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# Accumulation

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# ACCUMULATION

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Art

in

The School of Art

by  
Jennifer Terbieten Mayer  
B.F.A., Webster University, 1996  
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This also, is in loving memory to my father and grandmother. They've guided my journey in many ways and I will forever be inspired by them.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis is based on the accumulation of old objects found or given to me within the past year. Many are everyday general items that are considered to no longer have a purpose because they are now rusty, used and worn. This thesis is about the search to uncover my infatuation for these objects, as well as, transmit to the audience their aesthetic beauty that generates a similar appreciation.

## INTRODUCTION

Rusty, decayed, lost, broken, old and worn. These are characteristics of the objects spread throughout my studio. As I sit, looking at the accumulation of objects collected throughout the year, I try to determine my infatuation with each individual piece. Many are engulfed in rust and decay and have become fragile remnants of the function they once had. Remains of handles where only the basic foundation and the jagged wood splinters that are embedded into a base are simply signs of their previous existence. Bent nails and screws that once joined other objects in construction lay next to old washers that display a beautiful array of browns, grays and black. Pieces and parts that had a purpose but no longer have the fusion piece that allowed them to function, lay on the floor awaiting their new role.

## SEARCH

What is it about these objects that raise so much emotion in me? In my search for them, some were buried only to expose a minimal piece of their rusty texture to catch my eye, while many lay fully exposed, ready to be given a new life. A few pieces that crossed other friends' paths were passed on to me knowing they would be perfect for my collection. Others were objects that affected other people such as John, a husband of a fellow graduate student that collected old random things for their aesthetic content. He had no purpose for them but saw their pure beauty and wanted to find a way to utilize them so they lay piled on a table until I was able to give them a new life. Pure excitement engulfed me as I rummaged through his collection. Some were complete tools with a layer of rust, some were interesting metal garden accents and chimes that still played a beautiful tune but were no longer deemed useful because of their rusty surface.

Another group of objects were lent to me by my father-in-law. They were stored in a tattered box, high on a shelf in his shed and had been used to install cable and telephone equipment during his previous life working with the phone company. Although these tools weren't discarded and broken, they are no longer needed or functional. As he showed me the box, he explained each tool and its obsolete purpose with such pride. Many years of his life were devoted to his job, to the point that it became a part of his identity. He also has no use for these items but can't throw them away.

My sister gave me another group of objects that contain a portion of her soul due to the memories attached and can't be thrown away for that purpose. My sister lost her fiancé in a motorcycle accident years ago but still maintains the shed in which he worked, diligently fixing

and maintaining their livelihood. One day, she and I dug through the old shed and found some amazing tools and objects. Some were plain quirky items with no reference to their purpose; others were covered in rust, or broken, exhibiting neglect but still holding emotional importance. It's been nine years since the accident and although some of these tools no longer have a purpose she won't let anyone throw them away or treat them with disrespect.

So now comes the question: why some objects and not others? In every case of my discovery, there were many objects passed over. What is it about some objects that speak to me and others that don't? Is it the pure beauty generated by nature or the idea of nature displaying its power over the manmade to remind us how small we really are? Is it my need to save things and give these poor discarded objects a purpose? Is it other people questioning why I like these dirty, rusty, old things or their overflow of memories when they've seen a certain piece? Or, is it simply the idea that everyone can relate to these objects in one form or another? Truly – it's all of the above. Each and every object has such a distinct and defining character. I'm taken with the idea of them displaying nature's aesthetic signature. I'm also taken with giving them a new purpose, and even more taken with the introduction of a new perspective to the viewing public. What infatuates me most is that these objects can lure them in by association, and then I can challenge their base knowledge of the objects and induce an aesthetic awareness.

In my search to speak to this general audience, I began to thoroughly study my objects by moving them around, displaying them in different ways and eventually, drawing them. As I utilized them as drawing studies, I began to question what kind of impact they could have if they were larger than life. Would this bolster the idea of an every day object becoming something beautiful? In drawing the objects, I began to animate them and accentuate their imperfections. I also searched for other ways for them to interact with the viewer. Making them lightweight and

airy was a contradiction to the heavy metal most of them are made of. This led me to draw them on rice paper and display them so they can subtly waft in the rhythm of the viewer.

I also began making paintings using complimentary colors in concert with the aged surfaces. My emphasis was on the objects and complimenting their natural beauty as well as elevating their general function to become something more interesting and aesthetically pleasing. This combination has helped solidify my pieces and pull all my ideas from the past three years to fruition. At this point, I also abandoned the notion that the paintings needed to be framed and began attaching the panels directly to the wall. This gave me the freedom to experiment with the objects in space, and elevate them closer to the viewer, playing with light and shadows. Dyed twine and strings created from previous semesters have also found their way into the paintings, hanging and wrapping some of the objects.

## INSPIRATIONS

Resolving the relationship challenges created when combining three dimensional objects, two dimensional paintings, and their presentation are devoted to a variety of artists. One artist that I believed successfully included objects into his paintings, and has been an inspiration in the past decade, is Robert Rauschenberg. I rushed to his exhibition, as well as an artist talk, in Lafayette, Louisiana in 2005, which motivated me to continue painting although life was trying to lead me in other directions. I was not only thrilled to have someone of his stature in Louisiana, but he was also an artist I could connect with. His *Combines* evoked the concept I was trying to convey. His use of the materials and everyday objects thoroughly drew me into them. They express his desire to break down all barriers between art and life.

Another artist of interest that evoked a closer connection to accumulation was Eva Hesse. She was a major influence my first year with her sculptures and drawings. *Assession II, Sans II, Accretion* and *Magnet Boards* are some examples that encompassed a repetitive nature that enticed me. At first, I believed my infatuation was with their tactile nature and the mediums she used but the works with continuous repetition are the ones that intrigued me most. Their obsessive character makes me want to see into to the artist's soul: her inspirations, motivations, sources, experiences.

Leonardo Drew is considered a sculptor and one more artist of inspiration. He has been successful at utilizing repetition, accumulation and aging to allure. He also utilizes found objects and accents them by making rust his color palette. A view of his noted in *Sculpture Magazine* expressed a similar concept I find in my work: "An act of creation is always a collaboration of some kind or another. The trick is to create something that matters not only to oneself, but to

others as well.<sup>1</sup>” I saw *Number 45* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego in 1995 and was entranced. The size alone was breathtaking because the piece engulfed an entire wall with small remnants of decay. His composition with the medium gave an initial suggestion of a painting, but as you moved closer you realized it was made of three-dimensional objects. I was in San Diego on vacation and once I got home, didn’t think much about the piece until I entered graduate school when I started collecting rusty objects and displaying them in my studio as inspirational objects for my paintings. They began to engulf the wall.

A few years ago, I discovered Tara Donovan. She had a different approach to accumulating compared to mine or the previous artists mentioned. She used consumer goods, such as white plastic straws, white plastic cups and Styrofoam cups to create massive landscapes within the gallery space. Again, I thought it was the tactile nature that was created with the multiplication of objects, but in reality, it’s the obsession that draws me in. It’s the idea of manipulating everyday objects into extreme abstraction that stimulates thought and question. The presentation of her work entices the viewer to interact with the pieces by walking up to them, under them and around them.

As my collection of rusty found objects grew on the studio wall, individuals that visited my studio gravitated to them. I began to study that idea of recreating the wall in a gallery space and studied the objects closely to determine my personal infatuation and understand why individuals were drawn to them. While on the wall, the objects presented themselves and began to evolve as a painting. Although this wasn’t bad, it wasn’t the direction I wanted. As I continued my investigations, it became more evident that I wanted the viewer to have visual interaction with them. I felt the best way to do this was present them placed on a shelf at eye

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<sup>1</sup> Edwards, Lorraine, *Sculpture Magazine*, February 1997, Vol. 16 No. 2

level, enticing the viewer to pick them up and handle them. However, they will be too cluttered to do so, allowing the viewer only a visual experience.

## CONCLUSION

The audience will see certain objects that will stir up visual memories and past experiences or people that have touched their lives. This is an essential aspect of this work. I think it's important to be able to touch every individual, not just those engulfed in the art world. What better way to do this than with things they've personally touched, used or seen? The passage of time is also a defining factor because it makes an object seem more legitimate...as if it's proven its worth.

The presentation of the objects, combined with my drawings and paintings is a vital source to translate their aesthetic importance. In order to fully convey the connection between the objects and the created pieces, it was important for them to interact with each other. Therefore, objects were strategically placed on three shelves that were placed between drawings and paintings. The objects massed together on the shelves also strengthened the idea of accumulation. An area with a consolidation of paintings paralleled that idea, as well as an area that contained a mass section of object studies.

The preparation, obsession and reflection needed for this exhibition has been an amazing growth experience. During this past year, problems have been resolved, questions answered and a confidence re-established. Now, I look forward to my next journey.

## VITA

Jennifer Terbieten Mayer was born in Fort Smith, Arkansas, but the majority of her youth was spent in Bethany, Missouri, a small rural town. After leaving Bethany, she was a bit of a nomad moving twelve times between 1988 and 2006 where she finally received her Bachelor of Arts with an emphasis in painting at Webster University in St. Louis, Missouri. At Webster she received Departmental Honors and the *Cecille R. Hunt Best of Show Award*. She attended school in Vienna, Austria, with a Fulbright Scholarship for the summer of 2005 while also traveling to Budapest, Salzburg, Venice, Paris and London. After receiving her bachelor's degree she moved to Baton Rouge where she has resided since.

While in Baton Rouge, she has exhibited in Louisiana, Texas, and Colorado. In 2005, she was accepted and given an Assistantship into the Master of Fine Arts Painting and Drawing Program at Louisiana State University. Her M.F.A. degree will be complete in August, 2009. She is currently married to husband, Michael, and raising two year old Mikayla.