

THE COMBINATION OF OBJECTS IN
BOX-LIKE CONTAINERS

PROBLEM IN LIEU OF THESIS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Within the past few years, boxes have become intriguing objects to me. Through my reading of the book, Art in Boxes, by Alex Mogelon and Norman Laliberte, I have realized how boxes are a part of a person's everyday life and how they often hold a sort of mysticism. How often do you look at a closed box and not feel a desire to open it and see what is inside? From my interest in boxes, I have set forth to create boxes which contain items that produce a mystical or fantasy type environment.

Boxes and containers have always been an integral part of our life. The incubator, the infant's crib, the baby carriage are all boxes of a sort. Our earliest recollections are of boxes: an empty carton occupied us, the jack-in-the-box amused us, the church collection box mystified us.

When we were children, boxes represented a special kind of magic...Every big sister had a hope chest stowed away some place in the stillness of the house - a box embracing all that was yet to be...Many of us saved cookie and cigar boxes for collections of important things like thread and string, buttons, silver foil, china figurines, bottle tops, coupons and foreign stamps.

Who can forget rummaging through trunks and suitcases stored high in the attic or deep in the basement, boxes of "remember when"? And at Christmas time we contemplated different sized, gaily decorated boxes under the tree, boxes which held the promise of tomorrow.

All good things came and still come in boxes...The box is the conveyor of our needs, our triumphs, our creativity, our ability to produce, our follies, our hang-ups, our memorabilia and finally that which we have reduced to refuse...

Our involvement with and obsession for boxes is incessant and seemingly quite inescapable. From the moment we first open our eyes to the very instant we close them for the last time, the box - as an intriguing and exciting physical form, design or concept - is ever present.¹

The box form has a universality. Within it can be captured a concept, imagery, symbolism and the entire array of human activities.²

Throughout my work in ceramics and drawing I have collected small fabricated and found objects such as fragments of discarded ceramic pieces, doll heads, faces, shoes, knobs, and roses. These objects, which are on the floors, shelves, or tables of my home and studio, are an ever present part of my environment. My ideas begin and grow from these familiar everyday objects that I have collected and stored. From my construction of boxes and containers I have been able to put these ideas and objects together in a more permanent and protected environment. The contained items are removed from the everyday world and thus become objects having different meanings. When these objects exist in a protected and enclosed space of their own, they take on a calm and serene atmosphere.

¹Alex Mogelon and Norman Laliberte, Art in Boxes, (New York, 1974), p. 7.

²Dona Z. Meilach, Box Art, Assemblage and Construction, (New York, 1975), p. 7.

The boxes often times hold my fantasies and become shrines for meaningful objects and ideas.

During the fall semester of 1976 I began combining my ceramics and drawings together in plexiglas box containers to create an entirely different visual effect than when they were viewed separately. My first concern was whether the two media would complement each other when combined in containers. Through my first series of boxes I found that the two media could work together successfully to form a new visual unit.

For my project, I chose to construct ten containers in which clay and non-traditional drawings were combined. The various materials used were ceramics, drawings on plexiglas, wood, and other found materials. The questions to be answered by the completion of the ten pieces were the following:

1. What types of containers are most complimentary in combining ceramics and drawings?
2. What types of drawing media are most successful for combining drawings with ceramics?
3. What types of presentation are most successful?
4. What three-dimensional materials other than ceramics are visually important in the combined pieces?

CHAPTER II

STUDIO INVESTIGATION

During the completion of the pieces a written journal was kept showing my findings and reactions to the box-like containers. Photographs of the completed pieces were also taken. From this information the following analysis of the finished pieces is presented. I have chosen to discuss seven of the ten completed boxes which I feel are most successful. Seven different approaches, each of which is described, were used. All of the box-like containers, whether fabricated plexiglas or wooden boxes, antique boxes, or thrown ceramic containers, are used to hold objects. The majority of the items enclosed in the boxes are of a soft or delicate nature and therefore create a pleasant and mystical world.

Through the completion of this creative project I gained a certain satisfaction in simply learning how to construct boxes out of plexiglas and wood. Both of these materials were fairly new to me. I found that it was easier to build more than one box at a time and then work with the inside compositions. In that way, I was not forced to hold in my ideas for compositions until I had constructed the box. The box was immediately ready for the composition and idea to be

put inside. I gained ideas for new box constructions from unfinished or discarded boxes that I had laying around in my house and studio. Often times, I would tear apart an almost completed box so I could use a portion of that composition in a new box I was constructing at that moment.

Figure #1: "Box of Roses"

Size: 6" tall x 6" wide x 6" deep

"Box of Roses," a table piece, is a fabricated plexiglas container. Inside it contains a low fire ceramic object, plaster roses, velveteen, semi-opaque fabric, and gold thread. The drawing media and techniques used in the box consist of tiny drilled holes on the lid of the box. The holes, drilled completely through the plexiglas, create a curved line across the lid. The sides of the lid are cut in scallop-type curves and painted white. The white painted trim also serves as a type of frame for the objects inside the box. On two sides of the box a gold spray paint was applied, and again the scallop-type curves were repeated. The gold thread on the inside of the box creates a loosely flowing line. This line creates a definite contrast to the controlled line on the outside of the box.

Figure #2: "A Child's Box"

Size: 12½" tall x 4½" wide x 4" deep

"A Child's Box," a wall piece, is a found container - an old sewing machine drawer. Vinyl doll arms and a porcelain

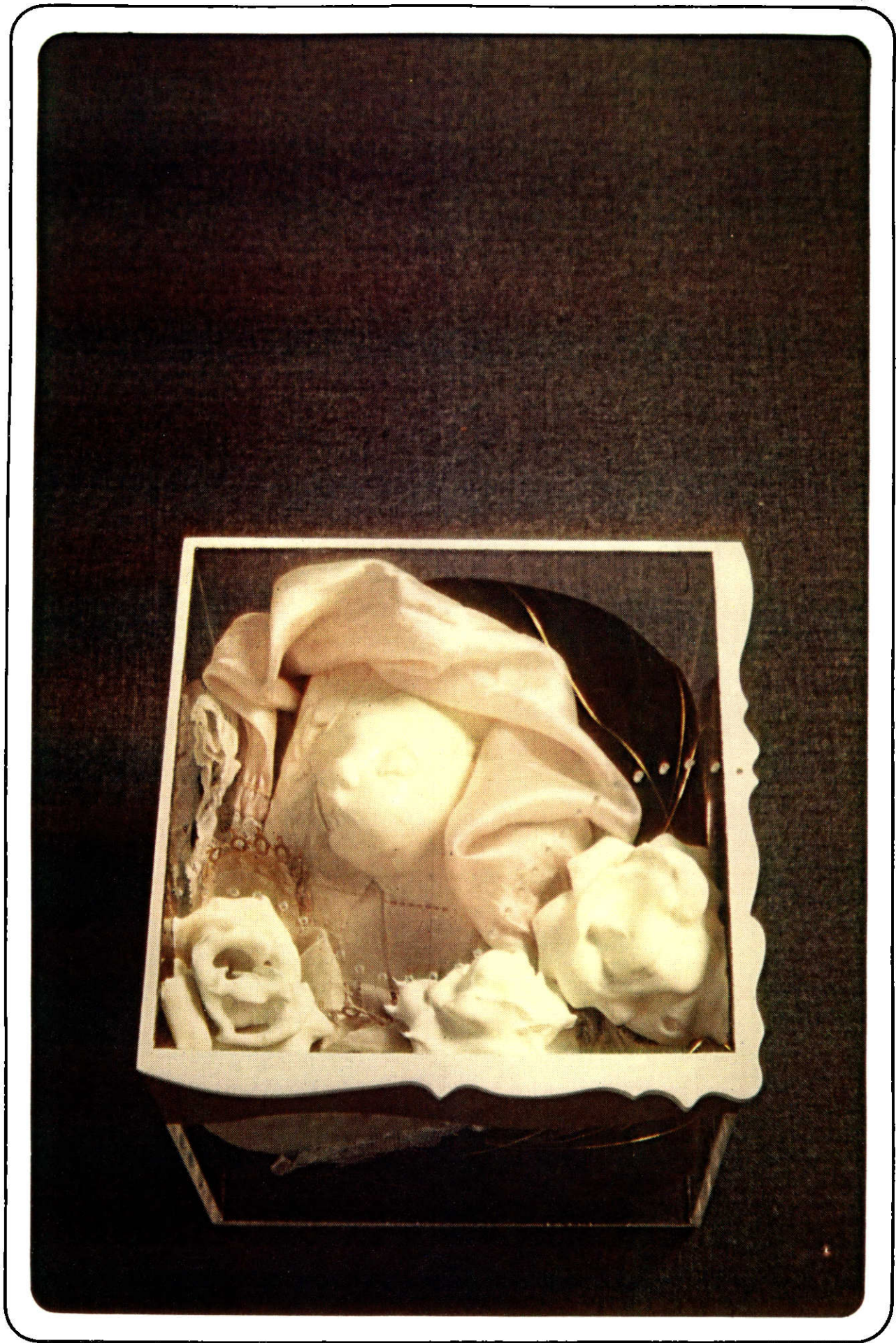


Fig. 1. "Box of Roses"

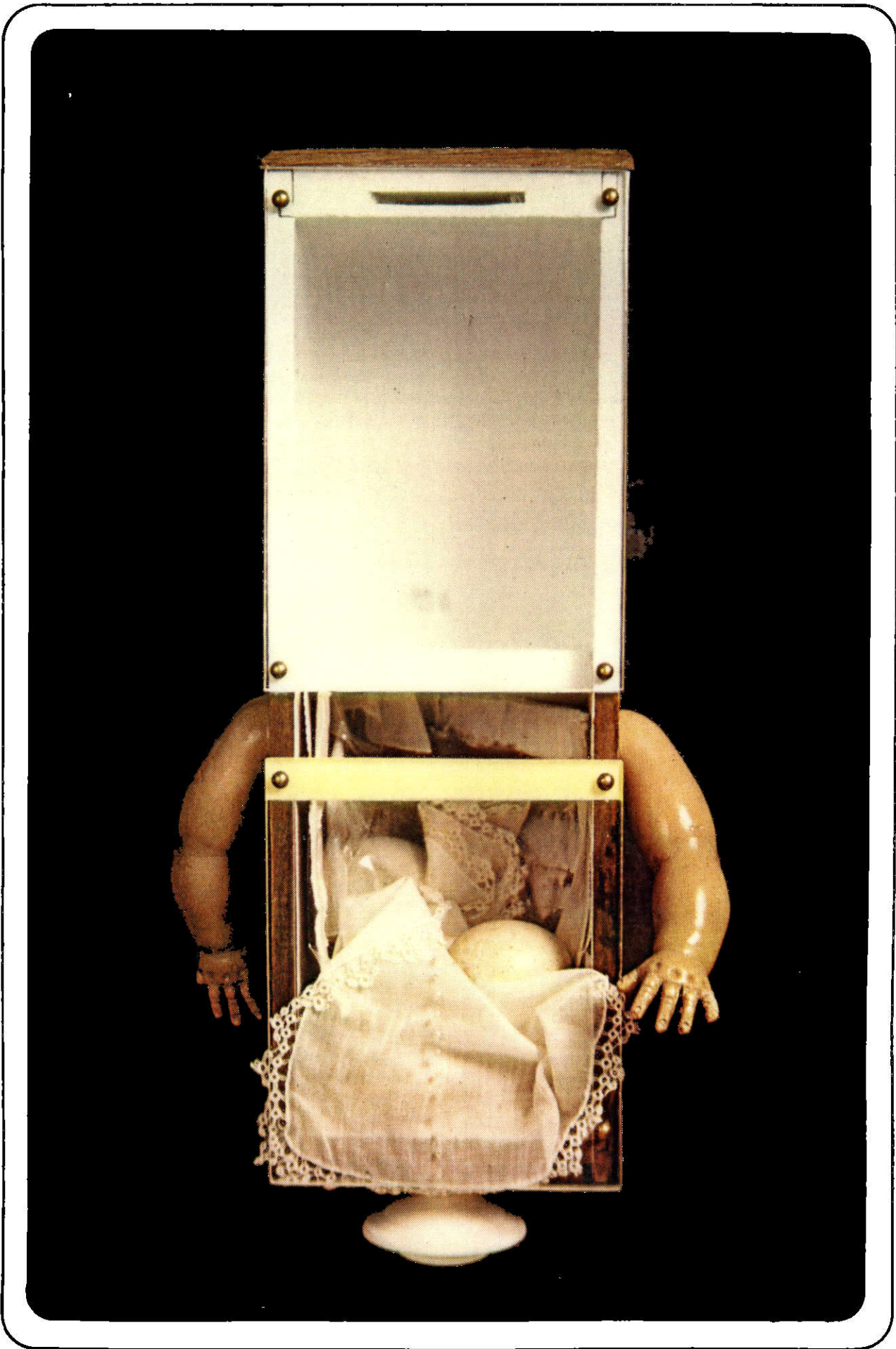


Fig. 2. "A Child's Box"

knob are attached to the outside of the box. The inside contains a white cotton handkerchief with tatting around the edges, an egg, pins, paper, and a blue velvet ribbon. In this box, spray paint and gesso are the drawing media used. Pastel pencil on paper is incorporated with the ribbon and pins. On the plexiglas covering, a faint vertical line is created by tiny drilled holes going completely through the plexiglas. A strong horizontal line is created by the yellow stripe of paint sprayed onto the plexiglas.

Figure #3: "Cylinder of White Dress Shoes"

Size: 21-1/2" tall x 8-3/4" wide

"Cylinder of White Dress Shoes," a floor piece, is a thrown stoneware cylinder container. The cylinder contains low fire, slip-cast shoes, silver thread, and small clear beads. The lid for the cylinder consists of a round $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick sheet of clear plexiglas. The drawing techniques incorporated into this piece are on the plexiglas lid. Scallop-type flowing lines were incised with a sharp pointed tool and small holes were drilled into the plexiglas. This time the holes only went partially through the plexiglas. The holes were later filled with silver ink. The total area of the plexiglas was sanded except for two oval areas. Therefore, the vision of the shoes was blurred except when viewed through these two areas.

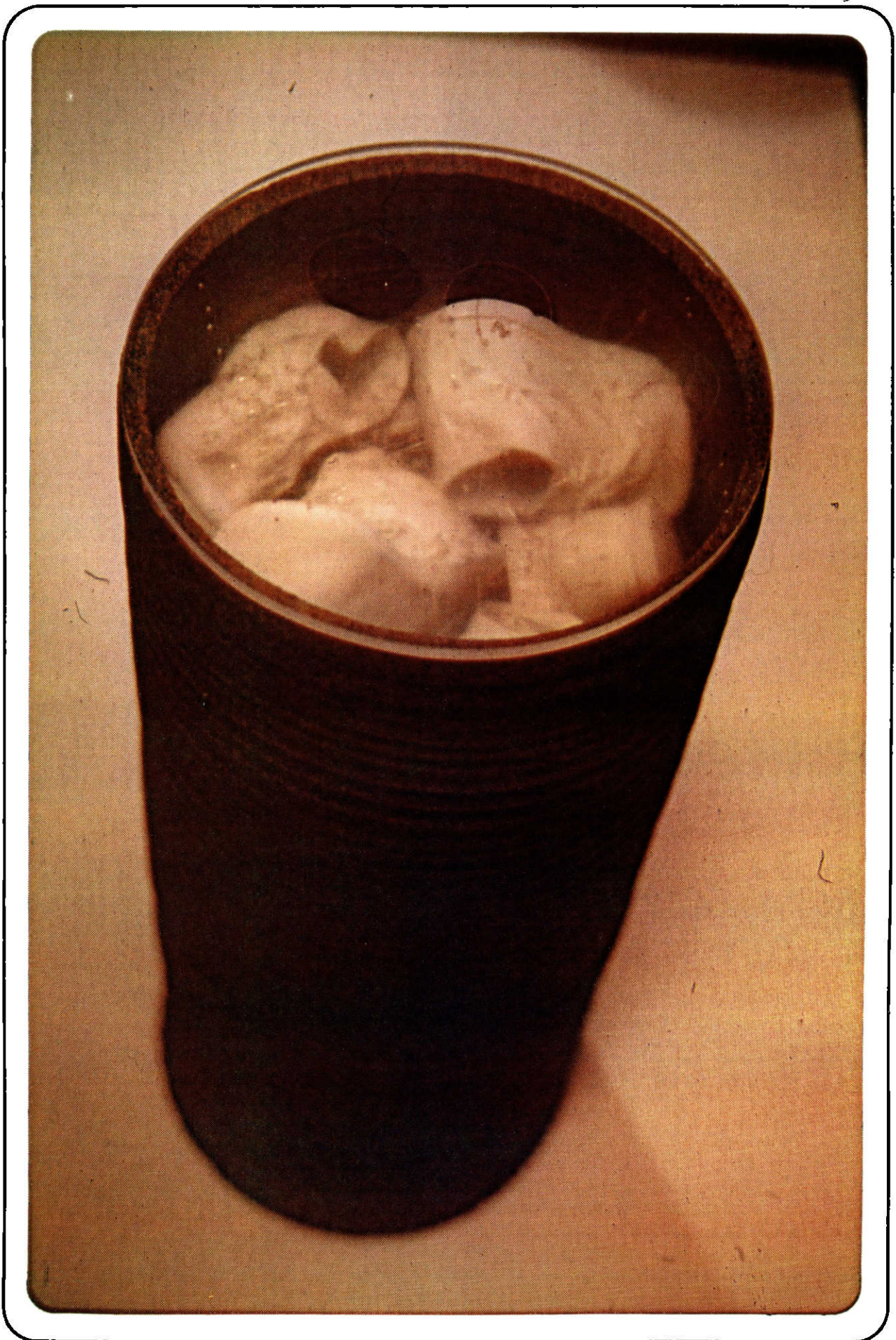


Fig. 3. "Cylinder of White Dress Shoes"

Figure #4: "A Box to Sleep In"

Size: 5" tall x $3\frac{1}{2}$ " wide x 6" deep

"A Box to Sleep In," a table piece, is a fabricated plexiglas box. It is an open, double decker type of box consisting of two box shapes joined together. This box, unlike the previous containers, is not completely closed. It remains open on the top. The ceramic piece inside the box is a porcelain object with a gold metallic lustre on the knob portion. Other materials are lace, beaded lace, gold thread, and brass rods. Brass rods and scallop-type edges of the plexiglas create lines around the ceramic object. Tiny drilled holes in the plexiglas also create line.

Figure #5: "The Doll and the Tennessee Sheep"

Size: $13\frac{1}{3}$ " tall x $8\frac{1}{4}$ " wide x $5\frac{3}{4}$ " deep

"The Doll and the Tennessee Sheep," a table piece, is a found, ready-made wooden box. It is hinged on one side so that the wooden lid can be opened and shut. I added a clear plexiglas lid between the box and the wooden lid to cover the objects inside the box. The materials used inside the box are plaster, a found toy sheep, lace, silver thread, a wooden wing, and a found doll covered lightly with plaster. Drawing media and techniques consist of scallop-type lines enscribed into the plexiglas lid with a sharp pointed tool. A blurred effect is created by the sanded areas of the



Fig. 4. "A Box to Sleep In"



Fig. 5. "The Doll and the Tennessee Sheep"

plexiglas. Lines are also used on the inside of the box, which is partially painted with gesso. Drawing techniques are also used on the doll itself. Soft, muted color on the surface of the doll was achieved by magazine transfer, colored pencils, and pastels. A white iridescent paint was applied over the previously mentioned colors. This box became more drawing oriented than any of the other boxes because I treated the surface of the doll in the same fashion as I would approach a drawing on paper.

Figure #6: "Pillows to Lay My Head On #1"

Size: $3\frac{1}{2}$ " tall x 3" wide x $1\frac{1}{4}$ " deep

"Pillows to Lay My Head On #1," a table piece, is a fabricated walnut box with a plexiglas lid. The box contains a porcelain ceramic object with a gold metallic lustre knob. Other materials used inside are lace, trim from an old dress, satin, and a gauze-like material. A strip of plexiglas with curved edges is enclosed in the box. A line enscribed on the lid of the box repeats the same flow of the curved edge of the plexiglas within the box. The strip of plexiglas and the enscribed line make up the major portion of the drawing techniques. A white border around the outside of the plexiglas lid frames the composition inside the box.

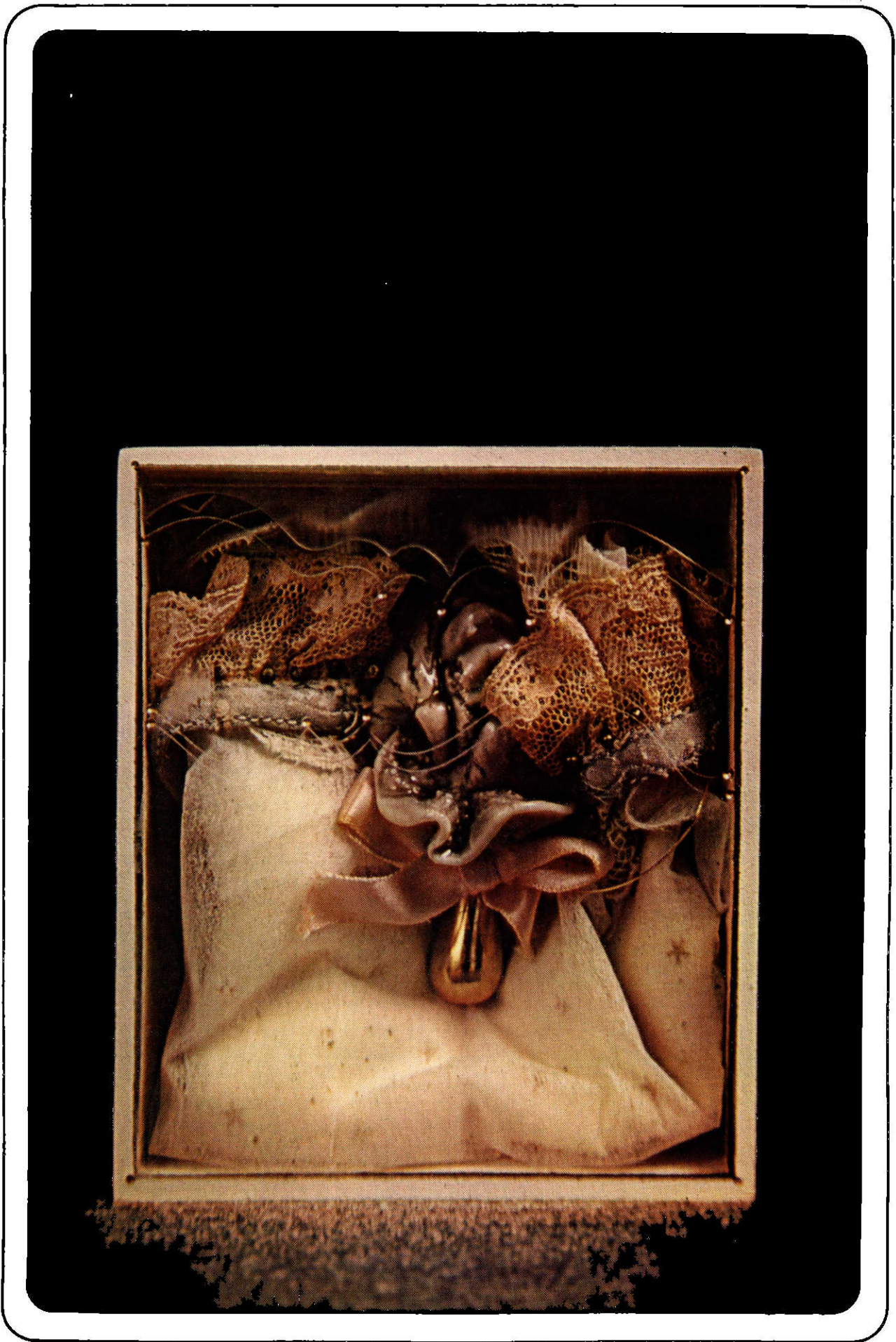


Fig. 6. "Pillows to Lay My Head on #1"

Figure #7: "Cylinder of Rose-Covered Shoes"

Size: 17" tall x 10" wide

"Cylinder of Rose-Covered Shoes," a floor piece, is a thrown stoneware cylinder container. The cylinder contains low fire, slip-cast shoes with applied ceramic decals. Other materials used are velveteen, net from a doll's wedding dress, lace, beads, and plastic wrap. The main drawing media used is thread stitched into the plastic wrap. This thread creates a flowing line around the shoes. No lid was made for this container. The only type of covering over the objects is the plastic wrap which is wrapped around all of the objects in the cylinder.



Fig. 7. "Cylinder of Rose-Covered Shoes"

CHAPTER III

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

I feel that this project was successful in many ways other than in answering the questions I had set forth. This project is not simply a problem that I have begun and solved through the completion of the ten box-like containers. Although I have answered the questions I asked of myself, I find new questions beginning, and I feel the need to continue working in this area of concentration.

Of the different types of presentation used (floor pieces, wall pieces, and table pieces), the table pieces were the most successful. Most of the boxes were fairly small and tended to be cubical in nature. Because of this fact, the pieces often became engulfed on a wall, or they protruded from the wall too far. The boxes seemed to need a small and more personal environment, such as that of a table.

Fabricated containers were more complimentary in combining ceramics and drawings. By constructing the containers myself, I could make them especially for the idea and objects which were to go inside. When I used found boxes, I often could not incorporate a certain set of objects and ideas into the box because of the size, shape, or total over-all

appearance of the box. I had to find objects that would relate with that particular box. The boxes that I made related more successfully to the enclosed pieces because, as I was constructing the box, I usually had some idea of what items were to be placed inside. Therefore, I could allow for these items through the size, shape, and total appearance of the box.

The drawing media and techniques most successful were the drilled holes that created lines and the lines enscribed on the plexiglas. These lines on the outside of the boxes related the plexiglas lids or containers to the lines created by the metallic thread, lace, or other fabric on the inside of the boxes. The drawing techniques on the outside of the boxes often enhanced or mystified the materials used inside the boxes. Fogging the plexiglas by sanding it created a mystical feeling because the objects underneath the plexiglas were not easily focused upon. Small clear areas were always left in the fogged areas of the plexiglas so that some of the actual items under the plexiglas could be focused on clearly. The fogging technique also created a softness to the plexiglas which was similar to the softness of the items enclosed in the boxes.

Three-dimensional materials, other than ceramic objects, that were visually important were lace, metallic thread, fabrics, and found objects such as roses or toy sheep. The lace and fabric seemed to be most important because they often

became a sort of protecting cushion for the ceramic object or other objects to rest upon or in which to be engulfed. The materials I chose to use inside the boxes were usually old or made to look old. These antique qualities seemed to bring about nostalgic feelings and often a feeling of preserved age or antiquity.

The three-dimensional objects that I chose to use inside the boxes were often substitutions for images that I use in my drawings. These objects, such as the roses, sheep, or flower decals often portray a sense of nostalgia or pleasantry. These feelings are also prominent in my drawings.

In my work, the boxes are an extension and incorporation of my ceramics and my drawings. My personal feelings from both areas are captured in these box-like containers. The boxes put the combined items in a separate and complete world of their own and contribute in creating a complete and valid statement of the combination of ceramics, found objects, and drawing techniques.

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