

# “THE RECRUITMENT OFFICE OF INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES”

By

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## Abstract

My work has always explored discarded material. I am also a passionate amateur of multiple disciplines. I call myself an amateur because of my curiosity for other disciplines not measured by a degree. The Recruitment Office of Interdisciplinary Studies is a fictional installation set in the welcome office of the Gray Gallery in order to explore the possibilities of other disciplines and their relationship to conceptual practices of fine art. I have hopes of creating a dialogue with the audience that promotes and creates skepticism and intrigue.



“THE RECRUITMENT OFFICE OF INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES”

A Thesis

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East Carolina University School of Art and Design

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Masters Degree in Fine Arts

By

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# “THE RECRUITMENT OFFICE FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES”

## Chapter 1

### The Artistic Anthropologist

Emerging in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, curiosity cabinets or wunderkammer were the foundations for modern thought, scientific observation, and the modern institutions of academia. A cabinet originally stood for a room rather than a piece of furniture. These cabinets were filled with natural ephemera like coral, minerals, precious metals and stones, plant life, skulls, paintings, taxidermy, and fossils. Some objects were fictitious and were meant solely to inspire exploration, discovery, and innovation. Cabinets usually belonged only to aristocracy or explorers hired by the aristocracy. During the Renaissance these wonder rooms gained in their popularity and proved crucial to scientific development. Many artistic movements would follow as result of the Renaissance.

Since the age of Enlightenment during the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the use of the scientific method has influenced how we think and work. That strong influence also showed a rise in institutions and disciplines creating a rapid decline for these cabinets during the late 18th and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Modern cabinets have become the museums of today, generalizing the experiences gained by the participants and creating simplified questions with reductive answers.

The scientific method at the time of its conception promoted skepticism and artistic movements like Dada. Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, and Institutional critique were no different.

## Collage to Assemblage

Artistic players like Marcel Duchamp became credited with introducing concepts like the ready-made, which meant that industrially produced objects can achieve the status of an art object merely through the process of selection, arrangement and presentation. The work “The Fountain” signed by R. Mutt posed a direct challenge to traditional perceptions of fine art, ownership, originality and plagiarism. Dada works featured deliberate irrationality, and the logical rejection of the prevailing standards of art. Challenging perceptions doesn’t always mean they are accepted even though the trend continued. Collage and assemblage artists like Robert Rauschenberg, Kurt Schwitters, and Joseph Cornell who continued the tradition, were some of my first inspirational motivators for creating collages. Starting with collage I quickly migrated to assemblage. Using an old pocket watch mixed with a boot spur and some skeleton keys “The Amalgamation of a Midnights Pass” took form.

“The Amalgamation of a Midnights Pass”

### Mixed Media Assemblage



Kurt Schwitters was a German Dada painter known for his collages and assemblages. This Dadaist, I feel, was one of the founders of the installation. Installing his Merz projects where he dramatically altered, over a period of time, rooms in the family house in Hanover, Germany. These were directly influenced from cubist works that were his collage foundations. The Surrealist American artist Joseph Cornell created whimsical childhood diorama box art pieces that romanced the artifact and yet also created a surreal poetry dialogue in the juxtaposition. Robert Rauschenberg became known for his combines, which were combinations between painting, sculpture, photography, and even performance. His combines were for me the real nitty gritty of the urban lifestyle going on at the time in New York.

Growing up in a culture of trash and treasure, antiques shows and craft fairs, my research centers on the use of discarded material, collecting and archiving for future use all in the name of art. The culture of buy, sell, and trade is a culture all unto its own. Each individual setting up booths, with artifacts for sale, has acquired knowledge pertaining to each item, where it was made, by who, with what material, how many were made, who inspired it and the list goes on and on. Others will just throw the junk on the table with no rhyme or reason just to make a buck. Now most antique dealers I have run across have acquired this knowledge through years of observational training and research much like an artist.

## Chapter 2

### Appropriate Appropriation to Installation

I related to the material culture that these mixed media artists shared, seeing the possibilities that they could offer. Coming from a culture of antiques and flea markets I feel that my migration towards this type of representational art was natural. Their work seemed odd and unusual from what seemed to be more widely accepted forms of art, like painting, and yet their work is still deemed important, but why? Their work seemed to be involved with more than just art but the social world from which it was a representation of. My interest and knowledge of collage and assemblage came from drawing and also trying to understand the motivations behind the artist. While also trying to understand the methods behind this rigorous type of anthropological scavenging, I knew I had to develop something of my own, and it ended up being my organization of the inventory I had collected.

During my time at East Carolina University in the School of Art and Design I discovered other artists like Andrea Frasier, Mark Dion, Fred Wilson and Mierle Laderman Ukeles who used Institutional Critique of art as a way of re-representing the convictions of art. Their work disarticulated the aesthetic judgment of museums and art institutions in order to challenge the assumptions of aesthetic autonomy, pertaining to painting and sculpture.

Each artist had different approaches to the critique. Mierle Laderman Ukeles' works involved using maintenance as an artistic activity. Using art spaces and museums she would clean and prepare certain spaces within the institutions and the idea of cleaning art objects became a material to transform. Andrea Fraser is perhaps the most influential to the movement of institutional critique. In one of her most memorable art performances "Museum Highlights," she portrayed the role of a docent in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. A docent's role in a

museum is to create an awareness of the art collection and its importance. Following a script provided by the museum and going by the name of Jane Castleton, Frasier would lead groups around the museum to works of art like the museums water fountain, alarm system, and the museums cafeteria. She would describe each one like a piece of art using language as her form of manipulation and creation.

Fred Wilson was another key player in the movement. He focused his concerns in political and social justice. At this point is where Fred decided he didn't need to create works of art any more but to create installations of mock museums. Leading into his most seminal work of "Mining the Museum" where he took the collection of the Maryland's Historical Society and rearranged it to showcase the history of Native and African Americans in Maryland. His approach was deconstructing the traditional way in which art and artifact have been displayed. I wouldn't call his methods of working non-traditional but his juxtaposition of artifacts forced the viewer to question their own assumptions that have shaped their interpretations of the truth.

Influenced by Wilson's work, Mark Dion is highly active in ecology and biology using scientific installations to draw parallels between nature and our affect on it. Using some ideas from Wilson and how the museum presented its material, Dion set out to create a series of works in multiple universities and museums directly resembling a cabinet of curiosities. Working with the museums and universities Dion had a team of people working on these installations that were inspired by Wilson's "Mining the Museum". By taking existing objects of the institution that seemed to be tucked away in storage Mark Dion and his team set out to create didactic displays of juxtaposition between ideas though the objects.

Dion's multiple projects that deal with the object and juxtaposition with the viewers understanding has been a big influence on me during my graduate studies.

I decided to make a switch from trying to create collages into mounting my own natural history collection. The idea of placing an object on a pedestal seemed to be a natural progression in the way I conceptualize about art within an institution. I have been collecting things for years and I like to think I have an eye for certain objects like artists have a certain eye for their own aesthetics. I like to have an open mind about certain things. My manipulation of materials that have created decisions in my process were in order to re-represent nature in terms of the artifact.

“Open Minded”  
Mixed Media Assemblage



Having an open mind allows me to absorb information with so many different viewpoints. “Open Minded,” is a human skull mounted to a brass and wood pedestal. The outcome looks intentional, which it is, but the collection of the objects that makes up its aesthetics comes from multiple locations. The base is an old wood candlestick holder cut in half. Attached to the top of the candlestick base is a twisted brass tube from an umbrella handle. The connecting hardware to the skull is a handle finial from opera binoculars. The paper brain that rests inside the skull was actually found in the trash unharmed and unscathed.

Curiosity is a scary thing. Curiosity creates a desire for the unknown, which can overwhelm the senses and cause a person to make rational and sometimes irrational decisions.

“The Spoils of a Piece of Paper”

Collage on Board 32 x 23.5



“The Spoils of a Piece of Paper,” is about the curiosity that drives for understanding so much that it can overwhelm, causing rational and irrational decisions. As a pun this piece represents a degree one gets after college as a reward of participation and experience on a piece of paper. It’s important to remember what you lose to remind you of what you have gained.

## Processes of Aesthetics

Recycling plays a big role in my work. I feel it is important to be knowledgeable about what we have left behind. As an artistic collector I have a perspective of the arts as a collection of techniques, tools, and processes; handed down through history, to use when appropriate. As an artist my methodology of working acts upon how things are put together by taking them apart. I mix traditional artistic parameters, like sculpture and drawing, with aesthetic characteristics of arts and sciences mixed with exploration. In the visual arts, artists tend to define who and what their art is about based on the materials they transform to become a medium.

I use mixed materials and found objects because I have found that some decisions in art making can be solved just the same and still save time without the sacrifice of the manufactured look. I never felt that there was one way to make art. Most of the bases for my mounted objects are appropriated from different authentic antiqued materials like candlesticks, old buttons, lamp parts and thread spools. They are accented with found objects from the scrap yard like decorative screws, spacers, and finials. The brass and silver metals that support the skulls, skeletons, and exoskeletons all have to be specifically made for each specific piece.



## Chapter 3

### An Installation of Inquiry

#### “The Recruitment Office of Interdisciplinary Studies”

“The Recruitment Office” is an artistic installation, taking place in the welcome office of the East Carolina’s School of Art and Design’s Gray Gallery. The installation is a conversation about the curiosity of the art object and to challenge the art object with its traditional outcomes. Its also is supposed to create question and inquiry about the interrelationship between the natural world, art, and technology.

This thesis is presented in installation format, with site-specific issues of artistic academic educations, in order to cross boundaries and open up possibilities within the academic art fields. Using the existing desk I want to push the idea of office further along with a desk light, bulletin board, and appropriated filing cabinets. Each filing cabinet is labeled with different areas of juxtaposed research and observation lining the window wall. The desk is arranged with multiple objects that represent the idea of an office of interdisciplinary that references the cabinet of curiosities. Offices are official places where one works or one would go for a multiple number of things. There is not this type of office on any college campus, and the idea is to stress the importance of a well rounded education and not having any restrictions on what you’re capable of learning or doing based on a degree or major. These labels seem to limit the idea that we are something greater than just a classification.

On the opposing wall of the office is the propaganda wall of artifacts with an asymmetrical composition. Four institutional wire glass shelf panels are the bigger pictures that hold up the total composition.

The installation focus is in encouraging comparisons, finding analogies and parallels between art and the object. The office is a critique of how the objects that inspire art become art and how they can work independently or separately with common themes, by arrangement and juxtaposition without much change or alteration. The audience's participation is crucial for the installation to generate meaning and conversation. They can participate in whatever way they want. I want to convey a sense of intrigue and skepticism among the viewers, in order to recruit the assumptions they might have made about art and how it's made within the academic institution. The installations purpose is to open dialogue through the disciplines, for a more wealthy sense of social awareness. By offering unusual juxtapositions using organization and arrangement as a technique, the design opens up the possibility to gain information on multiple levels through interaction.





## Conclusion

I have come to understand that art has always been about the represented idolized version of nature. The artist comes to terms with their world by observation and the transformation of material expressing these desires. Technology and factory production has made art materials so readily available. Examples like manufactured paints and refined metals, processed so that production time is faster, woods already milled and imported and yet we still consider it hand made. In my opinion most art I see created in art institutions has all become cookie cutter and it seems that everything looks the same. So I have come to the conclusion there is no right way to make an artistic statement. Just make one that is true to your self.

## Artist Statement

With my work I tend to over complicate the simple and simplify the complicated. I have never settled on a particular medium of transformation expression. I like them all.

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