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Live from Dripdropolis: Static, Remote Control, and the Leftover TV Dinners

A Thesis Presented

by

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Abstract of the Thesis

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The following details my work with found objects of the everyday, resulting mostly in the form of sculptural installation and also in two-dimensional imagery. A reutilization of unwanted materials gives new potential to seemingly worthless items. In an effort to positively contribute to our social and economic culture, I rebuild and compile these once-consumer goods into dioramic landscapes and architectural settings, as artworks. Through this reinterpretation and recycling of waste, a reflection on our behaviors and experiences is prompted from our own dealings and associations to items like tube televisions, broken records, concrete blocks, or wooden two-by-fours. Our role as creator and consumer is revealed by evidence of physical remnants. Through the provocation of memories in the past, we are confronted in the current time with questions concerning resource and environment.

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Introduction

I employ detritus into constructions which in turn communicate through sensitive and assembled sculptural form. Remnants of utility from industrial, technological, commercial and other familiar domestic settings offer up their individual material histories. The manipulating and compiling of these found objects creates scenarios extracted from the complexities of our built world. I find and subsequently pick up obsolete matter with the intent of using it to reflect and interpret this culture that mined, designed, marketed and devoured it.

Cast-offs sit outside, underneath and in the crevices of our homes. We collect and accrue until the accumulation is considered spent. Through a recomposition of formerly useful goods of our once every day, a reevaluation of utility is presented. The items that have seemingly depreciated in substance and monetary value are utilized in new modes that address larger social, economic and environmental topics.

We are gatherers and curators of our own spaces. In the process of editing our material lives, these cast-offs become a story more than they are valued as a tool. It is the actions these items once performed that can now operate as narrative about our past and present lives. A life cycle of the material is brought forth from both before and after our associations with it. The places an object has been or will go is traversed through artistic modification in the present. An era before now becomes evident in the design and condition of the recycled goods. Our roles as consumers and resulting physical effects elsewhere on earth are also put into question. Who we are and how we live become apparent through this recognition of the omitted, and further I address the uncertainties of our leftover material.

Why would we want look at and once again consume this trash? It is easy to ignore the rubbish. On the contrary, I have always been attracted to the manufactured past. I see the material culture as a resource of its own. Value exists in the tangible item, even if it is broken to most.

Upon arriving, I noticed the abundance of layers New York is built up upon. You can see generations or sedimentations, each revealing a unique sensory record of the built environment. The architectural past is buried beneath the concrete, while yesterday's snack

wrapper rustles on top of it. There is an immense richness to it all. All of the layers are woven and melded together. Pieces are replaced. A sorting out of the city's parts is in constant flux. This itself isn't entirely unique to New York, but the prevalence of creation and consumption is further realized when presented in such density, which I wasn't attuned to before moving east from the Midwest. This urban experience has affected my practice and aesthetic. Eyes of the visiting passerby are awed from above, while those of the dweller seemed fixed ahead on what is next. All the while, our space is being built upon from what happened in the past. This layering continuously accumulates, evolving and redefining the world around us.

Within this frame of thought, my process has emerged through a selected body of cumulative projects ranging from 2013 to 2016. The following text details this development of my work formally and conceptually through the course of the Masters of Fine Art Program at Stony Brook University as well as addressing influential artists and movements in art history.

Themes and Methods

2013's *Dripdropolis* was my first real attempt at building in dioramic form. Its 96 by 48 inch measurement gave viewers an immersive street-level view of an abstracted cityscape composed of old electronics, building materials, and dregs of paint. Interactivity was necessary in order to view the elevated platform, which sat in a dark room. Instructions upon entering asked visitors to use a flashlight application on their cell phones to explore the space. A looming technological wasteland was unveiled from the darkness standing upon central upright pipes. Dripping greyish fluids ran down, covering many of the surfaces. Dramatic shadows cast onto the walls extended the space. Silhouettes of the plastic, metal, or glass fragments were shaped by the viewer's movement as they circled the skyline.



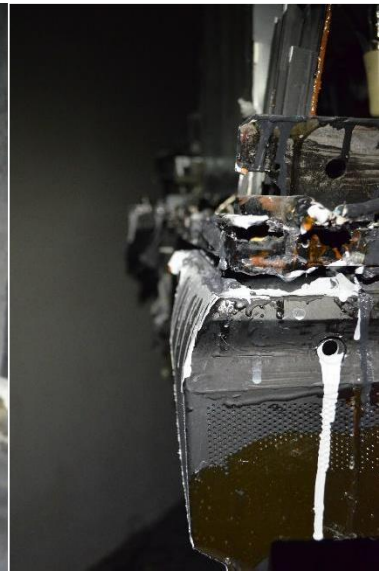
1 *Dripdropolis*, 2013, found electronics, construction debris and paint, 84" x 96" x 48"

By requesting viewers to rely on their own hand-held technology to view and rediscover the old and unwanted, the irrelevant device is again made pertinent. After the lives of temporary bits of technology, what happens to the toxic electronic waste is mostly forgotten or ignored.

There, in *Dripdropolis*, it exists how I visualize it was left, in a mysterious state. Presenting the unwanted detritus through the means of current commodity prompts the interested viewer to consider past, present, and future consumption of such devices. The entire experience of the viewers' involvement with this work depends largely on the participatory role of exploration. The God-like scale of the viewer is empowering while the height of the piece allows for delicate investigation of an imagined failed society. As one approaches the platform, the viewers' senses are intended to be somewhere between the excitement of exploration and the anxiety of uncovering the uncertain.



2 *Dripdropolis* (detail)



3 *Dripdropolis* (detail)

Dripdropolis also became the subject for a series of digital photographs. Due to the constraints of the overall size and format of the diorama, much of what is readily viewable in this sculpture exists as snapshots of the work. Directed at scenes within the miniature, each image is an even more fragmented version of the overall complex installation. In the photograph, scale shifts and details fade within the still images. However, it is similar to the simplified remembrance we maintain of travel vacation photos, however they portray the opposite of pleasurable destinations. In the form of digital photography, it persists as a memory of the past in a faraway place.

From this series, photography became a tool for research in my practice instead of solely a way to document sculpture. Simple framing and composition of situations or objects became something I could practice with a camera and anticipate in sculptures. An instantaneous

series of digital work could be made from a single assemblage of found objects with the clicking of a button. I feel that this affected my choice of material aesthetics when making work. It begged for subject matter to remain as raw as possible because of what was already being lost behind the lens. After photographing *Dripdropolis*, I realized that much of the identity belonging to individual objects within the piece was lost in layers of paint. The combination of this and a framed perspective took the viewer further from reality than I might have been hoping. I wanted to minimize and focus on the true nature of material that these lenses were blocking.

~

After exercising on the scale and complexities of a cityscape, in a more familiar and personal setting, *Who and How Mini?* (2014) embodies the structure and size of a dollhouse complete with furnishings in the interior rooms. Fabricated steel scraps were used to construct the house minus the exposed and accessible backside. Bronze casts make up the miniature wood dining room set. Concrete cushions were molded for the loveseat and recliner. Kitchen and bathroom appliances were carved from wood that was then whitewashed. Welds and rust were left untouched and sometimes used in a decorative fashion. The foundation was built of tiny



4 *Who and How Mini?*, 2014, scrap steel, cast bronze, cast concrete, painted wood 28" x 32" x 24"

individual steel bricks, while sheet metal formed the siding and pitched roof. A front porch and spiral staircase came from memories of homes in my own childhood. The general design was borrowed from a collection of styles belonging to Americana and traditional plans of children's playsets.

Who and How Mini? (2014) evolved from a technical study in material usage and paradox of work/play to extend on the sensitivities of childhood and blur boundaries of gender specificity. Material used in the furnishings have been used in applications non-conducive to their real-life functions. One example is the use of wood for the wet and hot appliances. Processes used throughout the making of the dollhouse (welding, casting, woodworking) are regularly considered to be masculine, while the overall object itself is seen traditionally as a young girl's' toy within our culture. This version acts as a refusal of stigma concerning expectations of roles dependent on gender. A switching of tradition in an objective manner helps reinforce a subjective social consideration. This invites viewers to dwell on setting and principle in a serious, yet playful, way. While kneeling to experience the tiny space up close, we can relate to a childhood state of mind. However a serious, cold tone exists within the inherent traits of the piece. The rough and rigid does not come off as comforting. The rust dirty. It is this uncertainty of the space that inquire about the beliefs instilled within us from a young age. The work acts as an alternative tool for the sharing of domestic values and childhood experiences.

~

As ideas about place and themes of architecture continued in my work, a focus on interior items and our associations became more evident. An aluminum casting of a miniature hinged doorway called *Chance* (2014) accompanied a number of wall-based works. *(De)Constructs* (2015), was a series of five assemblage pieces. Minimal, this combination of wall works and freestanding studies acted as stepping-stones of abstracting my construction methods and pairing of materials. Arriving on the wall, this work led me to make an ongoing series of prints on paper and canvas. At the time, all of these works were initiated as mostly formal endeavors. They needed to get out of my system. Looking back, this period of time these kind of small-scale formal works develop my awareness of simple artistic principles such as linear/planar composition and utilization of positive/negative space. I felt that these sort of foundations were getting lost in the complexities and intricacies of building in a dioramic fashion.

Using a technique I had utilized in earlier works on packing foam, chunks of steel were sprayed with water and pressed onto the paper. After drying, rust would develop on the surface of these *Iron Oxide Monoprints* (2015-current). Organic patterns of yellows, oranges, browns and blacks are left behind in the oxidation process after the steel pieces have been removed. Much control is left to natural process, but orientation and shapes of the steel pattern form dictated patterns and composition. Texture is left to chance, and color is only slightly predictable in this process. (see figures 22 & 25)

The crusty, saturated earth tones contrast the purity of the clean white paper. The decay against the sterile surface becomes a thing of beauty. Manufactured steel is reduced to dust. A cold grey becomes a fiery orange. The ore is reclaimed as dirt. I began to see my process as not only a reversal of material properties but also as taking part in the shaping and cycle of matter. It isn't that rust is gold, but I aim to exercise the potential of each object through process. What shouldn't an object do? How can I activate the stagnant and undesirable?

~

The formalities and simplicity of the smaller works was interesting, but I wanted to push the scale and presence of my work as it relates to consumption. I decided to apply the same set of principles used to create the two-dimensional prints to guide my collection of more substantial pieces of junked construction or consumer material in numbers. They were applied in a large room-sized installation during my 2016 solo show at Lawrence Alloway Gallery. Incorporating the specifics of the space, a landscape of mostly ambiguous discards lined the walls in a work entitled *Lookout Trace*. Elements derived from those earlier two-dimensional layouts on paper prevailed in larger flattened shapes of metal and wood using the drywall as canvas. While the majority of the material was mounted flat against the wall, numerous three-dimensional objects protruded into the space. Some identifiable items were included in the collage of things. Items like a beat-up faucet, a CD and a red Solo cup were placed in with pieces of electronics and spent household goods. Small construction-style flashlights were utilized pointing upward from the floor at angles evenly across the viewing plane. This created shadows and further depth of space through the flat walls of the picture plane and forward into the viewer's space. Many raw wooden and iron components were implemented, which portray natural earth tones. Varied metal sheets, lengths of banged-up boards, and strings of frayed cable pieced together elements of the

linear composition across the space. Peaks and troughs extended to floor and ceiling in a sort of visual rhythm, and a few loose pieces of junk occupied edges of the room. Draped electrical cords belonging to the flashlights activated our real space to the presented view beyond via the socket. A bench was placed at the rear center of the room.



5 *Lookout Trace*, 2016, construction debris, household detritus and LED work lights, dimensions variable



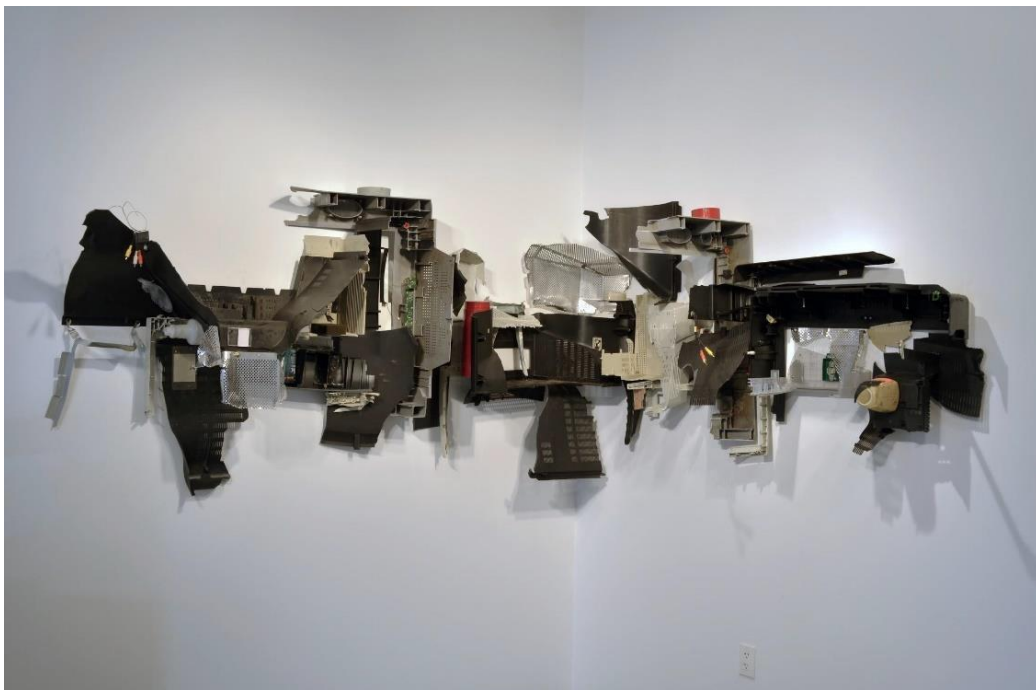
6 *Lookout Trace* (detail)

In titling the work *Lookout Trace*, my goal was to offer a spot with scenic view of redefined debris while also providing an approachable collection of evidence of everyday specifics. Few details are initially apparent in the appearance of the work as whole. However, further inspection of individual elements allows one to make their own associations, not just with the shape and colors, with the objects themselves and their apparent histories. Things we can relate to from our past became part of a larger landscape. Castaways were built into new context. Lighting played a large role in this aspect of the installation. The construction flashlights from

below shed cool, new spotlight on what had been reclaimed as from the dark. Warm gallery lights cast a low sunset-style lighting evenly from above. Together, dramatic and long shadows were formed. A dim purple gleam resulted in the mixing of the lights. The overall effect is one that evokes wonder and curiosity in my mind. Is the space being built or decaying? Is this place faraway or am I a part of this material landscape? The mundane nature of everyday objects is reestablished and our own occupancy within a place becomes uncertain.

~

Having come across many old tube television and computer monitors, as many gatherers and hoarders do, I decided to dismantle them all for their parts. I had an idea that required the tubes for a later project, but the outer plastic housing was left. It was a shell of old information, but lay open and emptied. This led to a further dismantlement by crushing it with a sledgehammer. The result was fractured-looking miniature architecture. After all, it was the house for the sensitive electronics inside. In *Disconnected Vision*, layers of this plastic were composed in an accumulation of protruding fragments back-mounted in a corner.



7 *Disconnected Vision*, 2016, plastic containers and cords, 36" x 144" x 20"

Other plastic vessels such as parts a canteen and an emptied fertilizer tub were also included throughout the landscape. Some old audio/visual cords mimicked power lines strung here and there through holes in the walls of the structures. The positioning of the composition provides an immersive, eye-level perspective on approach. Forms reveal themselves as parts of television monitors when you get close enough to see their non-working buttons and speakers. Content is again present in these fragmented housing as we remember what we once witnessed on the screens that were once inside. This transience of material relation invokes reflective consideration of their influence on our life. Each old show or commercial we watched can be brought forth in memory, while its new form concurrently presents a more dystopic and physical visualization in real space.

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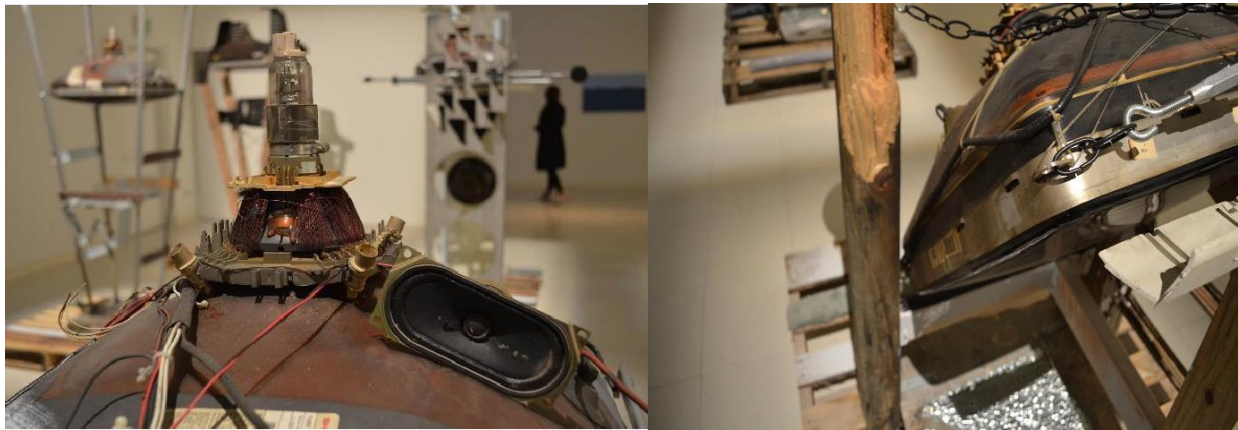


8 *Static, Remote Control & the Leftover TV Dinners*, 2016, cathode ray tubes, wood, metal, plastic, carpet, glass and paint, nine individual sculptures standing 4-10'

To come full circle, my thesis body of work incorporates lessons and elements that developed through each of the previous works referenced in this text. Undoubtedly, infinite other influences shaped the work too. Nine individual towers varying from four to ten feet tall, stand in a three by three grid on the gallery floor. Atop shipping pallets, square concrete slabs anchor

each work. They show evidence of past use in their chipped corners, flaking paint and discolored surface. Mounted upright on each cube are lengths of varied metal or wood stock which support downward facing cathode ray tubes at the top. These towers are constructed in various manners. Some resemble utility poles, while others are obviously made from a household door or part of an old painting ladder.

This skyline of blocked out architectural constructions stand together equal to the visual weight of a cast of human figures. One's imagination can simultaneously consider these as dioramic buildings or as life-sized robotic characters gathered in formation. Many pieces that the works are made of are recognizable household objects. However, their overall combined purpose and individual identities remain uncertain. The pallets have strips of carpet and stripes of paint on select surfaces. Shattered bits of mirror lay atop the concrete, opposite from the downward-facing screens above. Some plastic sections of shattered electronic housing act as facade or abstracted telecommunications hardware. A uniqueness exists within each piece, yet collectively they work as one group.



9 *Static, Remote Control & the Leftover TV Dinners* (detail)

10 *Static, Remote Control & the Leftover TV Dinners* (detail)

To really conclude what kind of language is being used in *Static, Remote Control, and the Leftover TV Dinners*, I feel that it is necessary to start from the ground up with an explanation of each material and the decisions made in its use. From there, the overall decisions regarding individual and group formation can be addressed.

A physical underlying feature in each work is the hardwood pallets. Used as unifying feature, the industrial and commercial shipping units act as ideal plinths for the towers sitting on

top of them. Protecting the curious viewer became priority due to the nature of the work. Sharp steel, elevated weight, and shards of glass were blatant dangers in the proximity of the unwary wanderer. The added perimeter allows the passerby a cushion between themselves and the looming structures. Still functional, the weathered pedestals aid in the moving of the hefty lumps of junk. The added height to each piece increases the overhead, and possibly daunting, presence of the gang of sculptures.

The pallet, as a utilitarian object, also contains inherent value that contributes to the work. Iconic as a mode to transport bulk goods in the commercial world, they are vessels for mass production and consumption. This evident history of traversing supplies acknowledges the original source, faraway and unknown, from which we extract our material needs.

To bring this back to the domestic setting, I added patches of household carpet and paint to each wooden pallet. The very materials we comfortably dwell within are linked with the unknown of the outside world in this way. The close familiarity of the carpet also juxtaposes the cold glass of the cathode ray tubes above. This is my own personal association derived from sitting on the floor in front of the TV as a child.

On the center of each pallet sits concrete foundation blocks. The 21-inch square pavers anchor each totem structure. Their four-inch thickness and density provide each totem with the gravity needed to maintain their upright presence. Via drilled holes, the bolts, screws and steel clip angles tie the main frames to the floor. This masonry maintained its manufactured form, but showed evidence that it had been broken apart from each other after being connected. Years or decades can be seen in the concrete's surfaces. From a local pub's walk-in freezer, the broken-up floor had a literal history as foundation for human consumption. I like to think of it as the stone underbelly of our gluttony. I try not to think of everything that spilled and seeped onto these blocks over the years, especially considering how much I handled them. It is probably a good thing that they were left outside in the rain and snow for a year before they were re-used.

With the patches of flaking paint, planes of shattered glass top the concrete pavers. The tiny fragments of tempered material remain semi-intact by reflective tinting on the backside. From an earlier work, I broke this glass. I consider the unnamed piece unsuccessful, so in a way the re-utilization of its material in my thesis is a kind of rectification, despite the irony of breaking it to do so. Further, the glass adds a glisten and decadent fragility to the aged and

clunky forms. Reflections from the light bounce off to the other glass on the screens above, creating a tension. Some spills subtly upward in spots. The patterns of cracking also resemble that of the TV static that once fuzzed upon these very screens. Dead now, it is funny that “static” means unmoving, yet this is the opposite of seeing “snow” on analog monitors. I realize this stillness is referring to the lack of a transmitted signal, but from our perspectives (now memory) nothing could be more frantic and chaotic than a live TV on channel three.

Lengths, sometimes planes, of wood and metal act as posts of the main structural elements in each work. They also define the upright dimensions of the work. This framework is mostly used in an exposed manner. Bolts, screws and other hardware fasten the works and provide strength to these partially deteriorated supports structures. On the whole, elongated box-shaped spaces are created as the uprights are attached at the corners of the masonry below. The voids vary in dimension but all are roughly human-sized. Additionally, various attached pieces of plastic electronic housing resemble tiny architectural models in fragmented form on the facade of the structures. This presents a spatial paradox. The fact that our body could potentially inhabit this structure on a real scale is countered through the overall composed diorama that operates like more of a micro-scaled city where multitudes of beings once dwelled.

Cathode ray tubes are the pinnacle of each tower. Each mounted screen faces downward with the cathode pointing up like a tower at the top of a skyscraper. Stripped of all outer components, these glass bubbles maintain some clipped wiring and a few speakers from their sound systems. Copper wire coils and terminals also still remain from the original working televisions, while the screen are blank and powerless. One tower has two monitor levels while the rest each have one acting like the roof of the structures. “Danger” and “warning” labels are still present of the backsides of the screens to inform us of potential hazards within the objects. The issue of electrical shock is minimized due to the lack of power source, but what also exists is the presence of lead and other toxic chemicals within the sealed glass.

The exposed tubes are interesting objects in themselves, yet they offer much more in terms of their prior use. Movies, shows, commercials or music videos can all be present in our viewing of the works via our remembrance of the programming we so closely associate with these kinds of screens. They were physical consumer goods but also acted as chief vessels for the marketing of infinite of other products over airwaves in their time. Televisions are iconic for

consumer culture, which is why they act at the top of the totems. Their messages have been followed by a few generations of modern man, therefore a spot at the top symbolizes their power among the masses. A hierarchy of materials is created in the compositions, and a looming presence of the television tubes at the top also is directed downward as if their messages would be directed below. The idea that one or many might dwell within these works implies that these televisions are the roof overhead. Yes, they provide the means for a typical way of life in this line of thought. However, they are something relied upon by the dweller. A consideration is asked to be made on the effects of the TV's in our culture. Further, the elements of danger and toxicity in the screens poses a threat to those around them. In this way, I aim to question the dealings and reliance we have on such objects.

Dualities persist on many levels. This language of domestic materials in motion presents questions of affect pertaining to the lifecycle of consumer goods. In this process, I contemplate our participatory role as creators. How do our material relations reach beyond our view? What paradox might occur afar in my personal pursuit of comfort? How do our previous wants and needs exist as detritus in present time? Is this material dead or does it still obtain a positive existence? I'm not attempting to give direct answers here. These are just the kind of ideas that are being considered through my methods of presenting simultaneously contrasting themes. My goal is to arrive at a point of positive progression in my dealings with leftover objects, all in recognition of their now menial place in our lives.

Artist References

In the course of creating the previously summated body of work, adaptations have occurred as influences continue to soak into my practice. Undoubtedly broad, it is not entirely possible to pin down each and every decision, as to what set things in motion or why it occurred at all. Intuitive and even superstitious reasoning can affect the outcome of a work. Coincidence or quirkiness can play their part. I must admit that the ordinary impacts of everyday life are the most likely influence in any one work. The things immediately around me are the tools that I pick up. Acknowledging this eco/egocentrism, I identify nearest as a site-specific artist, however this is rooted within a basis which I consider to be folk art. Not only is the immediate area and show space considered in my practice, but there is also a sincere connection to material source and surrounding environment. This is mostly localized from the area in which any one work begins. This traditional identity surely stems too from my tendencies to work with pieces of scrap metal and from within rural settings.

Various established artistic principles are indeed relevant and have had significant influence on me, and thus on the work being discussed. The interests which I have developed generally borrow from natural and constructed settings, both small and large. I will specify a number of artists and corresponding movements that persuade my work.

Spanning over the past century, I find most of my direct artist references. To start, the work of Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948) will be considered for reliance on reduced linear, planar, and found object constructions. A bulk of artists I align my practice with come from the post-war period. American Assemblage artists like Robert Rauschenberg(1925-2008) and Nancy Grossman (born 1940) share my preference of aesthetic and technique of utilizing everyday objects. Combining recognizable items together borrowed from their already established traits results in a unique situation-dependent kind of art. Similarly, Nouveau Realists from France or Gutai artists from Japan spoke in a process-driven manner about materiality, accumulation and action. Referencing Paul Schimmel's *Painting the Void*, consistent themes will be pointed out in my work. Subjects in architecture and subsequent photography are had in common with the

works of Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978). Similarly focused on domestic space and physical setting is the work of Rachel Whiteread (born 1963). There are many other artists who have influenced my work, but the artists I will discuss here directly linked to methods and formal outcomes from my time at Stony Brook.

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Beginning, Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbau* (1933) was an indoor installation of nondescript and fragmented geometry jutting out immersively into the viewer's space. The walls and ceilings expanded out in a similar way a crystal expands on the edges of a deep and mystic crevice. The surfaces remained mostly white like an ordinary room, but contrast was created in the varied levels of abstract surfaces that took over the space. Objects, themselves, existed without individuality but rather in a state of ambiguity composed of line and plane. Scale is lost despite the integration of the room's already established framework. The work was lost in the bombardments of World War II, ironically. Kurt Schwitters had begun the *Merz* Series "*in the wake of World War I*", in a mindset that, "*destruction can feed creation.*" (Thomas 2012)

Of my works discussed in this text, *Lookout Trace* (2015) most notably shared physical resemblance to Schwitters' series of interior installations. These works were the result of the processes of salvaging, manipulating, and composing urban debris into freshly considered interior forms. I did not create with the remnants of a world war, but I fully relate to his positivity in the reinventing of what was thought to be completely lost. With this constructive ideology, an abstracted landscape was created within the confines of a room. Plane and line drawing was made in space by arranging fragmented building materials onto the wall surfaces. Some sections reached into the space, similarly to *Merzbau*. Both works also existed as wondrous sort of spaces with no clear or ordinary definition. Clear differences between my work and his are in the coloration and the ability to identify individual elements in the overall composition. Had I chose a less contrasting color palette, the angular works would appear very much alike in terms of formal characteristics. I would also say that I generally relied on more linear structures, while *Merzbau* was almost entirely composed of planes.

~



11 Grossman, Nancy, *Totem I, II & III*, 1967, mixed media assemblage, each approx. 75" x 11" x 11"

Nancy Grossman's *Totem* series of 1967 is three unique, but similar-sized, compilations of commodity. The stacks stand within the parameters of grandfather clocks. They are free-standing, slender, straight up, and rounded on the top. Each is ratty looking, however they remain contained and structurally sound. The first is a three-dimensional collage of roadside advertising signage with the word "money" clearly perched at the top. It embodies a highway car culture of Americana, while reflecting a hierarchy of anonymously branded labels. The second one seems to be a mix between a typist's and a fur trapper's work locker. It reeks of the labor of living off of the land. The commodities nature has to offer are presented like trophies next to the utilitarian tools of modern commerce. The third displays the words "m.m. guns" and looks like a mechanic of war's cabinet complete with racked containers of possible coolant lubricants or chemical cleaning agents. All are boxy, and relate to both near and far. They remind me of family chests. Troves of information all packed up into three tight stacks stand weathered and well-traveled. Despite the variables between them, they all act cohesively as a group of relics from our commercial and industrial society. The tactile nature of the viewer's relationship with each item creates persona and narrative within the totemic structures. While the figure-sized towers themselves stand in relation to our own occupied space.

Also found in my work *Static, Remote Control & the Leftover TV Dinners* are identifiable as items and personalities. Plus, the strength in the numbers of characters reinforces a clan sort of reading of the work. Like Grossman, I employed ambiguity by manipulating families of existing objects and further assembling them together. This obscured full-realization of each found participating object. I feel this unknown about the sculptures is contrasted by the already existing ideas we have about the, sometimes nostalgic, original material. This spawns an investigation by the viewer. We want to speculate and create a motive in the work, and in doing this accessibility is offered with room for imagination too.

~

Identity can be explained through the integration of materials in each of our own worlds, as Robert Rauschenberg alluded to with his Combines. “*Autobiography and self-portraiture were among the most consistent interests that Rauschenberg explored in the Combine series.*” (Schimmel 2005)



12 Rauschenberg, Robert, *Nettle*, 1960, oil, printed paper and ink on canvas with chain and metal, 84" x 39"



13 Rauschenberg, Robert, *Gift for Apollo*, 1959, mixed-media assembled collage, 44" x 30"

Not having these self-revealing tendencies in my work, I still strongly identify with Rauschenberg's methods of utilizing objects from his life to tell a painterly and sculptural story. Rather than personal narrative, material objects give clues about their lives before my participation. Though, my fingerprints are omnipresent in the treatment of the found objects, but

this involvement with most materials is only within their post-mortem state, per se. I aim to bring forth broader social, economic, and industrial histories that lay evident in the material itself.

In a comparison to a few of many examples found within the Combine series, equal modes of material usage will be pointed out from my thesis body of work. One such method is employing linear found elements to connect flat planes to our real three-dimensional space. In *Nettle* (1961), a thin chain links a crumpled sheet of metal to a door-sized, abstractly painted canvas. The title implies a clinging connection between an emotionally handled material within the viewer's space to the ambiguous picture plane beyond of black, white and red swatches. It also presents a single envelope and green "X". The discrepancies between the two dimensions inform each other via their connective links.

Also found in *Gift for Apollo* (1959), the use of chain suggests a certain nature of the relationship between the objects attached at either end. A sense of tethered control is apparent. I think of a kind of ball and chain relationship between the objects. In this case, there is a dented pale attached to half of a wooden door mounted upon a wheeled chassis. A typical Rauschenberg collage of blocked pastels, drips, fabric of clothes and newspaper clippings are pasted to the door portion. The overall work gives off a characterized persona, especially considering the green tie and upright stance. It is one of the most relatable works where I find numerous unintentional consistencies in my own material language, most notably the replacement of a typically stationary door onto a mobile platform.



14 Rauschenberg, Robert, *Trophy IV (for John Cage)*, 1961, metal, fabric, leather boot, wood and tire tread, 33" x 82" x 21"



15 Rauschenberg, Robert, *Empire 1*, 1961, wood and bicycle wheel with chain, bricks, wood plank and metal, 33" x 28"



16 Rauschenberg, Robert, *Empire 2*, 1961, vent duct, roller skate, paper, wire, and electric light on wood and metal wheels, 60" x 58" x 29"



17 *Static, Remote Control & the Leftover TV Dinners* (detail)

Trophy IV (for John Cage), Empire 1 and Empire 2, all from 1961, along with numerous other Combines are all cut from the same cloth. Electric cords and other industrious implements tether the energetic and playful forms. The presence of working lights illuminate possibilities within some pieces, and tattered edges plus weathered surfaces present themselves as spent. Worn domestic furnishings sometimes adorn his works, while wheels can simultaneously give a feeling of spatial breadth. These kinds of techniques in Rauschenberg's Combines create scenarios that I read and relate to as peculiar or even paradoxical. This interests me because what is portrayed is anything but ordinary or orthodox, yet narrative is occurring through the most common objects we know. Preconceptions are flipped on their heads and our attention is grabbed because of it.

~

French-born artist Arman also used a method of dealing with used materials that I am familiar to with. His accumulations repetitively reminded us of our leftover consumables. Populations of similar everyday items were made into subject and framed. This collective of

homogenous utilitarian implements within an artwork provoke a reading of the object on its own, for what does or what its essence is.

“Assemblage is a method with disconcertingly centrifugal potentialities. It is metaphysical and poetic as well as physical and realistic. When paper is soiled or lacerated, when cloth is worn, stained, or torn, when wood is split, weathered, or patterned with peeling coats of paint, when metal is bent or rusted, they gain connotations which unmarked materials lack.”

(Seitz 1961)

In *Arteriosclerosis* (1961), our consumptive behaviors are politely, yet directly, confronted. Tarnished tableware is scattered in a dense layer across the picture plane. The wood container is 19“ x 29” x 36” deep and contains innumerable forks and spoons.



18 Arman, *Arteriosclerosis*, 1961, forks, spoons and wooden box, 19" x 29" x 36"

Likewise, the repetition of old TV parts found within *Disconnected Vision* and *Static, Remote Control and the Leftover TV Dinners* is also cumulative comparable items previously utilized to consume. Only here, the package is the advertised information rather than glutinous edibles. The whole of the landscape is itself consumed with the object. In this manner, our active pursuit of mass consumption is reflected upon through the sheer accumulation.

~

As I work in space and reutilize debris from people's homes, it is impossible to ignore the artistically architectural achievements by Gordon Matta-Clark and Rachel Whiteread. In their works *Splitting* (1974) and *House* (1993), entire former family dwellings were sacrificed to capture the ins and outs of the spaces in which we exist. *Splitting* was the process of cutting a house in half. Photographs captured the exposed cross-section of a family safe spot inside of the carefully dissected exterior shell. Almost inversely, Whiteread's *House* was created as a public work. All of the interior space of a three-story townhouse was filled with concrete. The roof and walls were then removed in this process of inversion. Bits of the original structure remained embedded in the surface of the negative-turned-positive space. Like *Splitting*, it was torn down. This was due to political reasons due to its location on public grounds, while *Splitting*'s eventual removal was due to practical concerns of conservation. It is also worth noting that both Matta-Clark and Whiteread faced unique challenges in terms of both procuring the original media and further obtaining adequate documentation for their projects in the end. However what remains from their projects in text and images are both artists attention to our unconsciousness of the space around us by revealing the exact intricacies of our dimensional boundaries.

While I don't have the experience of bringing down a house, my aforementioned three-dimensional works explore and redefine spaces of our creation by reutilizing remnants of domestic living into newly simulated and carefully composed experiential settings. A new perspective is offered of the predefined material. Each diorama type work within this text act as continuations of predefined histories that are captured through our interactions with material space. The patina of a door handle, stains on carpet or chipped wooden boards all present evidence of past life. Exhibiting these traits as aesthetic pays tribute to the past and also presents mystery. What the walls have seen can only partially be identified, imagined or remembered.



19 Matta-Clark, Gordon, *Splitting*, 1974, single family dwelling cut in half

“... they were able to make one half of the house rock gently back to rest on the descending incline, and the narrow split at the center widened into a wedge open to the sky.” (Crow 2003)



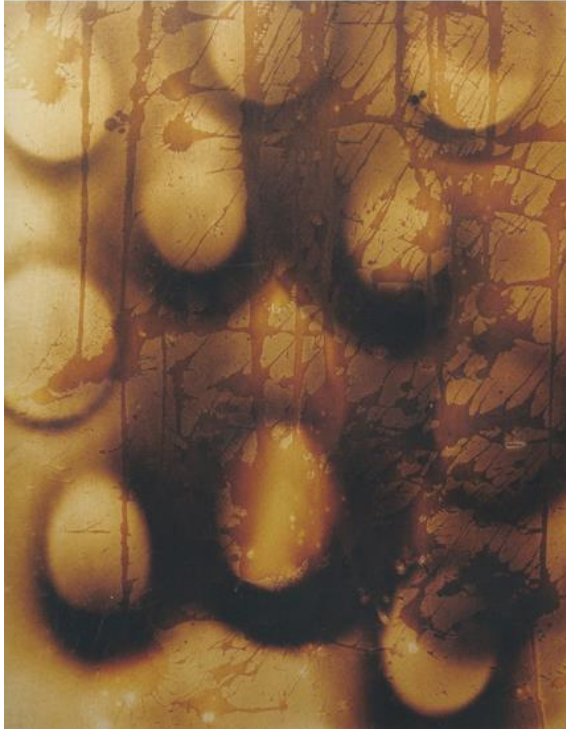
20 Whiteread, Rachel, *House*, 1993, single family dwelling cast in concrete

“Close to the texture of the cast, the indentations of domestic details invited contemplation of the interior life the house once had. But from further away, the sculpture gradually became implicated in a mute dialogue with various architectural forms which surround it.” (Lingwood 1995)

~

“...destruction was in a dialectical relationship with creation, and the void was a space of potentiality.” (Schimmel, *Painting the Void* 2012)

Paul Schimmel’s *Painting the Void* is a large survey of canvas-based artwork from across the globe spans the years 1949 to 1962. Schimmel welcomes the reader with nearly 200 high-quality plate images, and a comprehensive timeline of relevant artists, shows, and events providing context for the broad basis on post-war treatment of materials. War had all but ruined the world, and art didn’t escape the assault. Violent evidence was inserted into rupturing canvases which wept the remnant sorrows of the time. Essays discuss Nouveaux Realists tearing through the traditions of painting and exposing the crumbled concrete situation of post-war Europe. Also of topic are Gutai artists of Japan. They simultaneously brought forth a collision between the spiritual soul of the self and reacting physical material substances. Similar language was being used by Americans, Italians, and artists elsewhere. What is emphasized again and again internationally is the common attempt to express the social reality via constructions of art derived by objects being put together and then pierced, punctured or pulled apart. Tattered textiles with gaping holes or dripping crimson elicit reference to everything that had been lost, yet the consistent depiction of the void also offered a space for a new potential in the minds of many of the artists surveyed, many of whom I identify with, mostly in terms of my two-dimensional practice.



21 Klein, Yves, *Fire Painting (F13)*, 1961, burnt cardboard mounted on panel, 26" x 20"



22 *Oxidation Monoprint 1*, 2015, rust on paper, 12" x 8"

Sometimes a found object can create remnants of its own. Through specific application of process, an image of the action can be captured. Yves Klein (1928-1962) made *Fire Paintings* in 1961 and they are perfect examples of action process-driven art from the post-war period. Applied flames to the sheet of the cardboard emanate the heat of burning. The actual act of degradation is displayed in circular blackened patterns. Similarly, my iron-oxidized monoprints were produced by applying water to paper and pressing mild-steel plates into the surface. Drying took place, and then metal was removed. The stains on the surface reflect the materiality of the found object over time and conditions. The resulting decay ends up frozen, remnant and beautiful.



23 Shimamoto, Shizo, *Canon Picture*, 1956, oil, smashed glass bottle and mixed media on canvas, 38" x 28"



24 Rotella, Mimmo, *Untitled*, 1961, back of poster, 38" x 24"



25 *Oxidation Monoprint 2*, 2015, rust on paper, 12" x 8"

Application of media can also be left up to chance. Aging isn't all that predictable. One can project an outcome, but in active process-driven works natural variables of physics and chemistry take place. In Shozo Shimamoto's (1928-2013) *Cannon Picture* (1956), pigment filled glass bottles were expressively heaved at the canvas. Green and black oil is splattered all across the surface, while shards of glass are sure to be embedded beneath. In Mimmo Rotella's (1918-2006) untitled piece of *Decollage* from 1954, a 37" x 27" poster has been peeled away from the wall and flipped around. The revealed backside has clung to the remnants of the wall it was stuck to. Older pieces of previous posters, the residue of old adhesive, and perhaps even some concrete crumbs combine in a marbling.

Conclusion

As time passes and the weather defines our outlook on today and tomorrow, the practice of redefining the past is in constant evolution. My intent on recycling the ragged into richness is the sum of a slice of any material's overall life cycle. The larger picture is that we must consider the resources we use and realize that our role in their creation is often beyond us. Our presence both physically and subjectively persists for other generations to deal with down the road. It is important to me that consumption becomes a positive thing. We should not waste what we have, and if we must than I hope that something good can come of it later.

I continue to explore and experiment with the found object. Once any one project is considered to be finished, I move on. Somehow, the value of my work doesn't maintain itself, to me at least, once being stored. No artist really wants to see his or her work go. For this reason, documentation stored digitally becomes where the real worth is because physical space is so limited and moving endless amounts of huge sculpture is not practical.

Many elements of my work become other work, or it gets tossed for trash or preferably gets recycled again. This process is similar to the culture of mass-consumption that I refer to in every work. I am guilty of participating in our consumer culture. It is something that I can only deal with by maintaining a consciousness for my behavior as it affects the world around me. With every artwork developed or influence uncovered, my practice is refined. Through this realization and out of the respect of our material resources, I am determined to create with what we already have in order to positively contribute to the way we exist and interact with our environment.

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