



'Finding beauty in the unexpected'

Context of Practice - Essay

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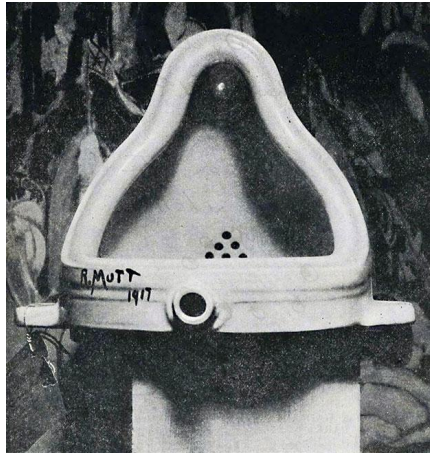
I find myself enjoying the process of looking at random objects I discover on my daily walks, don't get me wrong I love walking in nature but there is a different satisfaction to be gained from discovering something out of place. Like a Womble I peruse a skip or an interesting heap left behind from an industrial unit, it's all resources, materials that provides my mind with potentiality and possibilities. What could I create with the remains? Does it have potential to be something else? Does it trigger feelings or memories?

So what is Found art ? (Tate - Art terms April 2021)" Found objects (sometimes referred to by the French term for found object 'objet trouvé') may be put on a shelf and treated as works of art in themselves, as well as providing inspiration for the artist. The sculptor Henry Moore for example collected bones and flints which he seems to have treated as natural sculptures as well as sources for his own work. Found objects may also be modified by the artist and presented as art, either more or less intact as in the dada and surrealist artist Marcel Duchamp's 'Readymades', or as part of an assemblage".

He was interested in ideas not just in visual products, The "Readymade" challenged the idea that art must be beautiful and this in turn created space for the conceptual artists to take the stage, they used their work to question what art is." Duchamp is said to have influenced the art world in the latter half of the last century by making such choices

However -"Picasso was an originator from 1912 when he began to incorporate newspapers, matchboxes and other scavenged materials into his 'Cubist 'collages". This was called Synthetic cubism and dates back to 1912, he would use real items to collage

directly into his art and this paved the way to include found items to enhance the overall visual language of a work of art.



Here is Marcel Duchamp's take on the concept and ideas behind his thinking from 1917.

“Readymades,”(MoMa.org MoMa learning - April 2021) as he called them, disrupted centuries of thinking about the artist's role as a skilled creator of original handmade objects. Instead, **Duchamp** argued, “An ordinary object [could be] elevated to the dignity of a work of art by the

mere choice of an artist”.



The Art movement Dada started in Switzerland 1916 came out of post WW1 human experience, a reaction to the absurdity and chaos left behind - also a reaction to the rejection to the logic, reason, aestheticism of modern capitalist society.

Life is absurd - life has become pretty absurd in this last year, art is a response to life. Surrealism and absurdism has an appeal in the times of great uncertainty. I love the

craziness of this era and the imagery that it produced often using a variety of found media to explore visual and political messages.

- (Hans Arp 1915) “Revolted by the butchery of the 1914 World War, we in Zurich devoted ourselves to the arts. While the guns rumbled in the distance, we sang, painted, made collages and wrote poems with all our might.”

The 'Arte povera' movement - "This translates to 'Poor art'. An artist called Jannis Koundlis made use of a wide range of materials such as soil, rags and twigs". Art must play its part in resourceful sustainability of the art market. It feels like trends are changing, art that could be viewed as extravagant or indulgent - this no longer can be seen as cool. Many artists use these freely available resources to express their feelings about anti-commercialism and relating to our modern capitalist society.

Looking into other artists that fall into this area of using found materials has been an interesting journey, all so different relating to their time of their art careers, life situations as well as their creative individualities. Here are a few names: Micheal Landy, Richard Wentworth, Tony Cragg, Bill Woodrow, Phyllida Barlow, Sarah Lucas, Marcel Duchamp, Cornelia Parker and Robert Rauschenberg. Here is an image of Rauschenberg's



famous 'Combines' called Monogram.

(Sartle.com - Marguerite Elliot). " Rauschenberg usually found most of his material dumpster diving on the streets near his studio in Lower Manhattan. He bought this stuffed Angora goat in a nearby second hand shop for \$15. The face was messed up so he

Painted it. Angora goats prized for their soft hair were raised in Texas, Rauschenberg's home state. Legend has it that Rauschenberg had a pet goat when he was growing up. His father killed the beloved goat greatly upsetting Rauschenberg. The goat and tyre went through several transformations in Rauschenberg's studio. In fact it took four years before the artist was satisfied with it. In 1955, not many artists had been using found

objects as an integral part of their work. Rauschenberg was revolutionary. Monogram has become possibly his best-known and most controversial work”.

For 10 years Rauschenberg explored his “combines”. They are a blend of sculpture and painting all inspired by items found on his walks around the block where his studio was based. He was using found items as thought provoking material, take the insert from the article above the whole story about the goat, I find it fascinating, he was obviously quite a character with a passion to use what he could - Doors, house paint, an abandoned bed, stuffed birds etc all brought together in their unique language.

Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008)(Andre Parinaud, catalogue exhibition,Paris, Pompidou Centre 1977.) “Rauschenberg developed an individual style through his ‘Combines’ which play on the relationships between art (as we expect to see it traditionally) and the everyday world (how we recognise it). Rauschenberg believed that neither art nor life can be made, this thought building the structure for his artworks that move between both of these realms. Rauschenberg had always played with the idea of – what is a work of art? and what is the role of an artist? This explains Rauschenberg’s historic use of varied techniques and materials throughout his artist career and his adoption of the traditional media and found objects within his ‘Combines’.

Richard Wentworth born in 1947 he is a British artist, curator and teacher. He is part of the New British Sculpture movement, his work is quite minimalistic and subtle



reflections of everyday man made items such as buckets, plates, books, bricks, ladders, chairs and tables. Take this image here to the left, he has

seemingly just parked some dinner plates in a pavement drain cover, however his thought process has combined the idea of washing up and our dirty water going down the sink into a drain and using photography he's brought it out into the open into a public domain for us to question, what does really go on under our feet as we walk around the streets? He is using Juxtaposition to place objects and change configurations in a clever way to make us question aspects of the everyday. He lives in Peckham, London and knows his surroundings intimately and thrives on the energy of the city around him and there he soaks up the rich diversity and East Asian culture. He describes artists as "Foragers or grazers capturing moments and accidental opportunities, we need to be vigilant and notice the small stuff in our environment." (13Feb 2019 - Holburne Museum)" Wentworth's sculpture takes as its subject the semantics of the everyday world, taking the readymade and frequently incongruous objects and arranging them in a fashion that forces us to recognise the drama inherent in that which we too easily dismiss as routine. His photography captures the unusual or counter-intuitive behaviour of things, treating the (generally urban) landscape as consisting of readymade works that merit the same attention as more traditional art objects. The effect might be compared to having a film of dirt removed from one's eyes: it is often said by his students that, after talking to him, one begins to 'see the world as a Wentworth', meaning that one suddenly has a heightened awareness of the position of objects in one's environment, and a refreshed curiosity in how they came to be there and how we might interpret them."

Watching Richard Wentworth's view on his art life and 'The sustainability of small things' (Nov 2012 Nasher Sculpture center), he takes you on a journey of his 'Surrealist Eye', everything that pops out the exquisitely randomness to discarded items, the movement, the subtlety of everyday human influence on surroundings. His use of

playful juxtaposition , his ability to transform and manipulate using industrial and everyday household items to extend our understanding of their original classification .He was said to have an “osmotic influence” on his students at Goldsmiths. He worked for Henry Moore as a young man so learnt a very classical way of producing sculpture. However his work has a very different language he speaks of patterning, codes, human habits and aspects of genetic force. He reflects on the small things in life, the contents of his pocket, the life story of a broom or the space above our heads. He has a passion for photography and documents the world around him to create a narrative with what he finds. He is a visual storyteller and an instinctive and perceptive photographer, as we read or process images very quickly he can convey a message or just delicate, subtle observations of the street or city with ease. He is interested in the “semantics of the everyday world” he explores a lighter art, using metaphors of subjects such as fragility using walking sticks, suspension and creating a “false ceiling” and denying it’s true structure with books. He is constantly exploiting juxtaposition with his installations and use of everyday paraphernalia.



George Shaw (Maruani Mercier gallery - 2017) I get perturbed by people who have meaningful epiphanies in expensive places – who go to India, Goa, New Zealand, watch a glorious sunset to find themselves. If you can’t find yourself in your own backyard, you’re not going to find yourself in the Serengeti, are you?

So for me, it was taking those cliches of epiphany and the sublime and putting them in a place where great thoughts aren't rumoured to happen.

George Shaw's work really jumped out to me how he captures the essence of run down everyday suburbs, council estates, waste land, they tell a story of someone who grew up in these places where you had to make your own entertainment, you went out after breakfast and meet up with your mates and found places to call your own then didn't come home till teatime. The streets belonged to you, the stuff you could find, a sense of place, your identity and upbringing but also images that you took for granted in some way, the housing, the garages, a piece of woodland.

His painting style is photo realistic and semi abstract in it's quality, he uses modelling enamel paint, which takes you back in time to the 1970's and trying to glue and paint a plastic replica of a car or a fighter jet, I remember the smell even now ! You will need to look twice as the attention to detail is extraordinary, a "Fastidious realism" (Maruani Merccier.com). The subject matter, compositions and chosen paint medium have a rebellious nature to them. Through his art he questions his religious upbringing, the casual use of shop bought pornography, the excepted way litter is left in the hedge. He manages to capture the light, atmosphere and the subject like you were right there.

Inspired by his use of this unusual paint medium I chose to use oils to paint an urban scene from Bristol , It definitely added to the quality of the outcome, with a glossy fine art feel.

George Shaw (Artnet 2021) is a contemporary British artist known for his realistic depictions of banal spaces in the English suburbs. In the artist's paintings, the presence

of graffiti, litter, and architecture, creates an eerie sense of someone else being there. “For me, it was taking those clichés of epiphany and the sublime and putting them in a place where great thoughts aren’t rumored to happen, Shaw explained. “It has been said my work is sentimental. I don’t know why sentimentality has to be a negative quality. What I look for in art are the qualities I admire or don’t admire in human beings.”

His work certainly embraces the romantic, real and gritty realism of forgotten spaces and although not truly found art as such, it’s just as it comes, raw and uncensored in any way.

Studio practice

I feel like I have been on a wonderful journey discovering my style and use of visual language and what I notice about the world around me, what I am drawn to and why. I guess it is about our wastefulness as a society, I find it hard to throw things away, I don’t mind passing stuff on and finding a bargain at a charity shop. It must be part of my upbringing and I can thank my parents for that, reuse where possible. Humans are consumers by nature, we just don’t know when to stop shopping.

Being able to visit Bristol inbetween national lockdowns for a weekend and take some images of urban street views was the fresh inspiration I needed. There were only a few pedestrians making their way home or to work and there was an eerie feeling, the sky



was a pinkish grey and heavy with the imminence of rain. Here in my oil painting titled ‘Footpath to the mount ‘ a lone figure just appears out from the overhead metal cage into the daylight before the

path turns to the left. For some reason I found so many aspects of this view captivating. It was tricky to get the perspectives right especially with the graffiti along the sides of the bridge, and the light in the sky was heavy and brooding. I really enjoyed the process of capturing a moment in a city on a dull day in a pandemic.

I am new to oil paints and so I have much to learn but I love their movability and luminosity. It felt like there was light at the end of this tunnel, and freedom waiting on the other side.



Here is another of my pieces, from my visit to Bristol, I created an Aquatint using four dips into the acid to capture the tones. The view was a tunnel in St Werburghs, this time going under the railway track. The walls were caked in graffiti from years and years, since the 1970's, it has a similar feel to the oil painting as only one figure walking on the other side of the road. Outside at the other end the sun is blinding and obscures any features of what is beyond, so there is only light at the end of this

tunnel. The aquatint was perfect for this image, the tonal quality gives it cinematic and atmospheric feel, again it was tricky to get the perspectives right for the lettering and my vanishing point. The road markings really help give it some context and sense of space. I like the shadowy effect of the wet tarmac in the foreground and along the kerbside.

It's a cityscape with a difference, a grimy and uncertain urban landscape which takes you to an entirely different world on the other side. It is really refreshing to make art about these sorts of places, they have an energy to them, a social history, a local's



sense of place and identity. A subterranean experience rich in urban street culture. Being able to see things as they really are is a gift to my eye, so it's refreshing to discover artists like Richard Wentworth and George Shaw and the way they go about their practice of making art. This piece was my favourite to paint, it was so free and loose, textural, tonal, semi -abstract, larger scale lots of contrast, shadows ambiguity,

unusual composition, mixed media, expressive. It was actually about finding a skip at my local industrial estate and being so excited about it's contents. There were bits from cars, bikes, lightbulbs, metal bits, rubber gloves and aerosols. Someone had tried to move the metal bin and the whole lot had tipped over to produce a vomit of the contents that spewed over the ground. Rusty liquid pooled around the detritus. It was such a feast for my eyes. I was thrilled to be painting something that has been rarely documented in the visual art world as a painting. And then there at what was the bottom of the skip a crusted rusty image of a woman could be seen. She looks down disdainfully but with a glint of curiosity in her eye. It felt like her response to this pile of waste is similar to our human reaction to what is going to happen to that, where it will go, will it get melted down or just buried in the ground. This toxic sense of denial and

disownment of our own mess is a classic symptom of the anthropocene era in which we live. I want to continue on my journey of finding things and documenting them in a visual way. The strange and obscure, the untouched, frozen in time dark and forgotten spaces. Furthering my use of oil paint, acrylics, Screen print and maybe a series of smaller Aquatint plates in an artist book. My current plan is to document an old shed belonging to an elderly couple I know. In their mid 80's now and not so mobile, the garden has been taken over by weeds and the shed has become a time capsule of delights. Rusting tools, boxes, metal tins, spiders, old road signs and broken garden ornaments all await to be creatively explored.

Conclusion

I feel there is so much to be sourced from what we find, like archaeologists of our own time taking inspiration from what has been left behind or like a vulture picking at some dried carcass for the last morsel of meat of lost memories. We now have a duty to repurpose and recycle when we can to help us make sense of our industrial, commercially oriented past and support our journey into the future of making art that can carry the message of demanding less of the world's resources in an inspiring and creative way.

So from Picasso, using found scraps to help build ideas in his cubist forms, Rauschenberg finding discarded items in skips to create his abstract 'Combines', Richard Wentworth playing with our perception of beauty in the urban landscape questioning visual ideas through the items of the everyday and George Shaw for painting us his gritty and realistic childhood memories of growing up on the Tile Hill

estate near Coventry, I have definitely been inspired on my own personal creative journey and look forward to the final project explorations.

It's the Poetry of discarded materials

In a world full of stuff,

It's a cairn of accumulation to stimulate,

My imagination.

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