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ERRATIC BOULDERS

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

ERRATIC BOULDERS

By Julie Malen, MFA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2014

Major Director: Andréa Keys Connell Assistant Professor, Craft/Material Studies

Exploring how the material environment affects human knowledge of the world is an ongoing investigation in my studio. With this tactile exploration I am also looking to discover how histories and cultures overlap constantly and in close proximity within my daily experience. By collaging natural fragments and cultural debris in my installations, I seek to exaggerate this overlap and create the dizzying feeling of moving through many places at once. Cultural and historical overlapping also occurs in the phenomena of erratic boulders, which refers to the depositing of boulders, rocks, sediments and other materials that receding glaciers leave behind. This phenomenon has the effect of spinning archeology and geology on their heads as large fragments of earth and cultural debris can be carried by glacier for hundreds of miles. This process exposes an intelligible yet chaotic cultural and geological sampling, and in this paper I will explore how this natural phenomenon parallels aspects of my MFA thesis installation.

Material Presences: The Still Life

“To think through things, that is the still life painter’s work- and the poet’s. Both sorts of artists require a tangible vocabulary, a worldly lexicon. A language of ideas is, in itself, a phantom language, lacking in the substance of worldly things, those containers of feeling and experience, memory and time. We are instructed by the objects that come to speak with us, those material presences. Why should we have been born knowing how to love the world? We require, again and again, these demonstrations.

...Description is an inexact, loving art and reflexive one; when we describe the world we come closer to saying what we are.” (Doty, 6–10)

I am drawn to Mark Doty’s concept of “material presences,” from *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon* in that he describes material objects as containers of human experience and a bridge, when words fall short, between humans and the world. When exploring materials in the studio, I am looking to understand how the material environment affects human knowledge of the world and human disposition. I also have a reverence for still life painting that influences how I look at objects and document my daily experiences. In this section I will describe this historical

influence and how I am compelled by the activity of people, their peculiarities, and what it is that makes us inherently human.

The still life painting tradition that emerged in the 17th century in the Netherlands was significant in that for the first time in western society painted compositions were void of the human figure. Several genre's or categories of still life developed in the 17th century as still-life paintings gained popularity and the Dutch society acquired a great deal of wealth from the rise of the Dutch East Indies Trading Company. The earliest category of still life is known as vanitas. I have incorporated many motifs from the vanitas tradition into my work for its relationship to materialism. I will describe this particular genre in detail as a way to clarify some of those motifs, and to point out the admirable complexity of the symbolism employed by Dutch still-life painters. It is believed that the complex symbolism was well understood by the common Dutch person living in the 17th century– so much so that the paintings could literally be visually “read.”



Fig 1. *Still Life with a Skull and a Writing Quill*, Oil on Wood, 9" x 14", Pieter Claesz, 1628

The still-life genre of vanitas is distinguished by motifs associated with memento mori, meaning essentially "remember your death," and functions in vanitas paintings as a reminder of death as well as a reminder of life (see fig. 1). Motifs of memento mori include bones (typically a skull), hourglasses, watches, candles/oil lamps, soap bubbles, and flowers. These motifs usually appear in juxtaposition to items associated with existence on earth in the context of primarily riches and knowledge. These items of earthly existence include instruments of science and the arts, valuables, collectables, pipes, tobacco, musical instruments, weapons, armor, articles of food and drink, and games. Juxtaposing these items with symbols of memento mori indicates the passing of time and emphasizes the foolishness of collecting such items in the face of an eternal afterlife (in the religious sense). These motifs remain at the core of still-life painting but

are emphasized differently as the tradition progresses; at certain points placing more emphasis on celebrating opulence and wealth and making reminders of death subtle undertones. These depictions of wealth are known as pronk, or banquet still lifes. One recurring element in this still-life genre that I am drawn to is the peeled lemon. Lemons mark the craft of the Dutch still-life painter, and are universally found in Dutch golden age paintings after the mid 17th century. The challenge in painting the peeled lemon is to make the viewer believe that the amount of swirling peel depicted corresponds to the amount of exposed lemon. I reference this motif in one of the first projects that I made during graduate school at Virginia Commonwealth University.



Fig. 2. *Swag*, plastic fruit, Easter grass, foam, hay, ceramic, paint, 50"x24"x15", 2013

Swag depicts an abundant amassing of goods and creates a relationship between low and high forms of art, craft, and architecture (see fig. 2). I am using primarily plastic and Styrofoam fruits to create a cornucopia-like composition. The gesture of “peeling” the foam lemon and other fruits suggest a mastery of these cheap materials, and an attempt to elevate the status of both the foam lemon and myself as an artist working with foam lemons. I am also pointing to a shift and degradation of materials that occurs in current production and construction methods.

Buildings are now made, and rehabilitated quickly with lighter weight, cheap materials. Affordable foods are no longer farmed locally, are chemical ridden, and lack flavor– a description similar to how I envision the taste of Styrofoam.

In my enthusiasm for still-life paintings I was initially eager to make connections between this tradition and contemporary culture. In a phase of humanist naïveté, I felt that the level of clear visual poetry in the traditional still life could be articulated in contemporary art in the same way. While I eventually came to realize that things aren't so cut and dry, I also realized that there was something at the core of this historical movement that is still alive and well. Western culture never got over a need for opulence– and in fact this phenomenon has become more extreme and accessible over time. I came to understand that Dutch still-life painting (with all its symbolism and mystical beauty set aside) is very simply, an arrangement of consumable objects from Dutch culture. While the rules of syntax between those historical motifs are no longer a meaningful way to approach objects presently, one can still look at combinations of contemporary objects through the lens of still-life traditions and deduce quite a bit of information. In this paired down view, the result is that I look critically at combinations of objects with the belief that symbolism exists in everyday life experiences. From this vantage point, I employ regular photographic documentation as a part of my studio practice. In these photographs, I am looking for combinations of objects that describe current human activity and current cultural paradoxes.

Commodities contain a history specific to the owner. Whether they bought or inherited them, a person's belongings describe aspects of who they are and the culture that surrounds them. I see objects as a powerful tool to this end, and enjoy employing that quality strategically in the objects that I make, and in the way that I document with photographs the places and objects that I experience.

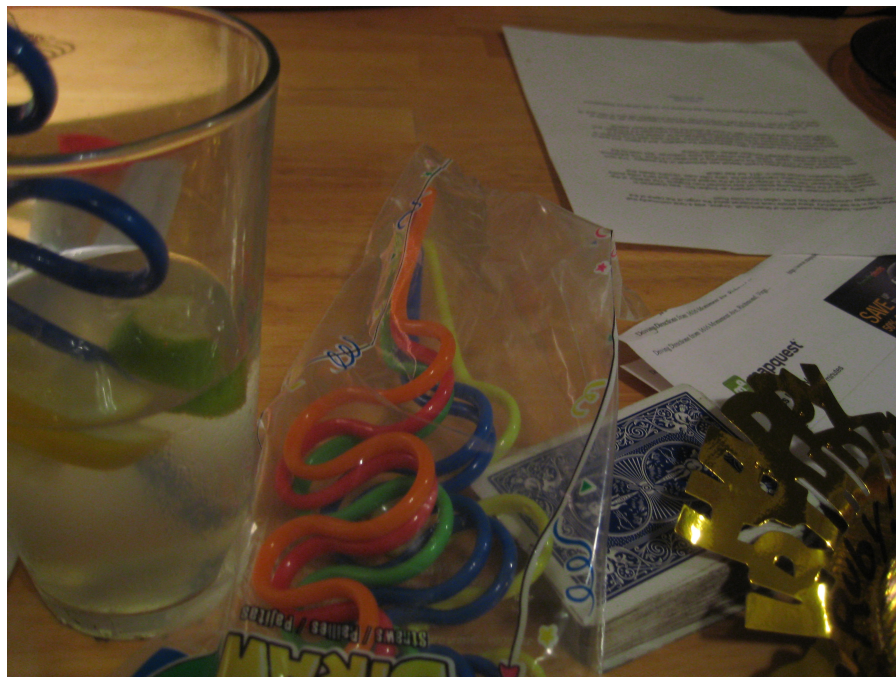


Fig. 3. digital photograph, 2012

Still lifes of consumable objects are potent descriptions of present human interests. In the photograph above the objects depicted are all related to social activity– playing cards, party

straws, a party hat, and a beverage (see fig. 3). We are clearly at a birthday party. The scattered papers in the background and the level of wear on the playing cards also add another layer of meaning– they are both unkempt. The straws and birthday hat are cheap and cheerful dollar store acquisitions; messy, cheap, and partying are all suggestive of low wages, college party life, and young people that enjoy playing cards and drinking gin and tonics.

Collage, Real and Dream Space



Fig. 4. digital photograph, 2010

Histories and cultures overlap constantly and in close proximity within our daily experience. I work from this philosophy in the studio in various ways, but I also see examples of historical interweaving in real space and time. The above image depicts a property line shared by a livestock farmer and a Taco Bell in rural Missouri. I frequented this particular location on trips

to and from St. Louis and Kansas City, Missouri. The image immediately speaks to the relationship between farm and market, while at the same time pointing to the impossibility of that relationship between these two businesses. This image is also an example of how photographs capture situational paradoxes, or collaging that occurs in physical space and time. When I am collaging in the studio I often keep the power of this image in mind.

While I am always looking for poignant overlaps in my daily experience, I also experience collaging of spaces in my dreams. My most vivid dreams often involve seemingly endless complexes of different architectural spaces. It is a working goal of mine to recreate my dream experience physically. For example, in my dream I will enter my aunt's house to find myself in the hall of a sports stadium. I will walk down the hall to find that it leads to a gymnastics studio. As I make my way through the gymnastics studio, elements of the studio will slowly start to transition into a department store. The dreams are anxious, but also fantastically disorienting. I often see these qualities come through aesthetically in many of my collaged compositions (see fig. 5).



Fig. 5. *Untitled Landscape*, collage and ink on paper, 36"x62", 2012

I feel it is important to make connections between my life and the past. I feel inherently connected to the past and my ancestry through the material cultural objects that I live with and my genetics. With this in mind I interweave my current experiences with imagery from the past, often looking for parallel experiences. As a studio process, collaging allows me to quickly sift through an immense amount of visual information, and is often the first step in conceiving many of my sculptural works.

In the fall semester of my second year at VCU I had a magazine printed that consisted of photographs I took over the past five to six years. I collaged my images with images from magazines, post cards, pamphlets, and books from a range of time periods (mostly the last hundred years) to create the large collaged landscape in my thesis exhibition and other smaller studies (see fig. 6). In this process of creating an expansive landscape of imagery, I look for parallel experiences between my life and the past. In reflection, the found imagery I have collected so far could go back further historically, but the cultural sampling seemed eclectic enough for my initial investigation. The resultant work feels like a cultural spewing– having a bold chaotic quality. Through this method of collaging, I create the dizzying feeling of traveling through many spaces and histories at once– compositions that then become a way to exist in multiple places and time periods simultaneously.



Fig. 6. *Space Study 5*, color laser prints on paper, 9"x 22", 2013

Tactility in Architecture

Is it possible to exist in multiple places simultaneously? This has been an ongoing inquiry of mine in the studio after creating some of the collaged landscapes pictured in the previous section. In a drawing, architectural renderings can flow together seamlessly with as little as one drawn line. Simple implications are enough in this type of representation for the viewer to move along the landscape and float in and out of different spaces. However, I was intrigued by the idea of what such a representation would look and feel like in three dimensions? This line of thought led me to research architectural theory and artists that work with multi-sensory experiences. My interest in architecture also led me to questions concerning the materiality of buildings as well as and historical and contemporary forms of construction. With both of these inquiries I am looking to understand the potential of experiential scale itself, and how I can play with architectural forms as an artist. I am particularly interested in a few points from Juhani Pallasmaa's *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*.

My interest in architectural materiality led me to appreciate several points in Juhani Pallasmaa's *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. Pallasmaa writes extensively on the history of ocular centrism in Western Architecture and the ramifications of emphasizing the

way things look over their tactile material qualities. “The ocular bias has never been more apparent in the art of architecture than in the past 30 years,” Pallasmaa writes, “as a type of architecture, aimed at a striking and memorable visual image, has predominated. Instead of an existentially grounded plastic and spatial experience, architecture has adopted the psychological strategy of advertising and instant persuasion; buildings have turned into image products detached from existential depth and sincerity...in our culture of pictures, the gaze itself flattens into a picture and loses its plasticity. Instead of experiencing our being in the world, we behold it from outside as spectators of images projected on the surface of the retina” (30). According to Pallasmaa, bombarding ourselves primarily with flat visual information generates feelings of alienation and detachment. Plasticity in this case refers to the materiality of the buildings- something that gets lost in modern construction methods where “the detachment of construction from the realities of matter and craft further turns architecture into stage sets for the eye, into a scenography devoid of the authenticity of matter and construction” (Pallasmaa 31).

An ongoing investigation of mine in the studio has been to understand the physicality of different types of materials. Motivation for this work partially stems from my understanding of this concept of tactility addressed by Pallasmaa and many architectural theorists. According to Pallasmaa, plasticity in materials, and the “authenticity of matter and construction” (31) are lacking in contemporary architecture because of a focus on visually immediacy. He describes

how certain construction methods like large seamless sheets of stainless steel and massive panels of glass lack materially because it is difficult to visually deduce the amount of force and labor that went into their creation. The relationship between visual understanding of material and existential grounding in our environment goes hand in hand for Pallasmaa. The less we understand, the more alienated we feel. The world gets flattened, into a multitude of senseless surfaces. A phenomenon that is characteristically western.

My appreciation for Pallasmaa's concept was brought home when I visited Israel in the summer of 2013. Despite having traveled abroad numerous times prior to this trip, I had never experienced non-western architecture to this degree. The entire city of Jerusalem is built out of limestone. Some of the individual limestone pieces are several feet in all dimensions, and many of the historic structures were built using slave labor. The physicality of the city was overwhelming. I could sense the sheer weight and immediacy of the limestone. I felt the visceral connection between the city and the earth from which it projected upwards.

Pallasmaa's opinion about contemporary western architecture carries a lot of weight in the context of my experience of Jerusalem. However, I don't entirely subscribe to his opinion that alienation is inherent in urban cityscapes. Although the experience is highly flattened and condensed in many ways, I believe we can have meaningful connections to the physicality of these spaces, even if the spaces themselves lack an easily perceived tactility. These ideas relate

to the ongoing investigation of mine in the studio to understand the physicality of many types of materials. A lot of this process during graduate school has been trial and error.



Fig. 7. *Crest*, plaster, wood, foam, 24"x33"x11", 2012

Crest is an example of a piece I made dealing with the materiality of contemporary architecture, and comes from a series of pieces that took on similar forms (see fig.7). My goal was to reproduce historical architectural motifs using contemporary materials- plaster, insulation

foam, and wood scraps. The construction is purposefully loose and tactile. The messy rendering points to my longing for a materiality that I feel is absent in walls constructed out of wooden studs and drywall. I made many pieces during my first year of graduate work that addressed my curiosity for quick, cheap and modern materials commonly used in the human constructed environment. Many of these pieces were similar to *Crest* in construction, and some included responses to found objects.

My explorations in architectural forms were also interjected with other ways of thinking about flattened experiences within the material world, not specifically architectural realms. As discussed above, I was grappling with the concept of multi-space, collaged experience. During this process, I maintained a need to describe the material world and how the physical components of our environments are integral mechanisms to our disposition as humans.

In my thesis exhibition at Anderson Gallery I am still very much grappling with the possibility of existing in multiple spaces simultaneously. This question that began revolving around my studio as a response to my collaged landscape pieces. In this inquiry I feel a connection to another concept that Pallasmaa discusses in *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Sense*. Pallasmaa describes the human experience of dense cityscapes and music videos. He sees technology leading to new ways of having multi-sensory, meaningful and tactile experiences in the world. "The haptic experience seems to be penetrating the ocular regime again through the tactile

presence of modern visual imagery. In a music video, for instance, or the layered contemporary urban transparency, we cannot halt the flow of images for analytic observation; instead we have to appreciate it as an enhanced haptic sensation, rather like a swimmer senses the flow of water against his/her skin” (Pallasmaa 36). In my piece, *Erratic Boulders*, the dense and chaotic installation aims to mimic the sensation of traveling through highly layered contemporary landscapes. As Pallasmaa describes, walking through compact urban areas, or watching television, the dense flow of visual information is so rapid that it is difficult to stop and analyze each image separately- rather one can allow the images to flow over them. I want to stimulate, not alleviate this sensation. My thesis installation, *Erratic Boulders*, comprises dense amounts of visual information in an effort to rouse this sensation on many levels.



Fig. 8. *Erratic Boulders*, ink jet prints on canvas, ceramic, granite, foam, wood, video, un-used tool handles, plaster column, cabinet, play sand, 10'x 21'x 10', 2014

The installation, *Erratic Boulders*, includes many sculptural components, video, and a large, multi-paneled ink jet print on canvas (see fig. 8). The print on canvas depicts an enlargement of a collage I made using personal photos combined with images from magazines and other media of hurricane aftermath, receding glaciers, salvage yards, and thrift stores, where organizational lines are often blurred. The large canvas print, depicted below, acts as both a two and three-dimensional world as the print itself also has the structure and scale of a large partition wall (see fig. 9). The imagery in the collage exemplifies a chaotic overlapping of both present and past experiences. Within the overlapped images there are critical moments of connection where, for example, piles of doors become a bridge between mountains, and ranch mashed potatoes resemble both plants and flowing water. The viewer can grapple with these moments of transitions between different spaces in time and material, or just allow the imagery to flow over and past them and ride the ranch mashed potatoes wave.



Fig. 9. *Erratic Boulders*, ink jet prints on canvas, ceramic, granite, foam, wood, video, un-used tool handles, plaster column, cabinet, play sand, 10'x 21'x 10', 2014

The three dimensional and figurative works in *Erratic Boulders* that interact with the large canvas print also draw connections between landscape, matter, convention, exaggeration, and cultural overlap (see fig. 10). In the next two sections I will discuss how many of the sculptural works fit within these various forms of inquiry, and will again refer to my ongoing investigation of compression, flattening, and space.



Fig. 10. *Erratic Boulders*, ink jet prints on canvas, ceramic, granite, foam, wood, video, un-used tool handles, plaster column, cabinet, play sand, 10'x 21'x 10', 2014

A Certain Clientele

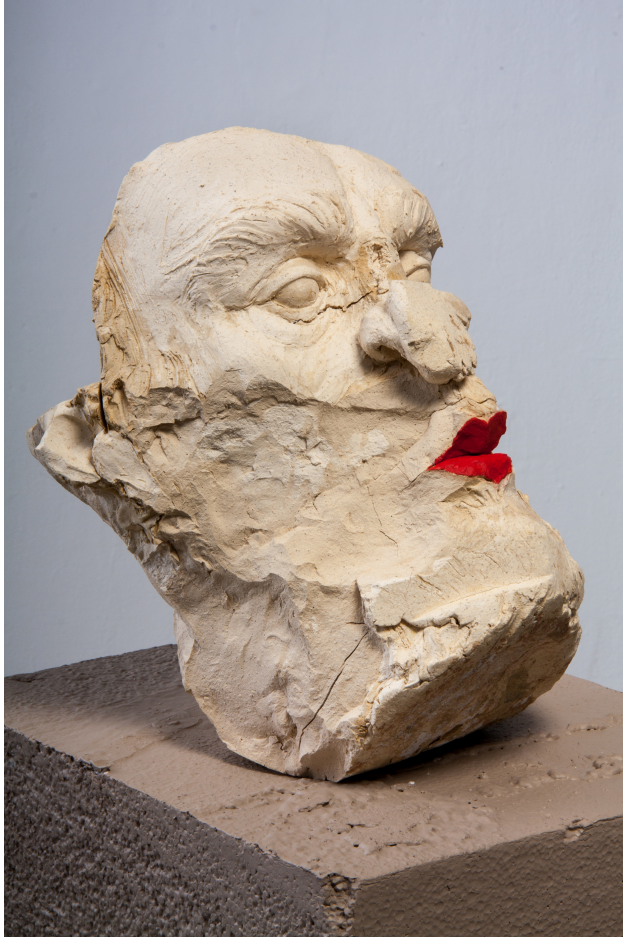


Fig. 11. *Thinly Veiled*, ceramic, Revlon's "Rich Girl Red" lipstick, 2013

My approach to work in the studio often involves holding a mirror up to the world in a manner that renders it absurd. Frequently, I direct the mirror towards issues of vanity, fashion, and trends. Part of the motivation for this may stem from the fact that these are easy targets.

However, I am also genuinely curious about certain phenomena in the world of vanity and fashion. I attribute this curiosity to having worked in retail for several years as well as to my father's profession as a boudoir portrait photographer.

Working in retail was interesting to me because my job exposed me to my economic peers, while my activities in the art world exposed me to my intellectual peers. Certainly there were overlaps between the two, but living within this paradox I always appreciated my education, cultural background and imagination. These were the things that allowed me to live a rich life by utilizing what I had on hand irrespective of the amount of money I had to work with. From this experience I developed a heightened awareness of the habits of vanity products available to people in my economic class. This awareness has served as a source of cultural critique in my work as well as genuine survival.

I don't often pull directly from my family life as a starting point for my artistic work, but I also recognize that life experiences inform the imagery that I am drawn to, and my attitude towards certain cultural phenomena. The experience of growing up around a boudoir photography studio made me more aware of the demand for products that are marketed to women as a way of making them more attractive. My father's job was to make people look their best in photographs by using specific lighting, make-up, camera angles, and directing his clients into poses that were the most flattering. He exclusively photographed women, and marketed

beautifully crafted albums of the photos as gifts for husbands and boyfriends. The backdrops he used were various replicas of plush domestic interiors with props such as fireplaces and fancy couches. The outfits the women wore were typically fancy lingerie, often combined with furs and feather boas. His clients brought an abundance of products to the studio with them. However, it struck me that these seemed to be used primarily for masking as opposed to fixing, perceived flaws– flaws that my father often claimed were what made them unique and were attractive to their significant other. In my work I often point to these transparent attempts at masking. I am also interested in the visual flattening that occurs when people conform to fashion conventions– a process that effectually leads infinitely diverse people to appear very similar.



Fig. 12. *Rat Queen*, ceramic, foam, feathers, synthetic hair, deconstructed prom dresses, Easter grass, polyester fiber, 45"x48"x12", 2012

Rat Queen, depicts a human scale rat sporting a prosthetic squirrel tail in an attempt to elevate the rat's status among the human community (see fig. 12). There is a saying that squirrels are basically rats with fluffy tails meaning that squirrels are pests to the same degree as rats, but we accept them more because of their cute fluffy tails. The trick is seeing through that illusion. I

saw this concept as an interesting parallel to the experience of vanity in fashion. I fabricated the tail “accessory” for the “rat” out of materials that I felt a rat would be attracted to. This included deconstructed clothing, prom dresses, purses, brightly colored synthetic hair extensions, polyfil, plastic bags and sparkly dollar store finds. This context also informed the way I sculpted the rat to mimic systems for rendering mannequins that often include details like fingernails and facial features, but have very little detail in the body.

Re-Presentation

I am looking to create a heightened awareness of the body and the material world surrounding it. Exaggeration, shifts in scale, and pointing at recognizable conventions are tools to this end. In the process of sculptural representation, my goal is to try and produce some kind of foreign yet familiar version of the object or idea that I am trying to represent. There is a *skewing* that I achieve either by shifts in scale, exaggeration of conventions, collaging of seemingly disparate objects, or translating objects from one material to another in a trompe l'oeil fashion. In more detailed pieces, it is very important for me to get as close as possible to the materials, colors and surfaces of the objects I am representing to make the skewing feel believable.

In the case of ceramic figures, I realized that I have the ability to make objects similar to industrially manufactured ceramic figurines. Realizing that I have the ability to alter that type of taken-for-granted reality gave me the feeling of empowerment. I realized that good craftsmanship could allow the nonsensical to make sense and even to fabricate a history. At the same time, I also realized that the ceramic figures I was making looked like a bunch of oversized tchotchkes. This inspired me to make the tchotchkes directly, appropriating the authority of something that appears industrially made so as to make absurd ideas feel as though they make sense. I called these pieces *fake collectables*. When displayed together the pieces resemble a

caricature of someone's stuff; easily slipping into the background to create an atmosphere similar to the feeling of entering someone's home for the first time. This feeling, again, borders between familiar and foreign. You can see examples of this methodology in the detail of *Erratic Boulders* below, where there are two ceramic figures (see fig. 13). One is Roman style portrait bust of one of my favorite musicians, Bobby Gillespie (bottom left), and one is a tchotchke style figurine of a cactus wearing a skunk scarf and coat (upper right). I am interested also in how these two seemingly disparate objects are grounded within a white architectural moment, allowing the disquiet between the objects to feel both natural and askew.



Fig. 13. *Erratic Boulders*, ink jet prints on canvas, ceramic, granite, foam, wood, video, un-used tool handles, plaster column, cabinet, play sand, 10'x 21'x 10', 2014

I also made reproductions of found objects, and masked and modified found objects. In this process I realized that reproductions have a monument quality, and an anonymity that separates them from found objects. The reproductions lack a certain “patina” or build up of grime and history. Reproductions are therefore anonymous, sometimes only pointing to the maker who has somehow translated the original thing through their psyche. In the case of my

reproduction of the pews at the Richmond Main Street train station, I cropped the bench to include only a corner of the seat part of the pew and one armrest. The seat part appears fragmented, and the detail of the armrest is the most distinguished aspect of the piece. In my thesis installation, composed of many cultural fragments and assorted debris, this piece functions as an unsettling resting point in the composition. Its appearance, as a quiet functional object, is easy to rest on mentally but the placement of it on the floor in combination with its missing components make it physically un-usable as a place of rest.

Glaciers and the Internet

Through representation I physically create different atmospheres and cultural fragments. My sculptural work as a collection starts to mimic a historical compression similar to the process of archeology. I mine imagery from my daily experiences. For example, I seek meaningful connections to the stories of different cultures when I flip through magazines. In a recent studio visit with one of my fellow graduate students, the phrasing “archeology on [psychedelic] mushrooms” came up, which I found to be very descriptive. I appreciate the image of myself as a pseudo-archeologist- compressing, excavating, and (at times) faking, a historical record of the history of humans. This is why I found the idea of *Erratic Boulders* fitting as a title for my thesis work. This title refers to the depositing of boulders, rocks, sediments and other materials that receding glaciers leave behind. The phenomenon of erratic boulders effectively spins archeology on its head as large chunks of earth and cultural debris can be carried by glacier for hundreds of miles.

In my two and three dimensionally collaged works I look at every image/object as an element of landscape. This concept may seem given as all objects exist in the space of a landscape. However, this is not always the case. Our ideas surrounding physical objects often place them into categorically specific locations, and in certain proximities to other objects. Some

categorization is hierarchical, for example, you wouldn't find Tupperware in the same kitchen cabinet with wine glasses. Other categorizations are based on social convention, for example, you wouldn't expect to see formal clothing for sale at a hardware store.

I like to envision what the world look like without this sort of ordering, as if some indiscriminating force flattened all types of objects. Visually, this might resemble the images produced by the vomit of a Google images search- a colorful eruption of visual documentation. The disordered imagery would not have a linear narrative. Nonetheless, it could still provide an intelligible cultural sampling while creating an awareness of how much time and space is compressed and flattened through cyberspace. In my collages I utilize many images in which organizational lines are blurred. Examples of such images include scenes of hurricane aftermath and spaces like salvage yards and thrift stores. There is something deeply humbling and important about the aftermath of these phenomena in that the blurring of organization simultaneously eliminates and makes evident many of the structures and conventions that surround human categorization.

In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett explains a theory of "thing power," which she defines as "the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" (6). Bennett explains how thinking of the inanimate in this way can have significant political and social implications in societies that have normalized the "habit of parsing the world into dull

matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings)....the quarantines of matter and life encourages us to ignore the vitality of matter and the lively power of material formations” (vii). Bennett goes on to explain how matter is a powerful force in the environment and how humans and cities are interconnected by discussing such “things” as landfills and electrical grids. In all of her examples she aims to describe experiences that will “enhance receptivity to the impersonal life that surrounds and infuses us, will generate a more subtle awareness of the complicated web of dissonant connections between bodies, and will enable wiser interventions into that ecology” (4). There are many complex philosophical and political layers that Bennett elaborates on in differentiating between active and passive material “things.” I am drawn to her idea of how the simple act of seeing the world with an “active materiality” can level certain hierarchical norms and create a more horizontal awareness of our human interaction with and manipulation of what we perceive to be inanimate. In my work with landscape referencing phenomena such as glaciers and the Internet, there is an intuitive understanding of Bennett’s theory whereby inanimate materials participate in establishing connections between many forms of life, history and culture. Whether making forms that function as archeological artifacts or treating every image or object as an element of landscape, I am pushing to re-arrange the visual and material in a way that draws horizontal connections between otherwise disparate objects and people. This gesture forces the viewer to reach the lowest common denominator between the subjects- an activity that often points to an affectivity of matter in line with Bennett’s “thing theory.”

Though seemingly disparate, the objects and images I create are grounded in specificity and draw tactile connections between my life, the past, and other cultures. The imagery is often presented in fragments such as the foot of a woman that airbrushes her toenails and wears platform flip-flops, a Roman style portrait bust of a contemporary musician, a partial replica of the pews from the Richmond, VA train station, and piles of granite rocks. In this process I am a pseudo-archeologist- digging up cultural remnants from magazines and my life to create an exaggerated and reflexive narrative of my present experience.

The Internet allows people around the world to remain connected by intensely compressing time and space. The uniform screen-based viewing format of the Internet is also influential. Unknowable amounts of information are compressed into solitary, flattened, sparkly, images. I began thinking about my two-dimensional and three- dimensional works in the same way that one would compose a computer desk. Placing a screen or dense flattened image alongside physical objects seems natural in this context, as does thinking about the flattened image as a sculptural element. One is not more important or less functional than the next, and both feed off of and interweave with each other.

Looking at my completed installation at Anderson Gallery I can see that it presents the viewer with an immense amount of information. A dense collaged landscape print, collage on

sculpture, sculpture on sculpture, video, natural debris, found objects and replicas of found objects, figures and figurines. The composition is in the round, and creates both an outer and inner passage that allows the room to start spinning as you walk around it. The installation represents the manifestation of my quest to create the dizzying feeling of walking through many spaces at once and to merge a range of seemingly disparate objects in order to create a horizontal connection between my life and the past. The density and range of the various elements and media all work to this end. In future installations, I intend to cycle through the imagery I chose for this installation at Anderson Gallery. I envision this particular composition being installed in different renditions to fit other exhibition spaces. In this way the work *Erratic Boulders* has an infinite quality; the completed work is not only an end, but also a beginning.

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