

Hastymades and Composts: The Assemblage of Machine Expressionism

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## **Abstract**

I am a machine expressionist. I enjoy creating the essence of a machine from parts that are other used things. It is about harnessing all the physical characteristics and emotions of a machine without the utility. In doing so I try to include an absurd sense of humor in my work when I am reimagining machines that are Sisyphean answers to simple problems. If done correctly, it will require more process and or energy to get the task done than if you had done it by hand. In such ways that they can tell a different story, my work explores some unique scientific or humorous association but is always bordering on the inane. Humor and absurdity are vital to inviting the viewer into the work. It is important for me to use old tools or discarded objects that were mundane items in ways that defy their original value or function. The used objects are vessels for memories and emotions that are used to create the stories being told. I am hopeful that these works of art will lend opportunity for those people that are represented by these objects to engage in dialogue. Perhaps this generation, not knowing how they were utilized, can start a conversation between themselves and the generations of people who actually used them. It is my hope they can create a bridge between divergent populations and create empathic people if just for the moment.

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### **Dedication**

First and foremost, I would like to dedicate this to Stacey, my best friend and wife, for she, like no other, has supported me in this endeavor in body, mind and spirit. This is also for my children Azalea, Prairie, and Zach so that they can see what can be accomplished when you work hard for your goals.

This is for my parents William and Marri Hust

And IFNWHEN

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

I create sculptures I call *Hastymades*, which is bricolage art that is built from repurposed found objects. Art that starts with a brilliant idea that is brought to fruition with superior ingenuity, inferior fabrication, and dubious raw materials, which culminates in an absurd masterpiece. My sculptures have all the characteristics or trappings of a machine without the prerequisite utility. The idea mixed with the possible material catalyst and time compression creates an emotional chain reaction consisting of the Eureka moment, piqued interest, sense of wonder, a frenetic anticipation of possibility, and the empathy of the outcome. I guess I would say that I am a “Machine Expressionist.”

### Creating *Hastymades* and *Composts*

*“The good ones are present almost as if they were imaginary people and there is a verbal communication that takes place between them. These are rare moments when something gets put together and and my reaction is just “WOW..Oh my God” ... I take that energy and let it impact me in a way where I am just making noise trying to get the room hyped up.” (Seboni, Zuckerman 238).*

*Hastymades* are by far my favorite pieces of art. These require the reincarnation of the things back into objects. To create an atmosphere for *Hastymades*, I draw on a white board and I pace back and forth while drinking copious amounts of varying degrees of coffee. This allows me to come up with a mundane problem or task that needs to be addressed. I need to have several projects in the works at one time, and I need to have a boneyard of some repute that I can play in. Once again, I draw on a whiteboard and I pace back and forth while drinking copious amounts of varying degrees of coffee. I then attempt to create the solution

by creating a machine using objects that do not do what their original purpose was but I try to help them evolve to be used through another function. What is it about the cracks and crevasses in an object that endears me to the abandoned instrument? Is it the that they are synonymous with the wrinkles and scars of these old men? Some might think so.

*Composting* is another term I use to discuss one vein of my work. Soil composting is taking various organic waste materials and applying heat, pressure, and aeration. Voila! You have magic soil. In my mind, I do a deconstructing process that I call *Composting*. I take an object that is temporally challenged, whether by wear and tear or obsolescence, and I give it a new purpose that could challenge a viewer's interpretation of the original object. In gardening this would be like changing dirt into soil. I like the idea of being able to change people's paradigms. If people are shaped by the items and not the other way around, then the assemblages I make could do just that. Even if it is a unique, one-off object that still carries the residue of its origin, it would open viewers' eyes to other possibilities and interpretations.

In my practice, it is discarded yard implements, tools, toys, and materials confined to a mental coalbin. I have a Pavlovian response to the rusty and the weathered. Iron oxidization and the silver-plated barn boards are as comfortable as tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches. To incubate and stew in their own juices. Until after a while there is a fertile boneyard for ideas to be planted. Unfortunately, whereas soil making is less predictable, I have found in my practice this has been an invaluable practice for fertile creation that speaks to my sensibilities. My composting is about the reincarnation of other things/objects. It is the application of time, proximity, and incubation to one or more objects and taking advantage of the evolution of the pieces to rise again into an even greater height. These solutions are created by the objects themselves after a period of incubation within a finite proximity. Often



these solutions stem from an innate sensitivity that is dictated by the materials involved. For these connections to be made there needs to be a well-stocked boneyard. These *Composts* tend to turn out very natural and purposeful. These pose the question perhaps and not the answer whereas *Hastymades* pose the answer albeit an absurd one.

*"My studio is a large accumulation of various objects and parts of things.*

*Sometimes I look at things for years before I use them; it's very frustrating. Other times a decision is made instantaneously. I have a lot of works in progress at once."(Stein 173)*

Both the *Hastymades* and *Composts* I have developed were very much known quantities after I had developed their processes. These processes were about different approaches to making art. This pairing model a well-balanced system. Working with found objects and my own biases considering these two processes allows me to produce art on a surprisingly regular basis.

I make assemblages from the lost and discarded pieces of implements that are but vestiges of the blue-collar worker. I challenge the semiotic functions of each found and well-used object. Humankind has continuously, like Galileo, looked for the meaning of the universe by polishing the lens so that we might look beyond the surface of the earth. I look to the surface, this is why these scars of use beacon me, they give me a glimpse into the machinations within our universe every bit as informative as craters on the moon seen through Galileo's lens.

Found objects have stories to tell. Ironically, a new object only has one semiotic story. That story is going to be preordained. A found object has exponentially more, with each viewer applying their own folklore to the piece as filtered through their own culture.

*A scratch, a chip, a dent and a ding. Rust encroaching on the hinges of the trunk lid causing an arthritic groan as it is opened. Floral paper peeling and crumbling on the inside where the moisture had steeped. This, at one time, was a bright and shiny new vacation. Opportunity and adventure bound in leather and buckles, a bounty of necessities, a portable home. Now one can see these blemishes as tattoos and scars speaking of what the past was. Even more intriguing now as where the future was wide open, it did not give one the Hitchcockian suspense as the current damage does. As with trunks, so too with hammers, wheelbarrows, and all found objects, they all have their tales.*

*A new trunk is like a greenhorn, bright eyed and bushy tailed, ready to fulfil the purpose that the manufacturer had planned for it, just as a freshly painted picture before it gets to the public. This trunk is ready to fill itself with the new freshly pressed suits that will fuel the Horatio Alger success story just as it was meant to. The old trunk is the veteran of several wars. It can tell you about the slacks that maybe graced its interior, but it could also tell of the drop it took of the back of the tailgate of the '52 chevy denting the brass corner and scratching the leather handle. It talks about how, one year, it just sat gathering dust filled with national geographics in a leaking attic that destroyed the pretty floral print making it speckled with mold, bubbled and deteriorating. It could tell you about the time that the hinges were over*

*sprung because of a six-year-old girl's tendency to sit in it while she petted the seven kittens that curled up in the larger part of the trunk.*

As an artist, I am the composer, and each piece of the sculpture is an instrument in the orchestra. The sculpture is made up of distinct found objects whereas the orchestra is made up of several sections. Thanks in the most part to Marcel Duchamp, found objects are now an acceptable part of sculptural expression.

I use objects that have changed to “things”, and then repurpose them again. Things are identified as objects that have lost their utility or original function through wear or obsolescence. This would challenge the thing's semiotic reading. I use hairbrained ideas and adapt readymade parts for nonspecialized functions and combine these with other parts to make some “uber-gestalt” device, a machine whose final form is greater than its parts. I repeat once again: I get excited about building machines that cure mundane ills absurdly. A fitting example would be *The Handy Dandy*, which is a wheelbarrow with additional farming and household implements connected to it. By trying to improve the standard wheelbarrow, we sacrifice its utility or usefulness by adding all the other tools to make it more useful. I enjoy solving problems and, in the process, causing additional problems. To be frank, I like the puzzle of using items in unusual ways. It is like communicating in another visual language.

### ***The Handy Dandy***

This piece was inspired by my own imagination and resembles nothing from the world as we know it. (I do not care what the military of some mountainous, hot chocolate drinking,

watchmaking, too proud to choose sides, nation tells you) Ok, the Offiziersmesser (Swiss army knife) inspired this barrow.

Growing up I was not the most motivated to do chores. So, the idea of not having to remember where the tools that are needed for the various tasks sounded great, and if you had a wheelbarrow full of the tools you need to keep them in the wheelbarrow as you are traversing the barnyard. In the grand tradition of American ingenuity another product that comments to consumerist/capitalistic society.

This *Hastymade* assemblage has been made from an old rusted out wheelbarrow that was pulled from a garden bed in Princeton, Idaho. The fact that it was missing the wheel and the wooden bits were starting to rot away was paramount because it created a narrative that I could not match by attempting the weathering on my own. The rest of the appendages were found at yard sales, junk stores and unbeknownst to him, my father's toolshed, as the parts needed to be used and abused to fit my vision.

Less chicken scratch and more coffee drinking helped with the design of this piece. I felt it necessary to keep with the idea of the Swiss army knife aesthetic, so I needed to include several tools. Another tool that I had as a kid was a Boy Scout knife. The main difference between this knife and the Swiss army knife was the addition of a spoon and fork. This inspired me to include similar implements in the scale of the barrow: the shovel and pitchfork. I also intended to have implements that represented other iconic tools such as the saw/fish scaler and scissors. I used a saw and pruning shears instead. It was important that I get other tools that might be used in conjunction with a wheelbarrow whether it be for construction or farming that could nest well together due to shape. It is also important to me that I include a mystery piece. This I would accomplish by making one of the pieces broken

off at the shaft. They could possibly be highlighted with the use of remnants of black electrician's tape. Finally, I wanted to put in another layer of absurdity and humor and so I added the toilet plunger.

With all the pieces together, I needed to produce the mechanics of the mechanism. I decided to go with the copper tubing and spacer rings with compression springs to try to create the tension needed so that the tools would be held aloft when they were extended.

I placed *the Handy Dandy* in situ on a patch of ground in front of the Agriculture Science building at the University of Idaho as you can see in figure 3. I am not satisfied that this placement did it justice, however, I thought the viewers would be familiar with the implements. The in situ showing of this piece did not give it the sacredness of a gallery or the suspension of disbelief that some of my other pieces enjoyed.



*Figure 1: The Handy Dandy by Joshua Hust, 2023*



Figure 2: Handy Dandy in Shop by Joshua Hust, 2023



*Figure 3: Handy Dandy in Situ by Joshua Hust, 2023*

## Chapter 2: Theory and Practice

### Theoretical Foundation: Thing Theory & Material Culture Analysis

I can appreciate that objects turn into things when there is no longer a use for them in their original capacity or they become broken. Through my creative practice, I consider the impacts of objects on our everyday lives. I struggle with how we let our need for things define us and make us subservient to continuous production. We are indeed a reflection of the things we make. But by working with materials with a perceived past, their well-rendered use, whether it be marbles, anvils, rack, or razors, I can use the objects' semiotic inertia to draw the viewer in. Then by changing the function of the object the viewer has a double take moment which can give them a glimpse of a new reality or start a conversation for paradigm change.

In my art I practice an all-encompassing visual language. Each material I use in lieu of language conveys those things that cannot be conveyed in a single utterance or several words at a single moment in time. This language gets condensed into a stream of feelings or emotion. When one uses a found artifact like a wheelbarrow, it creates a dialog with those other pieces it has a relationship or is in contact with.

I resurrect found things in a sometimes-futile attempt to repurpose them within the confines of self-imposed rules, one of which is to honor its past by not erasing its history. I like to get a palimpsest object to replace new or newer pieces so that each piece has a longer pedigree of use that is shown on the exterior like scars or tattoos. The object's life story is important whereas a new item on the shelf in the store is a homogenized object. The further in time and use the object gets from the factory, the more unique it becomes, which adds a certain



richness to the artwork being made with it. It is the visual record of the object's capacity to hold memories and emotions which translates into a better story.

### **The Boneyard: Rusty Bolts, Aged Wood, Discarded and Broken Things**

I grew up looking down with my head up in the clouds. Coins, small washers, paperclips, pebbles, feathers, keys, bottlecaps, rubber bands, boot buckles, daddy longlegs, fishing lures, curtain hooks, wing nuts, cotter pins, watch batteries, wooden matches, cocktail umbrellas, gumball machine prizes, magnets, tumbled glass, sticks, bird's nests, Spam keys, millepedes, marbles, dice, periwinkles, crawdads, pottery, Bic lighters, hat pins, button hooks, pocket watches, jacks, clock gears, pollywogs, green stamps, buttons, roly-polies, snake skin, clothes pins, old bottles, gnawed pencil stubs, sporks, band aid cans, pull tabs, drill bits, yoyo string, bath chains, treble hooks, cribbage pegs, Dumdum wrappers, big washers, matchbooks, pocket knives, katydids, soapstone, arrow heads, amber, bottle openers, tobacco tins, pipe cleaners, chestnuts, ball bearings, alligator-clips, chess knights, hair pins, crackerjack surprises, tokens, dandelion seeds, corks, old spools, chuck keys, bobbers, bobbins, boxelder bugs, zippo lighters, ping pong balls, whistles, rusty hinges, cow magnets, horse shoes, Copenhagen cans, compass, owl pellets, beggars lice, bullet shells, zipper pulls, Bazooka Joe comix, magnifying glass, lucky rabbits foot, square nails, golf tees, 9 volt batteries, cat tails, darts, scotch tape sled, horseshoe nails, skipping stones, checkers, temporary tattoos, safety pins, upholstery tacks, padlocks, postage stamps, pop tabs, toy money, eye hooks, coupons, pulleys, springs, shot gun shells, bread clips, poker chips, and false teeth were just a few found objects that destroyed the pockets of my overalls as I was growing up. As I got older the pockets became too small, and the material itself that I tend to gravitate toward got bigger.

Heft and density are two characteristics that I tend to look for when I am creating. For this discussion, I will categorize them as such. Density is an objective term that could be measured by the size and the material of the object in question. Heft will be described as a subjective term. I have thought about how I measure heft, and it seems that the item is heavier than it is large or at least it seems heavier than it should be. In my explorations, heft will be used as an aesthetic tactile quality not unlike density, yet, with a *je nais se quois*. When held in one's hand, an item is weighed against an internal scale of expectations of what something that size should optimally weigh. The closer to the optimal weight the closer to the sublime. For me, this is measured both visually and tactilely and then compared to a semiotic picture in my mind. I will admit in my head a 1940's coffee mug and an old nickel are just a couple of units of measurement that I compare to other items in this subjective scale. This is one example of my artistic sensibilities. While looking for materials, I seek a tangible level of density or heft. Density in my mind connotes weight per size. A ton of bricks versus a ton of feathers both claim the same amount of weight. However, the amount of space occupied by the bricks and the feathers differ vastly. The less space occupied the denser the item or thing is. In the mid to late 1800s, the machines were all made from stouter materials such as cast iron and included, in a lot of cases, a purely aesthetic design quality that would lend to the weight of the object in question. As time passed these aesthetic approaches were no longer used. Since World War I and the rise of Modernism there has been a reprioritizing of the resources for military-industrial products. The result is more spartan or pared down physical artifacts or, in art comparisons, one might say Minimalist. I prefer things that feel solid. A blacksmith shop has very few light, non-hefty tools, much less raw materials. My

father's hammer used to pound steel was too large for me to lift, much less use, until I was about seven years old. This is the connection to my affinity toward these qualities.

When I go out into the world from my studio, I have a mental rolodex in my head comparing and contrasting. I mention contrasting as part of active viewing, specifically finding an object that will replace the actual object needed. The greater the contrast between the original object and the found object that will replace it leads to a greater reaction or interest from the viewers. An example might be replacing the hinge on a box with a handheld can opener holding on to the possibility that it will perform a similar task. Thrift stores, Craigslist, and Habitat for Humanity are my storehouses, or should I say boneyard, where all the old and broken-down machines await the scrap truck. Similar to Outterbridge, I grew up with the dump and the machine shop, rather than a museum. As Outterbridge wrote:

*"...as a kid, we never had a museum. But we did have a backyard that was arrayed with the precious baubles of the so-called junk trade. It was fragrant with the sweet smells of the lemongrass (pine needles) and red clay (wild strawberries) that my siblings and I ate. It was decorated with glass bottles and colorful rags, with rusty old machines and the wooden Coca-Cola crates that we sat on with our too-short legs as we learned to shift gears in "John Ivory's Truck." Our yard was alive with inanimate objects — and living things too — like the goat (even goats) my father brought home because that's how someone had seen fit to pay him that day. Castoffs, what was junk to others, became resource, conversion, meaningful substance." (Outterbridge,2020)*

I look at the treasured rusty hand tool and fit it into my mental inventory, then match it with everything, from the old Reese's Peanut butter cup fridge magnet to the Arc of the Covenant. I pick it up and play with it. What is the density per size of the object? Is it metal? What kind

of metal? Yes, it is cast iron, now on to the next level of analysis. If it were aluminum, then we would go to our next item. We could switch to wood if we could not find a similar hefty item. Does it have “wear and tear” or is there a patina glazing its surface? All of these are questions posed about each object I use in my sculptures.

I like turn-of-the-century machinery. I like it because it was the industrial age where all things were built with heft, and imagination seemed to be running the world. Certainly, with the advent of the internet the amount of technology that has been developed has been exponentially more than that at the turn of the century.

I tend to gravitate towards small machines and their parts: old hand tools and farm implements, “tools of the trades,” and hardware, the material culture of handheld technology. I am attracted to metal, which would be the biproduct of my upbringing, and also because of its durability and longevity. I experience this daily when I find a great artifact of a past culture whether that is centuries old or just out of my granddad’s back forty. The parts that were made of wood will have deteriorated and all that is left is the rusty red hardware. The oxidized puzzle pieces are often a mystery as they are un-recognizable due to lack of context. So, as an artist, I get to make up its new history. This by no means excludes the wooden bits as undesirable, but wood has its own mortality, its own qualities. It does not oxidize or patina in the way that metal does. It ages differently. I like wood that has the feel of being used. It has more character to me and fits with an aesthetic of aging better. I like wooden handles to have the oil left by the worker’s hand. I like the barn wood to be silvering in its old age like I am. Cement residue on old batt boards, pallets, and spools call to me when I pass by the construction site. Driftwood, rock, stone, bricks, cinderblocks, and “Urbanite” all have heft too.

Chipped enamel and rusted handles on a coffee pot pull me in because of the yarn it could tell versus the sterile stainless steel I might find in a new one. The irony that the hole corroded into the bottom of the bucket allows it to overflow with potential versus the newer bucket that has not been compromised cannot even hold my interest.

Only after the rust has encrusted the joints or the hinges or the paint chips away from the corners of the artifact does it pique my interest or become loud enough to call to me. Perhaps these aesthetics (or anti-aesthetics), better anthropomorphize the objects for me, bonding me with the objects; creating that sensitivity that attracts me to their plight as Pygmalion to his sculpture.

### ***The Palousean Loom***

*The Palousean Loom* started as an afterthought only to become one of my favorite pieces. Initially, I started collecting chalk lines which are a spool of string encased with colored chalk in a tear drop shaped cast metal case with a crank on the side. The chalk is carried by the string like ink. The string has a hook or a tooth on the end of it to catch the lumber's edge. It is used by carpenters and builders to create straight lines on lumber and sheet rock for the saw blade or knife to follow. Whenever I see one at a junk store or yard sale, I pick it up. This is because it was one of the few tools my dad would let me use as his apprentice when I was 5 or 6 years old. Right up there with the odd, but comforting, square carpenter pencil and the cold soap stone for writing on metal and the chuck key that fell out of his pockets in the washing machine, the chalk line was one of those magical tools. The magical indigo blue chalk on the soft worn cotton string was like effervescent fairy dust coming out of this strangely enchanting box with a metal crank on the side to reel in the “key” on the other end. My affinity only grew when I was older and discovered that it was also designed to act as a

plumb bob. I had been driven to make a piece of art that included these before I had started the Barrow projects, but the chalk lines always remained just that, chalk lines.

My mother was a weaver. Well, perhaps more of a dreamer who wanted to be a weaver anyway. She does wear the same wrinkles of the great indigenous, weaving grandmas on her face. Looms seem to migrate to her small eclectic living room, whether she makes them or picks them up on her thrifting journeys. My mother produces more unfinished textiles made from old sheets and natural fabrics than any other craftsperson I know. Her artwork must be about the anticipation of what the blanket could become. My mother was one of the fates still weaving the untold future. After I recently visited her, I saw a book she had about looms and noticed that some of the ancient looms had loom weights to hold the string taut. They were the same shape and size as the chalk line. The similarity was only enhanced when I suspended it with the actual chalked string. At the base of the loom the string line drapes across a wooden rolling pin that conveniently fits in both size and aesthetic and was designed with holes in the handle that serendipitously fits the rusty bolts that attach it to the rust pitted blue green barrow loom frame just inside the basin bottom. The placement of the wooden rolling pin is such that the edge of the pin cylinder is just beyond the lip of the wheelbarrow so that the chalk line rolls as if it were in a pulley. The rolling pin has four rasped out grooves in the cylinder so that the string remains secure and even. At the top of the loom is attached something that was a Sioux Chief Secure Copper Plated Steel Stub Out Bracket in a past life but now lives as a string guide for a loom assemblage. The netting weaved by the loom coils up on a spool across that is mounted six to nine feet in front and two feet above the loom frame. The shuttle is a transformed utility knife. The loom has been around for almost as long as civilization and throughout many cultures. It has appeared in creation

stories and mythology. Whether it is foretelling the future like the Greek fates, the spider women of The Navajo people with the deliberate imperfections, or with modern civilization by way of Charles Babbage and the Difference Engine, the loom figures prominently in mythos.



*Figure 4: Palousean Loom in Gallery by Joshua Hust, 2023*



*Figure 5: Palousean Loom in Gallery, Detail, by Joshua Hust, 2023*



My approach to the loom is that it needed to be a magical vessel that had its own secret rituals to be interpreted by the weaver alone and disseminated to the rest of the population. I used plumb bobs because I saw the connection of the Fates telling the future and the pendulum divination that has been practiced for ages. This piece, of all of them in this MFA show, needed to be in the gallery, because of its level of abstractness and that it is posed as a timeless relic in situ. I see this as a holy artifact loom. By keeping it abstracted and not using as many strings, I want people to get the feeling like they know but still they might approach the sublime understanding of how far we have come. In this way, the strings achieve a new recognition, similar to what may occur when you use an object for another purpose. As Brown writes,

*“Forced to use a knife as a screwdriver you achieve a new recognition of its thinness, the hardness, the shape and size of its handle...” (Brown,78).*

I explore creating art with most materials, but I am more excited about using the actual found object. These items no longer are objects but now they are things that may have no purpose because they are broken or obsolete. This means that I can re-invent them and stretch the semiotic understanding of what each of them signifies. So, if a piece is broken, I cannot use it for its intended purpose so I must adapt it. I must use secondary and or tertiary characteristics to create part of a larger machine process and it is through this unconventional use that I find the characteristics that make the object relationships possible. Louis Sullivan’s “form follows function” is no longer relevant as there is no longer function per se, but function follows form seems apropos.

## The Route

When Covid 19 raised its ugly head there was another part of this process that I had taken for granted: The Route. The Route refers to the hunting and gathering part of the equation that had been introduced to me at the dinner table in my formative years. Certainly, if the boneyard was low and needed refilled, you obviously went out and grabbed more “supplies.” Other sculptures have expressed this need to keep a steady supply of found objects.

*"Some people may see my studio as messy and unkempt, but my work dictates that I have a variety of materials at any given time scattered around me; that is how I make unexpected associations. The seemingly random array of objects, pictures, scraps of metal, wood, and other assorted flotsam becomes my palette to select from. I am, however, not one of those artists who can't throw anything away. In transforming my objects or images, it becomes necessary to discard the clutter. The leftover residue is something that I like to keep around for a while. It lies on my studio floor. The apparently discarded discards may be used later in another work. I like to challenge myself sometimes to be able to create work strictly from these leftovers" ~Norman Kary (89).*

I am not a person that gets writer's block, or builder's block, or even one that worries about dead air in a conversation or on a radio program. As it turns out, during the COVID-19 pandemic, my family and I had self-quarantined for about a year as best as we could. I had not left the house for more than a few hours for several months. Whereas, on occasion I looked on my old haunt Craigslist, I was looking at listings in the *Houses* and *Storage* sections instead of *Free and Farm + Garden*. I had not harassed Heidi, the owner of Open Eye Antiques in Palouse, Washington, who was someone I regularly interacted with prior to the pandemic. I had not visited any of the thrift or second-hand stores, such as Palouse

Treasures, WSU Surplus, UIdaho Surplus, Goodwill, Habitat for Humanity, The Hope Center, Dufford Mall, Dollar Store, Vincent St. Paul, Value Village, or the Salvation Army, that I regularly frequented prior to the pandemic. Once the Route was not available to me, I discovered that the Route was/is a vital part of my process. Like *The Memory Game*, flipping over cards looking for the matching sevens, I try matching all the new things I see not only with the new things on each stop on my route or the Free column of craigslist but with the junkyard in my studio. It is my mental boneyard churning the *Compost* making the machines.

### Chapter 3: Reflexivity Statement

#### Reflexivity Statement: Personal Influences on Perspectives of Objects

Growing up in a “hunter and gatherer” family, each member was required to go out and track and harvest the experiences as well as forage for knowledge. At the end of the day, we mighty hunters would gather back around the hearth to share our bounty with the rest of the family. Ingenuity and resourcefulness were highly valued.

My father’s masculinity was the truest essence of the archtypical blacksmith. Tom Berringer’s character in *Rustler’s Rhapsody* says, “Is the blacksmith a friendly guy who only gets mad when somebody burns down his barn?” Well, that was my dad.

Growing up I ate a lot of beans and rice, but I never went hungry. We were, however, always broke. My mom could fix bark and dirt into a gourmet granola. She was good at stretching a dollar to feed six mouths.

I think that between the two of them I had a good balanced upbringing.

Growing up we had no electricity or running water. Whereas my parents had always said that this was their chosen lifestyle, I wonder now that I am older, if it was just a response that you give your kids so that you do not have to deal with their judgement. We were poor. We had very little. Sure, we had running water every few months as we would move into town when it got too cold. Even then, we still had to chop that damn wood as we could not afford to pay for an alternative fuel. My father would get a job in town, as would my mother once my siblings and I were older, but they never kept these jobs long.

My dad ran a blacksmith shop, The Dooley Mountain Blacksmith Shop, off and on for my whole childhood. Sometimes he would get a “real job” working for the local lumber mill or one of the local machine shops in town. Most of the time this was to pay the bills that he gotten behind on when he was working at the blacksmith shop.

The bottom line, regardless of the year or season, was that we were always behind on bills, and we were always low on funds. My brother and I spent our summers selling firewood to get spending money. I know this is shaping up to sound like a Horatio Alger success story, but it is more of a McGyver success story. You see, due to our constant financial predicament we were always salvaging Peter to pay Paul, who had robbed Mary.

My family did not believe in insurance. Certainly, they believe that insurance existed, but they just could never afford to afford it. They had similar ideas about other expenses. For example, my father always said, “Never pay more than a paycheck for your car.” Growing up my father believed in what he had said because we always had a car that was just but a head gasket from the wrecking yard. This meant that it had to be fixed on several occasions or on a regular basis or sometimes perhaps both. So, we never went anywhere without a set of tools to work on the car when it inevitably broke down. I got the great distinction of being the child that had to sit with a grey and red toolbox under my feet...putting my knees up under my chin for several miles each day in various cars in my lifetime.

And there were many “Dooley Mountain blacksmith shops”. It was a wandering blacksmith shop that popped up whenever we moved. I became familiar with the building process through a subliminal osmosis. Just watching my father create things. By seeing him walk through his boneyard and selecting the perfect piece of flat stock metal that he would harvest

from an old thing-a-ma-do-hickey. Whether it was unbolted, grinded off, or just torn off with brute strength and a few choice words from a sailor's dictionary, he would bring it into the shop and the magic would start. Out came the tape measure and like a yellow, numbered snake's tongue the end would dart out lightning quick a few times and then disappear back into the deep dark recesses of well-loved, hickory stripped overalls. Then a ritual would start with him padding down each one of the many pockets, sometimes more than once, before he could scare out the illusive soap stone. Then like Rube Goldberg, he weaved a spell of silvery white chicken scratches on oxidized flat stock. Dimensions and measurements would be drawn and redrawn, erased with the heel of his hand, and drawn again.

My father had the best pockets. One never knew what would be hauled up from the depths of those bib overall pockets. It was like opening a denim advent calendar. Each pocket could yield mysterious treasures ranging in value of a few coins, to washers and wing nuts, drill bits to chuck keys, sawdust and lint, spiraled metal shavings, soapstone, cotter pins and scribbled on napkins; some of which were barely legible and others that were legible at least before going through the washing machine. Now this napkin had to be dissected like an owl pellet to get the message.

After several years of exposure to this, I adapted to my dad's habits and madness. I could anticipate what tool or material he needed beforehand and have it all lined up, especially if it was something I was interested in. Otherwise, I would do the same thing, albeit on a much smaller scale. I would go out and explore the scraps of metal and machinery in the mechanical graveyard. I might find a scrap of metal that I could make a sword or knife out of, and I would bring it back to the shop prematurely swashbuckling with it all the way.

All my time growing up, I have never seen my father fail to build something or not be able to fix anything. And my dad built a lot of things. This skill or ability to create something out of nothing is a trait of my father's that I admired and competed with my brother to attain.

Whereas my brother is good, he got my father's disciplined approach and played things like a machinist: well-calculated, measured and, quite frankly, boring. I got his ingenuity and resourcefulness, which was only enhanced by my own phenomenal short attention span. I came to this due to the lack of money, credit, or traditional insurance. When disaster struck, the only way out of it was to for dad to foray into the boneyard. If something was broken, he would salvage from a curated piece of "sumpin'sump'n" in his treasure trove behind the blacksmith shop. If we needed money, he would dip into his reserve of old car parts or defunct machinery to take it to town to sell or trade. A truck bed would be traded for a rifle, which would be traded for goats or an anniversary gift, which could bring us back to even more goats. In this way, the boneyard was dad's insurance plan.

Including my mother in this discussion, I guess is inevitable. We might as well lay back on that virtual couch and grab a box of tissues. I have always talked about my art through the lens of a little boy growing up to be like his dad. Walking around in his shoes and drinking his cold coffee. Quite frankly, this made me feel a bit guilty because I knew that my mother certainly influenced my imagination and the way I thought but until recently, I had no real thing, so to speak, to draw from.

However, now as I continue in this auto-interrogation and vetting of my father, explaining his work or lack thereof, it framed my mother as she was always the one who was working and making sacrifices. So, when my father was not working for someone else or in between jobs,

the family could get by with my mother's work. It might be living off just beans and tortillas cooked on a garbage burner until payday, but look at me now. I made it.

When I say "we" what is not abundantly clear was that my parents adopted six children and had three naturally. They also cared for over thirty-two foster kids over the span of my childhood. No doubt we were part altruistic, part gluttons for punishment. In hindsight, it might be obvious that my mother grew up through the foster care system after losing her father at four and her mother at twelve. So, her deciding to work in this area of expertise should come as no shocker. My mother worked at the Welfare office, as a CASA representative, and for Children's Family Services. She would bring her work home with her and they would stay. At least, this is how I have pieced it together.

My family adopted six children through the foster care system. Unlike adoption from a service where the biological parents can choose the parents who they would like to take their newborn baby, these six children were from all wards of the state. This means the parents of these kids made devastating decisions that caused them irreparable harm and destroyed their family unit. When this happens, the state must come in and terminate parental rights. The children were then placed for adoption, awaiting a new beginning from within the quagmire of the foster system. In swooped my mother and took one of these children she had learned about from work, and took them under her wing.

She applied lots of love and care and a few well placed, licked thumbs to knock the dirt off their cheeks. She fed them, clothed them, and called them her own. Then she went back to work.



I have always wanted to believe it was just because we cared so much. That is certainly the picture my mother showed me. I now realize that fostering those kids was certainly something my mother wanted to address after her own experience with it, but I think that part of the decision could have been financial. I think this would have been a small consideration as we never had more than one placement at a time, except for a pair of siblings. Though my interest is peeked, I have yet to have the gall or courage to ask. In many ways, I do not want to know.

My art is a combination of my parent's work. I bring broken machines and people together. During the times that my father oversaw me, as I was to help in the shop, we would start the day early so that we could get a good seat at the donut shop. People might say that my father was lazy. At first this was something that frustrated my mom but as time went by, she began to see the value in it as did I. This early morning pastry and caffeine ritual was like a conference every morning. It was where he drummed up business and advertised. Ironically, it was one of the things at which my father was the most dependable.

Other machinists, farmers, millwrights, carpenters, miners, and loggers would gather. Each would share stories and "shoot the shit." Initially, my dad started at the outer ring but slowly, as he put in his time and solved all these guys' problems, he worked his way to the head of the "Donut dunkers and Machinist Union." He eventually made his way to the main table. This became his office. People would stop in, knowing that he would be there until about 9:30. He'd be there until 10:00 AM if they were laughing at his jokes.

During the summertime or when I was out of school, I would go with him and listened to the old men. This is where I learned about incubation, innovation, and bullshit. It is where I

became infatuated with the stories of the old men who gathered there. It is why the tools of these people with their rust and traces of experience speak to me as they do. These are the trappings of a work culture, which is certainly run-of-the-mill at a base level. I attempt to elevate these materials to a different level. I want them to teach and connect people with the stories they tell or the stories I tell with them.

Another point beyond the yarns of these codgers and coots was a bond created through our upbringing's shared experiences. I too was poor, and I too had no indoor plumbing, I too had my own stories of amazing, over-exaggerated feats based on bootlaces, bigger hammers, and rabid squirrels. I too had "walked to school barefoot, through three feet of snow, uphill, both ways."

There was Henry, the septuagenarian tricycle rider with MS, nary a tooth in his head to hold back the tides of chewing tobacco that cascaded down his stubbled chin onto his grubby overalls. I would swear he only knew my dad affectionately as "Sum' Bitch." He had my father make his tricycle electric in exchange for teaching him how to make chuck wagon and stagecoach wagon wheels by shrinking the red-hot metal onto the rim of a wooden wheel.

There was Dave Davidson, another old man in his 70s, that lived with my family. He was a balding polio survivor that had no sweat glands and scaly skin. He lived in a camper packed to the gills with everything from toilet paper rolls to recycled plastic bags and white paper sacks of stale Brach's chocolate creams. He also had case upon cases of Veg'all and gusack (what he called the sandwich spread made of mayonnaise and relish. I just called it nasty). He was an ancient bush pilot that scouted out uranium mines in Alaska from about 200 feet. He taught my father how to make wings for ultralight airplanes using aluminum and rivets.

There was The Hitchhiker who my dad picked up one dark and stormy night. Peter Graves graduated from Berkeley with a degree in chemistry. After working for the military-industrial complex for a few years, he dropped out of society and hitchhiked back and forth across the United States three or four times with his red bandanaed, overly-protective, Australian shepherd. He stayed at our tar paper cabin for a month and then moved into the area and worked for my dad for a while. He looked like a towering Merlin with hair and beard like the branches and roots of Yggdrasil, and he would talk to us kids as equals about philosophy, science or, indeed, magic. He got a job in a goldmine which collapsed and injured him. He ended up marrying a horrible woman with the mouth of three sailors and the temper of a syphilitic badger. There are several more old men that worked with my father or with the family, but these were some of the most memorable.

### **The John Day Stagecoach Stop**

I have always romanticized the fact that I lived somewhere that had history. The ground beside the tar-papered cabin had been the refuse pile as long as the Stagecoach Stop had been there. Younger, ancient Ponderosa pines shaded this rubbish pile. Decades of pine needles blanketed the detritus with a display of orange and burnt sienna, camouflaging the jagged teeth of rusted and decaying tin cans that were but a mere tribute of the vast underground treasure-trove of garbage. The sunlight would illuminate a bottle fragment poking above the surface of the needles like a willow wisp beckoning me with promises of the treasures below. The further down into the pine needles one explored the easier it got. Seemingly big pine needles break down into smaller pine needles which beget smaller pine needles. This made digging through them easy to do without major hand tools. A trusty stick or broken shovel handle turned walking stick would work great. Sometimes I would hit the motherload of easy

diggings and rubbish plunder. The excitement I felt was dampened only a little when I was told it was the privy hole. Only years later, did I find that people did go to these privy locations purposely to dig for old bottles.

## Chapter 4: Machine Expressionism

### Machine Expressionism

*“The impulse for me to want to make sculpture is because I want to make statements, really, on a purely emotional level. And it’s also somewhat of a challenge to see how that can be done with materials and objects that really are not emotional, in and of themselves.” – Arthur Ganson*

Assemblage and bricolage are only the strategies I use to accomplish what I do. I am a self-proclaimed Machine Expressionist. I create the ‘eureka’ without the math. Let’s be clear, some of the machines do work and some do not but function is not the primary goal. Ideas and expressions are. The idea becomes a riddle which needs to be solved through bricolage or assemblage. I have talked about the process being the art. I have discussed the materials as the most vital component of my art. Systems and relationships are dealt with equally in my work. Anticipation is a key component also. The exploration of failure has also been included in each piece. Humor and absurdity are a common thread throughout my artwork as they are important strategies to invite the viewers into my space.

My two main modalities are conceptualism and bricolage. When analyzing my art, I discovered that I start by spotting an item or hearing a phrase and it gives me a great idea (or at least an idea anyway). This idea becomes a riddle. How do I make this great idea come to fruition? How do I do so with found objects?

I use self-imposed rules such as the art must be made with used and found pieces. The found pieces must not be used in their intended capacity. I often stop when it might work as I do not want to waste material or time. The concept is the most important part of the art. The

physical art and its materiality show the answer to the puzzle - both the concept and its material past. It is like showing your work in a math question. The two cannot be separated.

The other main part of my art is that of bricolage. The bricolage is the solution to the riddle incorporating all those found things. The items I tend to use are hand tools from rural areas and blue-collar workers, such as farmers, miners, loggers, and tradesmen. Most of these are items that had been made or used when our great-grandparents were alive. The generation gap is bridged by the pieces being vaguely recognizable so that it creates a conversation between the viewers.

*"I am intrigued with combining the remnant of memories, fragments of relics and ordinary objects, with the components of technology. It's a way of delving into the past and reaching into the future simultaneously (Saar, nd.)."*

Like Rube Goldberg's original cartoons, I tend to gravitate toward more common, ubiquitous items. If I use overly-specialized objects like a tiara or a water pick, people have less of an understanding or connection to the piece versus everyday household items, like brooms, toilet plungers and umbrellas. Most of these bricolages are kinetic in nature, as a gear needs to be turned or wheels need to roll for it to reach its goal. Anticipation is one effect of my sculptures. The viewer is primed and invested to see if this conglomeration of disparate parts and things will function as intended. I want to see wonder and hope in the faces of the people viewing the piece along with an expectancy of a person betting on the underdog in a prize fight. This has the viewer rallying to my side. This creates an advantage for me as the artist as it does not matter if the machine accomplishes the task or not. Since anticipation is an emotion this work produces, it qualifies as Expressionist work.

I was looking to Futurism initially, because of its celebration of machines, movement, and speed and ignoring the Fascist rants. Whereas Futurism celebrates the future and the sparkly, new Modern technology, I tend to work with the patinaed past. Where the Futurists were about urbanization, I am decidedly more rural in my outlook. However, as I thought about this, I realized, the Futurists and myself are celebrating the same machines, technology, and architecture urbanization. Whereas Futurism romanticizes contemporary machines of the time and celebrated the potentialities, my artwork celebrates the potentialities of post-apocalyptic renewal with pieces.



*Figure 6: The Knife Sharpener, by Malevich*



*Figure 7: Futurism by Bike by Italian Ways*

Looking at the paintings of the movement, they are akin to the machines I make. Both imbue a feeling of frenetic anticipation, so I will reclaim some of this influence. Another claim I will stake is that of Expressionism. My bricolage and assemblage are but the strategies I use in lieu of oils and canvas. As my art and machines are created to peak the viewers' curiosity and investment and, like the wheelbarrows, they tend to be made to carry a long range of emotions such as anticipation, excitement, wonder, wariness, and hope.

The machines created are but simulacra. They are the essences of machines without the utility. They could be compared to a placebo as they are like the real medicine, but they only work twenty percent of the time. These memory-laden objects are compiled thus creating an emotional dynamo that viewers can hopefully tap into.

### **Influence and Inspiration**

My definition of an inspirational artist is not to be confused with influential artist. The influential is pre-inspirational. It is from my more formidable childhood years. The artists that were the most influential to me are cartoonists. I started drawing cartoons to be displayed on my mother's refrigerator, and then I developed a twelve-year series special collection in the margins of my homework. This soon developed into drawings on diner and coffee shop napkins.

Inspirational artists, on the other hand, are those that have come to my attention while learning about art and building my own artistic identity. Initially, it was my intent to keep playing and creating in a vacuum, and I am still disappointed that this is not possible.

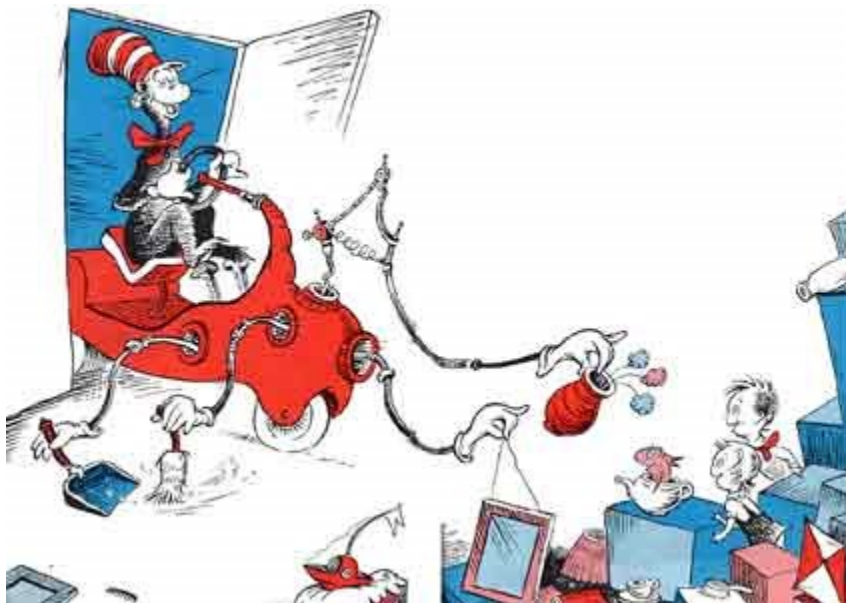


Someone once said, “art follows life.” In my case it started with illustrators of children’s books and comic strips with the likes of Bill Peet, Theodore Geisel, Bill Mauldin, and Sergio Aargones, and Rube Goldberg. I was also inspired by paintings by Bruegel.

Where it is undeniable that Leonardo da Vinci was one of the most influential artists in my formative years, I had always looked to him as an inventor and never as an artist. As I have matured as an artist and human being this legendary artist’s influence has become influential.

The mythical Da Vinci in recent years has become more human as research has posited that he had ADHD and he often had a tough time finishing projects beyond the initial drawings and sketches. This is something to which I can relate.

So, when asking about influential artists, I would have to start with a cadre of cartoonists. I too started out with Theodore Giesel (Dr. Seuss). I was fascinated with his cartoons and illustrations from an early age. Certainly, the rhyming was hypnotic, but I was enthralled with his cartoon ideas and strange devices.



*Figure 8: Thingamajigger by Dr. Suess*

The people were simple characters that one might find anywhere. The characters were not too handsome or homely, yet prim and proper. His animals were usually as anthropomorphized, just as his people were a bit theomorphic. The flora and fauna were all just a little abstract. These were all great, but for me it was all about his fabulous machines. Dr. Seuss made machines that did what the machines that do those things do. In other words, he made machines better by adding more machines to them. They were all *super-signifiers*. The bells had bells. The horns had more horns, and each with miniature horn blowers stepping out of the horn they were blowing. The books included miniature horn blowers with extravagant mustaches with little trapezes suspended from their curls for yet smaller horn blowers to swing from while blowing their horns. At no time did you ask how these contraptions were powered, as those types of questions were immaterial. They worked because he made you believe they worked or encouraged you to want to make them work.

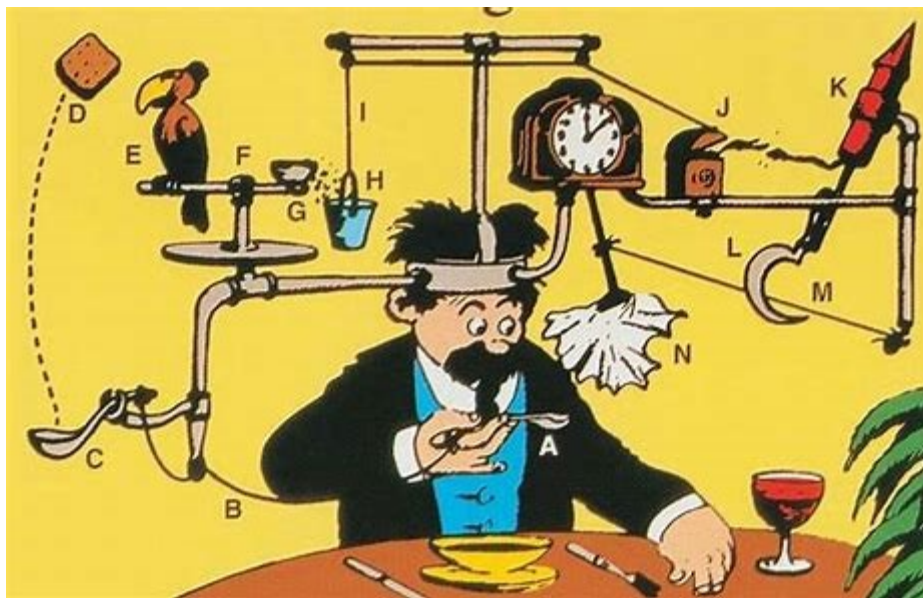


Figure 9: Self-Operating Napkin by Rube Goldberg, 1831

*"It just happened that the public happened to, uh, appreciate the satirical quality of these crazy things." ~ Rube Goldberg (nd).*

Rube Goldberg is a major influence of mine as he created these great blueprints for processes that would also solve mundane tasks, as I try to do. The difference is that I try to make them into one machine and not a bunch of separate parts divided by strings. Currently, one can go to YouTube or other various places on the internet and see modern day Goldbergian machines that have evolved to use marbles and dominoes in the place of actual household items. I feel the strength of Goldberg's designs was that instead of exaggerating the thingness, he examined the relationship between objects and the process of their interactions. He used ubiquitous household items in just a few steps to solve his problems. The items that he chose were mostly items everyone could find around the house. In this way they too could tell a fascinating story by each item's relationship to the other. His use of everyday objects common to his audience caused them to pay attention. It is not normal to use a candle to cut a string instead of using scissors or a knife. It was not normal to use a balloon to carry a boot. Goldberg made me see the world in a unique way. Objects were used as something more than intended function.

Another pair of cartoonist/ illustrators that caught my attention at a young age were Bill Peet and Bill Mauldin, which probably are at least part of the reason for my appreciation of Breugel. Bill Peet was a cartoonist illustrator and even though he is renowned for cartooning some of Disney's biggest movies, *Sword and the Stone* and the *Jungle Book*, growing up I had no idea he was involved in these films. I was introduced to his illustrations from his children's books. "Wingdingdilly" and "Hubert's Hair-Raising Adventure" are two examples

that showcase his style. Dr. Seuss' characters seemed to me portrayed the spit and polish "every-hair-combed-yet-scruffy", "Top of the morning to ya" confidence of *The Cat in the Hat* or *Sam I Am* situated in an ideal environment. In contrast, Peet's Characters showcased a vulnerability; less the Horatio Alger success story and more of a human condition story.

Bill Mauldin is another amazing artist who showcases celebrating the mud and mundane. His cartoons from WWII, Willy and Joe, emphasize the silver linings of the worst-case scenarios. Showing a satirical look at the armed forces during WWII was his specialty (see figures 10 and 11).



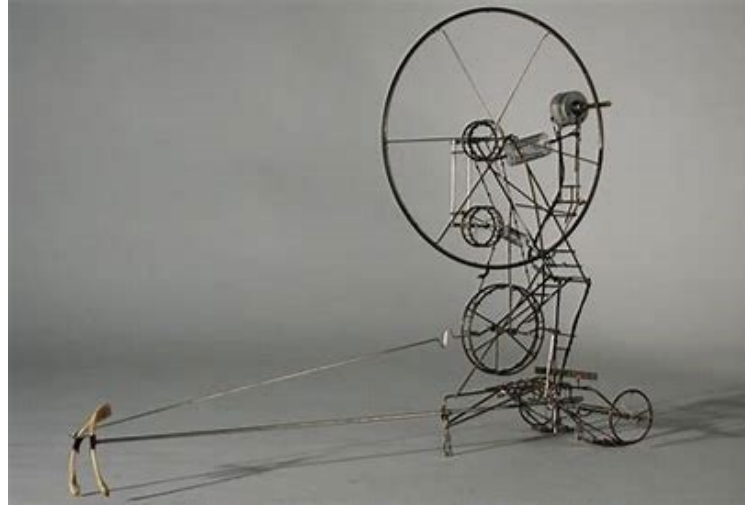
"Tell th' old man I'm sittin' up wit' two sick friends."

Figure 10: Tell the old man I'm sitting up with sick friends by Bill Mauldin, 1942-1945



Bill Mauldin's favorite cartoon from his own archives.

Figure 11: Man Shooting Jeep by Bill Mauldin, 1942-1945



*Figure 12: Machine with chicken wishbone by Arthur Ganson*

Another artist that I identify with is Arthur Ganson. He is a kinetic artist that makes machines that have no utility function, and he can be found roaming the halls of MIT. He has a great style with his combination of mechanical aptitude with an absurd sense of humor. I identify with the way he approaches his work. Most of the time, Ganson finds an object that gives him an idea. A fitting example of this would be his “*Machine with Chicken Wishbone*.” As he tells it, he was playing with a wishbone, and he was delighted that it reminded him of a bow-legged cowboy as he made it hobble across the dining room table. He then decided to make a machine that would somehow help this little “cowboy” slowly stride across the plains. I follow this same path in my work. When I was out junking, I came across this chicken pecking toy that was operated by holding it in one’s hand and gyrating one’s wrist, causing a ballast to move back and forth pulling and loosening strings, which causes the little wooden chickens to peck. This small, wooden toy made me think ironically that this was a great little folk toy that wasted the potential energy and that I should make a bigger, better, more industrial machine that wasted potential energy, and this is how I produced the *Pica-churn*.

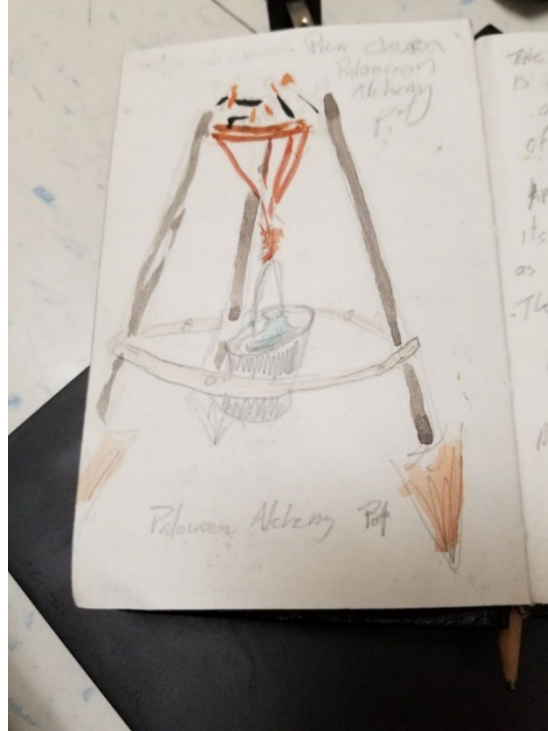
## **Pica-Churn**

The inspiration for this piece came from a folk toy that was always known in my house as the *chicken pecking machine*. I have yet to find where it actually comes from, as I have seen similar things from Mexico, China, and Northern European countries. This chicken machine's mechanics fascinated me because of the motion of these brightly painted chickens caused by the harnessed pendulum being swung down below the horizon plate. My interest was piqued because I had never seen a simple engine used on anything but this children's toy. I decided that I would create something at a larger scale that could possibly do something more than peck at fake bugs and grain. The obvious motion of the chickens was like that of a hammer so that is what I would use instead of chickens. The next important part was going to be what would I use to replace the pendulum instead of the traditional wooden sphere or wooden egg. The first thing I needed to do was look for hammers. I wanted to do something large that could use giant mallets, but it was not feasible. I looked at regular farm hammers, but they suggested carpentry to me. The hammers themselves needed to be part of the machine, so I gravitated for the ballpeen hammers because they suggested engineering, and I wanted the final piece to be more machine-like. They needed to be more than just the simple pecking mechanic. So, after scribbling up a few ideas, I got one of the large, plastic five-gallon water jugs.



*Figure 13: Pica Churn, in situ, by Joshua Hust 2023*

I would have preferred glass, if I had not had the electrician's bag. The bag helped me in a couple of ways. The first was about the right scale for the size of the contraption. Secondly, I could adjust the weight by adding water until it was perfect for the physics required by the machine without me having to use the math lobe of my brain. I had to determine how I would harness the pendulum so I decided I would use the electrician's tool bag which is made of leather canvas and rope and has a well-worn look. I do appreciate the rocking instability and the noise one can add to a sculpture when you use four legs, but to support the Pica-churn. I decided to use a tripod both for the formal shape but also to make sure the contraption will stand more stably. For the tripod, I used old sturdy oaken ballet rails, which I supported by placing a large flat metal hoop around at the midway point. I found some metal triangle plates, which I attached to the bottom of the tripod legs to add height and balance to the piece.



*Figure 14: Pica Churn Sketch by Joshua Hust, 2023*

The hammer plate (or donut as I will call it) was made of a piece of metal scrap salvaged from a boneyard. It is from this plate that the legs of the tripod are attached and from which the pendulum is harnessed. The five weathered ballpeen hammers handles were cut down to the appropriate sizes. The small wooden piece to be used for the fulcrum of the larger piece attached to the hammer head. These hammers / handles/ pendulums are all lashed together with orange bailing rope. A lot of time and energy went into the idea of the mechanism and what hardware I would use. Would I have the hammers pivot on a cotter pin? Or would I use old hinges? Should I glue a rocker on the back of the hammer handle with a staple in the end, which a string or chain would attach to the counterbalance? While I was letting this all incubate, I was looking in the junk stores for availability of various, appropriate bits. I decided to do a mockup, so I got bailing twine and just lashed it together. It felt right and amazingly it worked. I not only liked the aesthetic of it but, in the spirit of Hastymades, it



was like the end process of bulldogging a cow: it was lashed together rapidly and in the end I felt like I should jump up with my hands raised in the air.

In between the short time that I had built it and the graduate show, the *Pica Churn* was housed in the graduate studio. After it was tuned in, it worked wonderfully. The initial idea of this artwork had its intended location outside, over a fire pit, on a hill under a heritage apple tree. So, when I was given the opportunity to put it outside, I took it. The new arboretum where it is currently in situ was the next best thing. It gives me a great sense of satisfaction to see it in its current location, because it transformed it. It has changed from an imagined museum piece to only be viewed, to a real artifact that one can see being used by people camping or tending fields creating a suspension of disbelief as an example of machine expressionism.



Figure 15: *Pica Churn*, in situ, by Joshua Hust, 2023



*Figure 16: Pica Churn, in Situ, by Joshua Hust, 2023*

One of the other major components of Gadson's modus operandi is pacing and thinking. He seeks out a place that he feels will allow him to do more creative thinking whether that is a favorite spot outside or pacing in the bathroom. My pacing is done in conjunction with copious coffee consumption and continuous incubation.

*"Whenever I make anything, I usually have no idea of what I'm doing when I'm getting started... Only after I've begun to work with something do I have an idea that, OK, maybe it needs to go in this direction. I spend a lot of time making mistakes."*  
(Ganson)

As I delved into these artists' processes, I became more enthusiastic about our similarities. Each of us starts with a fluid idea of how we will bring our idea to fruition, realizing that failures and mistakes are both essential and inevitable. I suggest that our creative path's part ways regarding the building of the artifact. I too work in a similar vein, however, where our approaches differ is that my machines do not actually need to work, which allows me some tolerances not afforded to Ganson. I surmise the number of mistakes does not vary much, just the quality of those mistakes. Neither Ganson nor I have had formal training with machines as we enjoy tinkering and the experience of trial and error as part of our process.



*Figure 17: Heureka by Jean Tinguely, 1964*

The next artist I felt was within my sphere of artistic doctrine is Jean Tinguely. Tinguely is also a kinetic sculptor who uses some of the same materials. However, whereas his machines are made to destruct by design mine happen to deconstruct because of the materials used and the building practices incorporated in the art, more specifically the Hastymades. Whereas I am certainly interested in his big metal gear and wheel contraptions and am jealous of his metamechanics, it is his use of the participants and viewers and how he makes them part of the experience that I find most inspirational. In my case in my work, I have stolen this as I have made machines that the people can touch or play with. One example would be the *Handy Dandy*.



*Figure 18: The Handy Dandy, In Situ, Detail, by Joshua Hust, 2023*

This well implemented wheelbarrow invites interaction. With all of the parts opening and closing the tools and creating unique configurations is part of the appeal of the artwork.



*Figure 19: Yielding Stone by Gabriel Orozco, 1992*

*"What I'm after is the liquidity of things, how one thing leads you on to the rest... The works are about concentration, intention, and paths of thought".~Gabriel Orozco*

Another artist that I really admire is Gabriel Orozco. I think his breadth of work is impressive. He is like a world designer going out and about rearranging and adjusting the world so that when some sort of cosmic in-laws come over without calling ahead, the planet will be in tip top shape. One of the characteristics of his work that I pursue in mine, Orozco captures much more eloquently. I think this is true for me in the sense that from the single

found object there is a rhizomatic explosion of strategic choices for machines and relationships; a plethora of ingenious works of art. It is up to me to prune these rhizomes so each element may be cultivated like a personal bonsai into the next masterpiece. Whether one is talking about Orozco's "*Yielding Stone*," which is the basketball size ball of clay that he rolled down the road picking up detritus and impressions along the way, or the cans of tuna on the watermelons, he seems to be doing his best to make people think again. I attempt to do the same thing by putting disparate parts and found objects together in such a way that people must question what is happening. These machines do not always work and in fact after the first couple of times rarely do. Like the *Palouse Barrow* will certainly work or at least it screams possibility of work but after the first couple of times after being out in the weather it will cease to function. Orozco explains: "We normally consider stability to be the constant in life and accidents to be the exception, but it is exactly the opposite. The accident is the rule and stability are the exception"( Orozco). Once again I feel a kinship with Orozco as this seems to fit my fondness for fighting against the odds.



*Figure 20: Monogram by Robert Rauschenberg, 1955-1959*

*"It's when you've found out how to do certain things, that it's time to stop doing them, because what's missing is that you're not including the risk. ( Robert Rauschenberg)*

This leads me to a final candidate for inspirational artists and that would be Robert Rauschenberg. I do find some of his “Combines “ inspirational and I am appreciative that he, like Duchamp, took the chances and fought the battles paving the way for my own art. I find that for me it is less the actual artwork and more the attitude. His commentary has actually had more of a validation of my art practices than his art. He describes working in a direction until he stops at the time when he is bored or develops an understanding that another appetite has formed. This mantra by Rauschenberg, so to speak, is somewhat of a curse, but it is true for me as well. I must combat it by having several sculptures in the pipeline so that upon the occasion that one of these things happen I can just switch to a more novel endeavor.

Machine Expressionism is what I practice, and I have reached this conclusion because at the foundation, what I do is about the feeling surrounding the machines. I have gone through a laundry list of art movements that I tried to identify with, and it was difficult because I was not comfortable with those labels. When all is said and done, I found it all came down to several sets of emotions.

Why do I choose the specific pieces to assemble into the machines? It might be intuitive, but that doesn't quite explain the actual, specific reasons specifically. On the other hand, it works really well because how many emotive words can one use to describe "rust." What is a machine? The Oxford dictionary describes it "as a piece of equipment with many parts that work together to do a particular task." I feel under this definition I do not make machines; I make the essence and feel of a machine, as I cannot guarantee these pieces will complete the intended task. Ultimately, semi-utilitarian art is what my machines become. A Schrödinger cat they remain in a state of being both alive and dead. Even after they are activated, they remain in a similar state every time as they have the potential to work or fail every time that they are activated due to ramshackle building processes and how the questionable materials are "assemblaged."

## Assemblages of the Machine Expressionist



*Figure 21: The Great American Triple Barrow, in situ, by Joshua Hust, 2023*



The Single Barrow on the bottom stands out like the prow of a galleon with the upper two supported on a steel mast like the billowing sails leaning into the wind, charging forward as a vehicle for Manifest Destiny. *The Great American Triple Barrow* was inspired by the commercials and media that prey on the people. They promote the consumerist myth that bigger is always better. We are all bombarded with the premise that you had not only to keep up with the “Jones” but that you should usurp their status as the apex consumer. That this is just how the people could stake their claim and actualize their destiny.

While building this triple barrel, I was picturing the turn of the century salesperson showing all the farmers at the state fair or the prospectors at Miner’s Jubilee this amazing technology. The triple barrow for all its logic and layers could save you three times the trips to the woodshed. It was patriotic as it had all the colors of the United States flag. However, as with most of my projects this was also absurd. Anyone that has operated or driven a wheelbarrow knows that the secret to its success is balance and a full tire. Empty, this takes quite the strength and agility to run it properly. This is one of the first pieces that I have painted. My intent was to have it look bright and shiny but under closer scrutiny one would see the rust and dings underneath the patriotic exterior. This piece was placed on the stump pedestal to really enhance the point of the new man vs nature industrial age triumphs over Mother Earth in the belief of Manifest Destiny.

## Scull or Skeeter Barrow

This is one of many wheelbarrow pieces, which was inspired by a long history of other barrows. While researching wheelbarrows, I found that they were invented in China in approximately 118 A.D. and were used for both hauling cargo and passengers. Further into the study, I came upon engravings that showed a European wheelbarrow (which did not arrive upon the scene until 1170 CE) that had sails to assist in pushing the loads. I had already been scribbling diagrams of the *Fly Barrow* and so was inspired to conquer air, land, and sea with barrow builds. In this case, I was drawn to a childhood fascination with the water skeeter (or skipper).

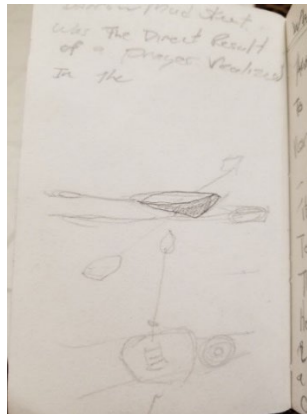


Figure 22: Drawing of Scull Barrow by Joshua Hust, 2022



Figure 23: Inspiration for Scull Barrow

I was in awe of the sleek body in the middle and the elegant legs out to the side that somehow defied gravity skating out across the waters. To that end, I wanted a regular sized barrow that was in fair condition. This was important because like a dingy, skiff, or skipper and other small watercraft or critter, it needed to have a low profile so that would dictate that I used oars instead of paddles. I used three pairs of silvery weathered wheelbarrow handles to create the long legs of the Skeeter barrow. Once again, while I am currently using farm implements and hand tools, I decided not to use the old oarlocks I had initially intended, but instead to destroy a Western tchotchke that was designed to hold a personalized branding iron for steaks or small critters. I used its horseshoes to hold the oars. For the oars I had planned to utilize old wooden oars but was unable to find one that fit my design requirements, as by this time, the design was becoming a scull type craft. I reexamined my options and was able to discover that there were shovels with nine-inch handles.

Unfortunately, not only were there no worn-out ones within the area, the new ones were too expensive. So, I hit my route of junk stores one more time and was able to find a well-worn post hole digger. The post hole digger was a great solution because, even though it did not have quite the length I had yearned for, after applying a little elbow grease and some well-placed cuss words, I was able to divide it into two symmetrical oars. I decided to use a single wheelbarrow leg in the front to hold the coiled anchor rope. For the grand finale it was important to me to lash down the basin to the legs with the orange bailing twine. This would not only help with the Hastymade aesthetic but also help create continuity with my other works. The placement of this one in Paradise creek really made it sing. I feel that this art in situ becomes a better example of machine expressionism because there is a suspension of disbelief, even though it is sinking.



*Figure 24: Scull Barrow, in situ, by Joshua Hust, 2023*



*Figure 25: Scull Barrow, in situ, by Joshua Hust, 2023*

## **Baggage Barrow Deluxe**

*The Baggage Barrow* was inspired by the burdens of moving. As I was growing up, I moved several times following my wayward father as he eeked out a living. Even to this day I still think that I have some boxes that have never been emptied. One case in point to this very day my family does not fill a medicine cabinet. Instead, we have a hand-woven African bag that is like a purse that all of the medications and toothbrushes go in. The art piece speaks to this nomadic lifestyle. It is the deluxe model as it has the springy cushion so that a person's valuables will be safely transported down the trail. This piece is a Compost as I have had the components for several seasons, and the idea just came to me after a long incubation period. Although it uses the same types of materials and building techniques as a Hastymade, it does not have the frenzied time component and it started with the materials and not an idea.

*The Baggage Barrow Deluxe* will work equally well in situ or a gallery, but I have a personal preference because I see myself using it on a trail littered with pine needles like the one in the old arboretum situ.



*Figure 26: Baggage Barrow Deluxe, in detail, by Joshua Hust, 2023*



*Figure 27: Baggage Barrow Deluxe, in situ, by Joshua Hust, 2023*



## Chapter 5: Summary

### Summary

Machine Expressionism is created using Assemblage and Bricolage to make machine simulacra. The mere physical and emotional expressions of a machine. These are mechanical devices with no lasting utility but including all visual, audible, and tactile characteristics. The physical manifestation of this object is made up of found objects that become the replacement parts of a machine. Each object can only perform similar duties of the parts replaced. The end result is a physical embodiment of the machine that has the possibility, however small, of performing the same utility function of the original machine. The artwork also harnesses the imbedded emotional characteristics and memories encased within found objects. The two main strategies I use are Hastymades and Composts. The Hastymades which in most cases are put together quickly within a compressed timeframe, and in a ramshackled manner. The other strategy is the Compost which is a process of incubation that takes place over a long period of time. This happens when I spend a long time in the environment of the pieces, whether in my studio or in the Boneyard. Unconsciously the found objects seem to gravitate toward one another in my mind until there is some catalyst that brings the inevitable creation moment. Each system of found objects simulacra reaches for the potential of a quasi-ephemeral utility. Each simulacra expresses machineness.

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