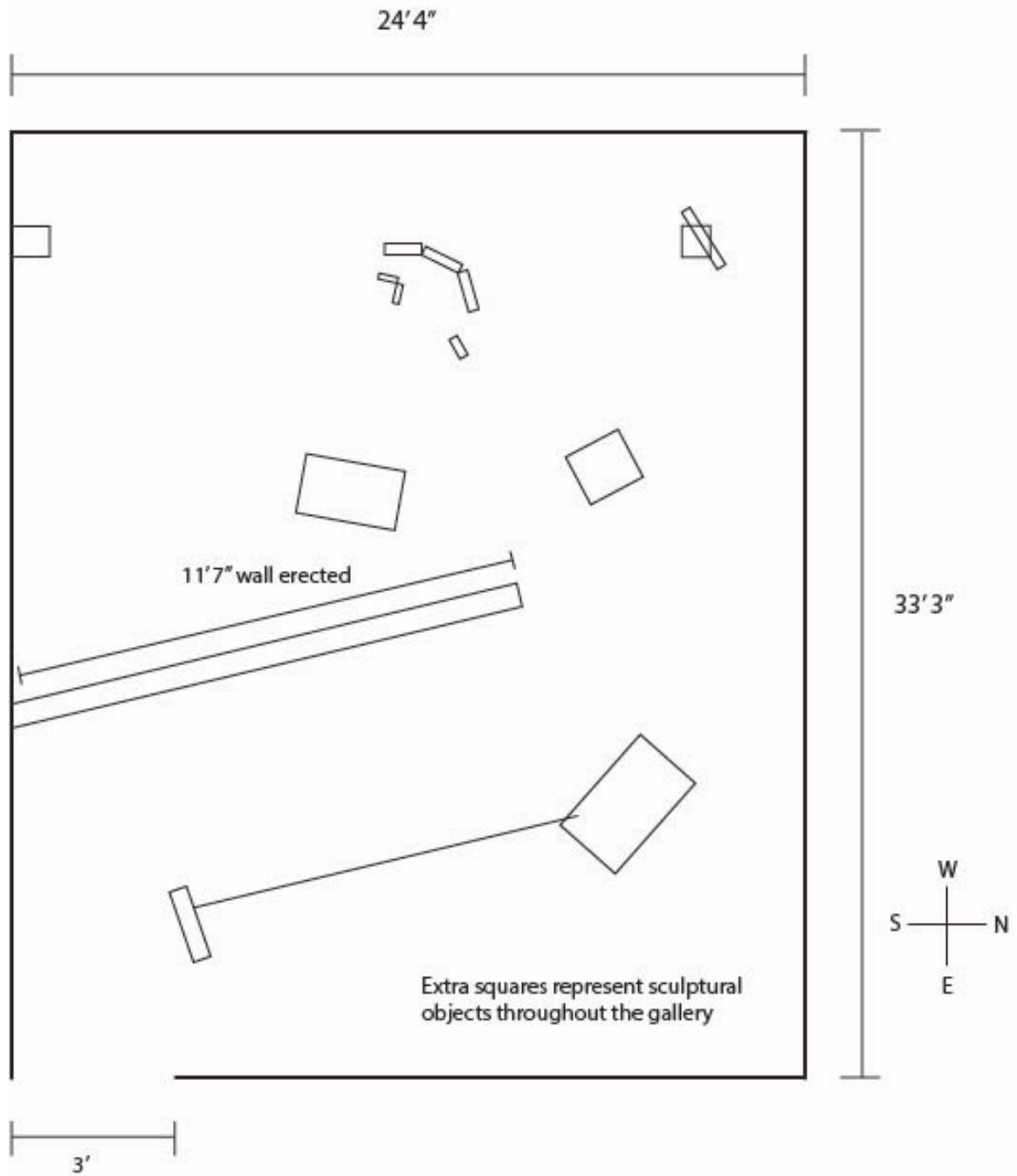


Figure 21: Floor Plan for installation in West Herter Gallery



Figure 22: The Artist at work

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