

Rules of re-Semblance

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Abstract

This paper supplements the series of pieces in the thesis exhibition, *Rules of re-Semblance*. Fascinated with the everyday, this body of work aims to draw attention to the things that surround us that are often overlooked. It consists of collections of simple everyday items possessing a semblance of ‘junk’. Meticulously re-created by hand following a set of self-imposed rules and displayed in a gallery setting, this work aims to transform the ordinary into a subject of significance worthy of attention, prompting viewers to slow down, look closer, notice, and consider more. In this, it is hoped the viewer will discover brilliance, beauty, and meaning within the unexpected, recognizing that what we often dismiss as junk can connect us to our past, our identity, and our shared human experience. Ultimately, it is hoped this work will cultivate a deeper appreciation for the overlooked elements of our daily existence, encouraging more attentive and mindful relationships with and within the material world in which we live.

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List of Works in the Exhibition

Recessed Wall Shelf (2025) – small oak shelf to be recessed in wall

5 ¹/₄ x 16 ¹/₁₆ x 20 ³/₄ "

Contents variable (see Appendix A)

Hall Table (2025) – walnut table with two drawers and metal pulls

26 ⁵/₈ x 40 ¹/₈ x 29 ⁹/₁₆ "

Contents variable (see Appendix A)

Shoe Boxes (2026) – A set of three corrugated cardboard shoe boxes stacked

15 x 23 x 14 ³/₄ "

Contents variable (see Appendix A)

Kitchen Cabinet (2025) – isolated imitation vintage pine kitchen cabinet with metal hardware

33 x 19 ⁷/₈ x 83 ⁷/₈ "

Contents variable (see Appendix A)

Plastic Bag (2026) – simple polyethylene bag

8 x 14 ¹/₄ x 11 ¹/₄ "

Contents variable (see Appendix A)

Production Room (2026) – 2x4 framed room with drywall, door, fabric ceiling, and shelving

12 x 12 x 9'

Contents include films, casts, molds, drawings and sketches, inks, tests and mock-ups, paper and cardboard, and other production materials.

Preface

The other day while walking from my tiny apartment to the studio, a short 3-minute walk I have been making multiple times a day for years now, I noticed a dumpster. One that was out of place, one that normally wasn't there, one that was so imposingly placed on the front lawn of a neighboring graduate student apartment building. Naturally this sparked curiosity as this walk is fairly the same and unchanged everyday. Capriciously I approached the dumpster to see what was inside. I stood on my toes peeking over the edge. As I looked over the cold metal wall I was greeted with many objects and things presumed nugatory or without worth or significance: broken furniture long out of date, old plastic shopping bags filled with papers, water damaged cardboard boxes falling apart at the seams. Amongst all these 'containers' filled and overflowing with disregarded things, I spotted a sort of tackle box with the lid partially open. Inner dividers that were somewhat free allowed a glimpse of the contents inside. Drawing materials, stamps, and wax seals were spilling out being consumed by the dumpster. Seeing this, I did as any artist would do and pushed myself up. Laying over the side, I carefully pulled out the box trying not to lose any other objects to the depths of the dumpster. After pulling out a couple more boxes I was on my way, walking to the studio encumbered with my arms full of my latest finds. Once I got to the studio I started by opening the plastic tackle box. I laid out each item, carefully inspecting everything. One after another I continued to open the boxes and it became clear that these all belonged to one person. Able to draw connections between the objects, I began to contemplate the owner's personal life, their interests, habits, values, aspirations, identity, and whereabouts and found myself immediately starting to develop a story for how and why this 'junk' ended up here. While this wasn't the first time I have rescued a treasure or two from a dumpster, this time

felt different. Experienced near the completion of my graduate program, this seemed like a physical manifestation of my studies. A playing out of my thesis interests in real life.

The Beginning of an Obsession

Growing up I spent most of my Saturdays throughout the summer driving around town with my eyes peeled looking for yard sale signs, going from house to house to see what people were hoping to get rid of. I found myself picking through tables of 'junk' looking for a treasure or something that I surely couldn't live without. I always found myself making connections and drawing links between the people, the objects, the circumstance, and why all these unwanted objects were strewn across yards and driveways. Uprooted from the confines and interiority of private ownership and now thrust into the open on public display, the objects seemed to have an unspoken life.

I think at a certain point it became less about the object itself and maybe more about what the object reminded me of or what the object stood for. Maybe it became less about the object but more about the potential this object had and what I could possibly do with it. Maybe it was less about the object and more about the beauty of a certain feature this object possessed. Maybe I started feeling bad for these disregarded and rejected objects destined for the landfill. While looking through all this junk people decided to part ways with, I found myself often torn between wondering "why someone would possibly want to get rid of this?" and "why would someone ever waste their money to buy this garbage?" How is it, I wonder, that individuals assign 'worth' to the remnants of our existence? For it is on a slippery slope that we find our relation to objects: treasure or trash, our relation to objects is one of value.

This fascination with the overlooked, the mundane, and the disregarded continued to have a hold on me. I started browsing thrift stores and continued to think about these objects and how they ended up here, why they ended up here. Did someone get rid of this on their own volition? Or was it someone's child cleaning out their parent's house after they passed away? Why did the

original owner buy this thing in the first place that is now here on a shelf being sold for, it seems, a fraction of its value? All these objects, many from other eras, have a history or a story that we will most likely never know. Looking and considering all these objects - each a displaced fragment of a particular time and place - brought together, seem to say so much.

Today I still love to frequent thrift stores, search for yard sales, and now browse Facebook Marketplace, Kijiji, and eBay - the online modern-day reliquaries for 'junk'. All of these are places where objects that are no longer valued or needed are relinquished to. In thinking about all these discarded, rejected, overlooked, and displaced goods, I have also come to fall in love with the form known as the 'junk drawer'.

Alongside my fascination with everyday objects, I have also developed an insatiable desire to understand how things are made and why things are designed a specific way. I always find there are little features within even the simplest objects that catch my eye and draw me in. From the beautiful slots carefully placed and punched out on cardboard that lock together to create a box to the perfectly sized springs on a mouse trap that provide force to the copper 'kill bar' or even the many layers of ink that are carefully registered and built up on paper to create an image, I find it amazing that these minute, commonly overlooked features make it possible for these objects to exist. I often question whether things could be done differently, or maybe even better.

The Importance of the ‘Everyday’

Many theorists, philosophers, and scholars argue for the merits of ‘the everyday’ - the ordinary, routine, mundane aspects of life. This encompasses the familiar and unexceptional moments, objects, and habits of our daily existence. Of focus in this work is the material everyday. Walter Benjamin has long argued that everyday objects are not just inert tools or commodities, they are rich ‘monads’ or self-contained units that compress and reflect historical, social, and psychological truths.¹ Similarly, in “The Cultural Biography of Things”, Igor Kopytoff asserts objects have histories.² They become attached to experiences and memories and acquire personal and sacred meanings. As a result, Kopytoff argues it is in the ‘mundane’ that the most meaningful and insightful socially grounded connections and cultural histories lie.

Other theorists promote the idea of ‘new materialism’. This approach argues that matter is not passive or inert. Instead, objects have agency. In her book *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett argues there is a “curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle”.³ Bennett calls this ‘thing-power’. As a result, Bennett asserts that non-human things are “vital actors in the world” and challenges traditional humancentric worldviews.⁴ Similarly, theorist Karen Barad’s ‘agential realism’ framework asserts matter actively shapes and is shaped by its environment.⁵ Barad argues objects are not static entities with inherent properties and a defined fixed independent existence. Instead, they are constantly in a state of being transformed in their dynamic ongoing relationships and material engagements with other entities, including humans.

¹ Walter Benjamin. *The Arcades Project*, 475

² Igor Kopytoff. “The Cultural Biography of Things”, 64-65.

³ Jane Bennett. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, 6.

⁴ Ibid. 4.

⁵ Karen Barad. *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 137-139.

My own experiences with objects in dumpsters, yard-sales, thrift stores, on-line marketplaces, and day to day life reflect these theoretical ideas. Things, even simple and mundane, have beauty and influence. They are not just passive entities with a functional purpose. Instead, they prompt meanings, associations, and responses and provoke vast thought and feelings. They have a history and they reflect on personal and collective narratives. It is clear, material objects are of great importance. They play an active role in human life and are completely interconnected and inextricably linked.

The Double-Edged Sword

Today we find ourselves living in a fast-paced world of highly specialized knowledge, technology, industry, elaborate engineering, and mass production. The majority of the physical everyday or material goods that surrounds us only exist due to mass production. No one – or almost no-one- would hand-make mousetraps, clothespins, or tape. At least not how we know them today. While mass production has led to the development of goods that are readily available and accessible, in the same token the nature of mass production and consumerist society has changed our psychological relationship with stuff and exacerbated a general disengagement from the material world.

Mass produced identical copies of items that are churned out without human investments look and feel sterile. As Walter Benjamin said, there is a “loss of aura”.⁶ With this, we value things less. Cheap and easy to replace, our relationship with the material world is compromised as we lose the incentive to repair or cherish things. Bennett explains that “the sheer volume of commodities, and the hyper consumptive necessity of junking them to make room for new ones, conceals the vitality of matter.”⁷ Objects quickly lose their appeal and with this they “fail to register on our consciousness radar that is calibrated to capture standout objects”.⁸ Ultimately, mass production has brought us a world of excess. In this, it has also desensitized us and stripped us of our ability to notice and appreciate the simple and the ordinary.

⁶ Walter Benjamin. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, 221.

⁷ Jane Bennett. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*.5.

⁸ Yuriko Saito. “Aesthetic Education in Everyday Life: The Role of Care”, 31.

Project Overview

This work is focused on drawing attention and consideration for the everyday. To facilitate this several strategies are typically believed necessary. In her book, *Everyday Aesthetics*, Yuriko Saito notes these include: “defamiliarization” or presenting common things in an unfamiliar way; “making strange” or rendering things in an unconventional manner; and “casting an aura” or treating mundane objects with a sense of elevated importance or special status.⁹ In utilizing these strategies, my thesis work aims to transform the everyday into a subject of significance worthy of consideration.

Rooted in my obsession with the ‘everyday’ and enamored with the specific form commonly known as a junk drawer, this work consists of a series of ‘containers’ – drawers, boxes, a shelf, a bag – holding a variety of ‘junk’ – common, traditionally mass-produced everyday items – that have all been re-created by hand following a set of self-imposed rules: birthday cards, a hammer, ear plugs, crayons, mousetraps, J-cloths, receipts, buttons, boxes, a mug, hair pins, fortunes, notes, paper, a cribbage board, 50/50 tickets, old mail...(See Appendix A). Objects found in junk drawers or from everyday life that I find interesting and that are typically given little attention in our material world. Displayed in a gallery setting together with evidence of its making, the junk will appear unfamiliar and strange and will cast an aura that draws attention and asserts importance.

⁹ Yuriko Saito. "Aesthetics of the Everyday", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 3.

Junk and Junk Drawers

A junk drawer is a highly personal space that differs from yard sales, thrift stores, and online marketplaces. Here, objects deemed too valuable to completely get rid of but also not valuable enough to have their own specialized place reside. Deemed junk, these objects are expelled to this space where they live together despite not having anything in common except for their lack of purpose. I've come to define junk as a transitory state that items fluctuate in and out of. When something gains purpose or fulfills an assigned task it is no longer considered junk. Junk drawers contain layers of objects with lost intentions that have been built up over time, constantly getting pushed down, buried deeper, hoping to be exhumed one day to fulfil their long-awaited purpose.

Junk is a very revealing category. Retained yet dismissed and existing at the intersection of losing its intended function while retaining a grip with some sort of imagined sentimental or hypothetical value, junk can illustrate how things function outside of human utility. In his philosophical work, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*, American philosopher Alphonso Lingis explains how junk gains new significance when its functionality is disrupted.¹⁰ Liberated from being 'tools', the objects in a junk drawer exist in their own right and are allowed to be themselves without being 'for' anything.¹¹ This allows the junk to gain agency and acquire a "vibrancy" and "splendor".¹² Lingis explains this further using examples of a bent paperclip, a foreign coin, and a lone key.¹³ He explains how in the junk drawer these things are 'useless' items. They don't provide a service. Instead, they are simply beings. In this, their

¹⁰ Alphonso Lingis. *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*. 7-11

¹¹ Ibid. 11

¹² Ibid. 11

¹³ Ibid. 11

physical presence and continued existence invoke thought that goes beyond utility and confronts us in a manner that demands we consider their material presence. In doing this, the junk drawer reveals much more. It offers a peek into the life of the owner and a partial understanding of their situation, interests, values, or position. It can reflect on hopes and visions for the ‘someday’. It also contains a world of its own with traces and futile attempts at organization, stories, connections, and memories of past eras.

Relatable to most, the junk drawer framework of this work will, I believe, provide an ideal means to draw interest while highlighting the everyday. Clearly, there is inherently much potential to draw attention to items that are typically overlooked and regarded as junk. The tension between secrecy and display implicit in this work and the opportunity to be ‘let in’ on the messy, disorganized, familiar, unfamiliar, hidden away, and sometimes shameful will elevate intrigue. Similar to the urge to peek into a medicine cabinet at someone else’s house, the innate perverse urge of humans to be nosy or snoop will lure the viewer in. Liberated from private confines and thrust into the public sphere for collective gaze in a gallery setting, the containers, their contents, and the production materials used in the re-creating process will draw viewers to look closer, notice, and consider more.

Starting...

Naturally, when starting this project I had to begin at the source. I began to look at junk drawers. Whenever I was at someone's house I would ask if they had a junk drawer and if I could see it. This was met with a range of reactions. The junk drawer is usually where you throw everything when the company is arriving in 5 minutes and here is the company asking if they can see the space where you've just hidden everything. I started to understand that junk drawers are this place of disorganization and shame, a place that is hidden and kept secret. You never really think someone is going to look into this place. But I was lucky and most people let me see their junk drawers, they allowed me to look into this place where they hide things, where they put things they aren't quite sure where they should go.

I expanded my research by sending requests to family and friends. Here is the message I sent.

Hey, I have a bit of a strange request...I am collecting photos of junk drawers as part of my thesis research. If you have a junk drawer and are willing to take a photo and send it to me that would be greatly appreciated!

It would be preferable if you do not curate or reorganize the drawer in advance of the photo.

Thank you!

After sending this message I was greeted with many photos of what people considered junk drawers and I was a bit surprised.

What Do We See?

“We see things not as they are, but as we are”

- Anais Nin¹⁴

I printed a selection of the junk drawer photos people had sent me and arranged them in a grid. With their practical function removed, the objects displayed were transformed into subjects of aesthetic, symbolic, and conceptual contemplation.



Figure 2: Grid Display of Junk Drawer Photos

¹⁴ Attributed to Anais Nin from the novel *Seduction of the Minotaur*

Stepping back and looking at this, I began to see connections and realized how much these collections seem to reveal: hobbies, former interests, lost intentions, changed tastes, past trends, experiences, values, culture, family, relationship status, living situation. These junk drawers felt autobiographical in a sense, like a window providing a glimpse into the life of the owner. Showing this grid of anonymous photos at an early-stage critique, there was a sense of excitement in response to being let in on a space that is typically off limits. Intrigued, others also naturally began to speculate and develop narratives surrounding the objects. These narratives varied considerably between individuals.

The fact that the same objects generate vastly different interpretations demonstrates that what we see is not just the object itself. Instead, we see ourselves reflected back. The objects, in a sense, seem to serve as mirrors for one's own perceptions, emotions, and ideas relating to beauty, utility, and meaning. Ideas that are filtered through a unique personal lens shaped by past experiences, beliefs, and cultural upbringing. Other artists have demonstrated the idea that we see things 'as we are'. Notably, for example, in his book *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, Daniel Spoerri demonstrated how mundane objects and even debris from everyday life are interpreted in vastly different ways based on the personal history of the observer.¹⁵ Spoerri captured eighty items on his table at a specific moment - a butter knife, a burnt match, a wine cork, a safety pin, a grain of salt, etc. - in a 'snare picture'.¹⁶ He then documented each item with his own narratives. These served as a starting point for a digression, anecdote, memory, association, or connection solicited by Spoerri or other artists. Each contributor projected their own 'self' onto the items and in this the objects became defined by elaborate descriptions elicited

¹⁵ Daniel Spoerri. *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, 1966.

¹⁶ Ibid. The 'snare picture' was a type of assemblage art Spoerri used to "snare" or trap a group of objects at a chance moment in time. In his *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, Spoerri's 'snare' of the objects involved a top-down map from his original *Topographie anecdotée du hazard* (1962) outlining the items found on his table.

by the diverse associations and memories prompted. While Spoerri's work demonstrated that what we truly see is a reflection of our own lives, of significance to this project, his work challenged traditional notions of artistic subject matter and brilliantly demonstrated how meaning can be found in the arbitrary and apparent 'insignificant' remnants of our existence.

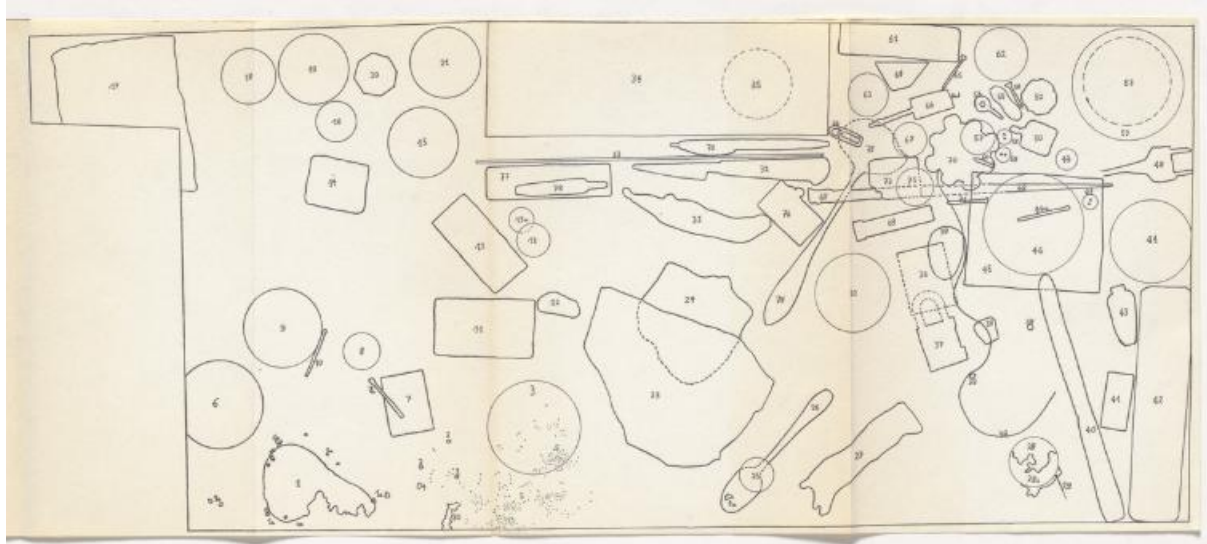


Figure 3: Outline of Items on Table from Spoerri's *Topographie anécdotée du hasard* (1962)

The Rules

In advance of re-creating the objects, a set of self-imposed rules were developed.

RULE 1

I must make all the objects and all their components. This includes the drawers and containers that hold the objects. I must make every object from basic materials. Nothing can be ready-made.

- A. What does it mean to make something from basic materials? I can use materials such as wood, paper, metal, paint, glue, and plastic etc., but I cannot use products such as screws, staples, nails, or hardware.
- B. What is the difference between a product and a material? A material is more raw. It is not a fully realized object or thing. A material is something you make something else out of. It is something you make a product out of, but a product is an object on its own.

*The gallery space and lighting within will be accepted as givens and will not be made.

RULE 2.

I must make all the objects 'by hand'. What does it mean to make something 'by hand'? My hands must be in control of what is being executed. I must have control of the tool being used.

- A. There can be no use of digital fabrication processes. I cannot use any 3-D printing, laser cutting, cnc/digital fabrication, etc.
- B. All printing must be done using analogue methods e.g. screen printing and relief printing.
- C. All imagery must be drawn by hand, myself.

RULE 3.

The objects must exist within their own world and function as their own entity. How can these objects exist within their own world?

- A. nothing can be cast off a pre-existing object. I must sculpt all the objects myself.

- B.** I must make all my own branding, logos, and company names. They cannot already exist.
- C.** No existing addresses, postal codes, phone number, or websites can be used.

*There can be references to places e.g. cities and towns.

These points function as a way to drown out the outside world.

RULE 4.

My objects must be believable. What does it mean for objects to be believable? They cannot look as if I or the same person has made all of them by hand. Why? Because many mass-produced objects never encounter human touch until they are unpackaged.

- A.** The 'made' objects must be mistakeable for 'real' objects commonly found in the outside world.
- B.** 'Aging' will be used when deemed appropriate.

The Importance of Rules

Having rules in this project provided structure, guidance, and direction that helped to inform and steer my work. Despite this, the rules consistently led me down a difficult path. The main rule at the foundation of this project - making everything by hand – inherently invoked difficulty. That is, making even simple things was typically quite involved, time consuming, and difficult. Details surrounding the main rule imposed other constraints that often forced me to do things ‘the hard way’. For example, my rules required me to hand-carve the form for the hammer head when it would have been much easier to 3-D print, hand draw images rather than use computer generated ones, and make screws instead of slightly bending the rules and using pre-made ones. Despite the difficulties invoked by the rules, they were essential and are what made this project possible. Basically, it is the rules that define the project. It has been said that without them it would be like playing tennis without a net. There would be no structure or challenge. There would be no objective. The rules tell you what you are and are not allowed to do. Without them, there would be no point playing the game. Maybe there would be no game at all.

Re-creating

What is the “work” of my *artwork*? To put it simply, I make things, not through invention, or creative flourish but through meticulous re-creating. In my work, many methods utilizing combinations of printmaking, sculpture, and a variety of other processes and mediums were used.

The likeness of the ‘made’ to the ‘real’ brings into question; is the made I have re-created the same or different from the real it is modelled after? The “Ship of Theseus” paradox sheds light on this.¹⁷ It questions whether a ship, fully repaired over time, with all its components replaced would be the same ship. This has proved ambiguous but invokes broad consideration relating to materials, production techniques, appearance, physicality, purpose, history, and intent. I have used these ideas as a framework of consideration in this work.

While similar raw materials were used in both the made and the real, the source of the materials used was largely different. The main production techniques – hand-crafted versus machine made – were also very different. Some of the hand-crafted objects were re-created using a process of meticulous ‘reverse engineering’. In this, there was both a physical deconstruction of the real and a conceptual dismantling. This involved seeing the parts, the internal relationships between them, and how they fit together. In this process considerable technical knowledge and information regarding the design, materials, fabrication, and techniques was extracted. Other objects required me to make up completely new processes that were accessible and feasible. This experimental approach involved testing, retesting, and testing some more. Unlike purely mechanical re-creation, I worked slowly and methodically throughout the process, taking time

¹⁷ Thought to be first recorded by Greek Philosopher Plutarch in his work *Life of Theseus* in the late 1st century CE

and care as I observed every detail and embraced and reflected on the work. Sketches, drafts and mock-ups were an important part of this process. Ultimately, a lot was made up along the way, mistakes were made, and many personal interpretations, adaptations, and revisions were necessary in the process of getting it ‘right’. That is, to get the made to look and feel the same as the real – in size, shape, proportion, color, texture, and detail. Not to deceive but to carry the same spirit and potential to affect.

Regardless of whether the made and the real can be considered the same or not, my practice has been noted to be of an “extreme nature” and have an “absurdity” that involves an “extraordinary amount of labour” and “obsessional insanity” (see Appendix B for self-reflection).¹⁸ To give context to these remarks, I have chosen two basic everyday items from the many I have made – a hammer and a coat check tag - and have documented, in detail, the process I used in re-creating them.

¹⁸ From feedback comments by Professor Marc Couroux on draft 2 of this thesis paper.

Hammer

- Step 1: I drafted the shape of the hammer from both the top and side views and created a template out of cardstock.
- Step 2: I traced around the templates onto a block of balsa wood cut to the appropriate size. Using a scroll saw I cut around the markings on one face attempting to keep the off cuts as intact as possible. Painter's tape and cyanoacrylate glue were then used to temporarily secure the off cuts back to the block allowing me to see the markings on the uncut face. I then used the scroll saw to cut around those markings.
- Step 3: The offcuts that were secured using tape and glue were peeled away revealing the rough hammer head form and the wood was filed and sanded further to achieve the desired shape.
- Step 4: The balsa wood was treated with a mixture of cyanoacrylate glue thinned with acetone to allow the wood to soak up the glue and harden the otherwise very soft material. After the glue had dried, any imperfections were filled and sanded smooth before spraying the form with a filler primer. This process was repeated until the desired smooth outcome was achieved. After letting the primer fully cure the form was sprayed with a high gloss paint in order to prepare it to have a mould made.
- Step 5: A mould box slightly larger than the hammer head was constructed using hot glue and foam core being careful no gaps or cracks were left open.
- Step 6: Wooden dowels were cut and glued to the hammer head form to create pour spouts. The parting line on the object was determined and oil-based clay was used to fill the bottom of the box up to the parting line. Next, a ball tool was used to add registration keys into the clay.
- Step 7: I sprayed the mould box containing the hammer head with an even coating of mould release. After the release agent had dried, I prepared the silicon, combining it with the catalyst by weight to the proper ratio and ensuring it was mixed very thoroughly but without introducing too many bubbles. The prepared silicon was then poured into the box, filling it to the top. After allowing the silicon to cure for the appropriate time, the mould box was flipped over, the bottom of the box was removed, and the oil-based clay was removed. In doing this I was very careful not to dislodge the hammer head from the first half of the mould. Next the bottom half was sprayed with mould release and silicon was poured using the same process as before, creating the second half of the mould.
- Step 8: Once the silicon was cured I disassembled the rest of the foam core box and slowly released the two parts of the mould from one another and carefully pulled out the wooden hammer head. I then trimmed and cut off any excess silicone.

Step 9: I reassembled the mould with a piece of high-density fiberboard on each side to provide support and limit distortion to the otherwise soft silicone. Elastic bands were used to secure everything. I used a stainless-steel meat marinade syringe to inject hot victory brown wax into the mould through the pour spout at the bottom until I saw wax escape the vents at the top. To avoid shrinkage and distortion, I cast the wax hollow allowing the wax to cure for a while before pouring out the excess.

Step 10: Once the wax was fully cooled, I removed the wax hammer head from the mould and touched up any areas that needed it.

Step 11: I gated the wax hammer head onto a sprue bar I had previously made and attached vents.

Step 12: The sprue bar was dipped, alternating between ceramic slurry and silica. This was repeated nine times allowing the slurry to dry fully between each coat. Once the ceramic shell was to the desired thickness, the top was cut off with an angle grinder and removed with the metal hook. Subsequently the shell was put through the autoclave, melting the wax patterns from within. Next the shell was fired in the kiln.

Step 13: The prepared shell was poured with molten iron.

Step 14: Once the iron had cooled the ceramic shell was smashed, revealing the cast iron. Using a hammer and chisel I dislodged any stuck pieces of shell then used the angle grinder to cut the hammer head from the bar. Many tools such as a belt sander, sand blaster, angle grinder, and die grinder were then used to clean up and finish the piece.

Step 15: Next, I made the handle for the hammer. I used the same template method as before but this time glued the templates to the hickory wood and repeated the same cutting process.

Step 16: After cutting the handle, I refined and shaped it by sanding and filing to achieve a final refined form. I also added a slot to the top for the handle to insert into the head.

Step 17: After sanding the handle, two coats of urethane were applied.

Step 18: I cut one wedge out of hickory and two wedges out of steel. I inserted the handle into the head and trimmed the top of the wood handle to length. I then hammered the wooden wedge into the slot in the handle followed by the steel wedges in order to securely fasten the two pieces together.

Step 19: The hammer was aged.

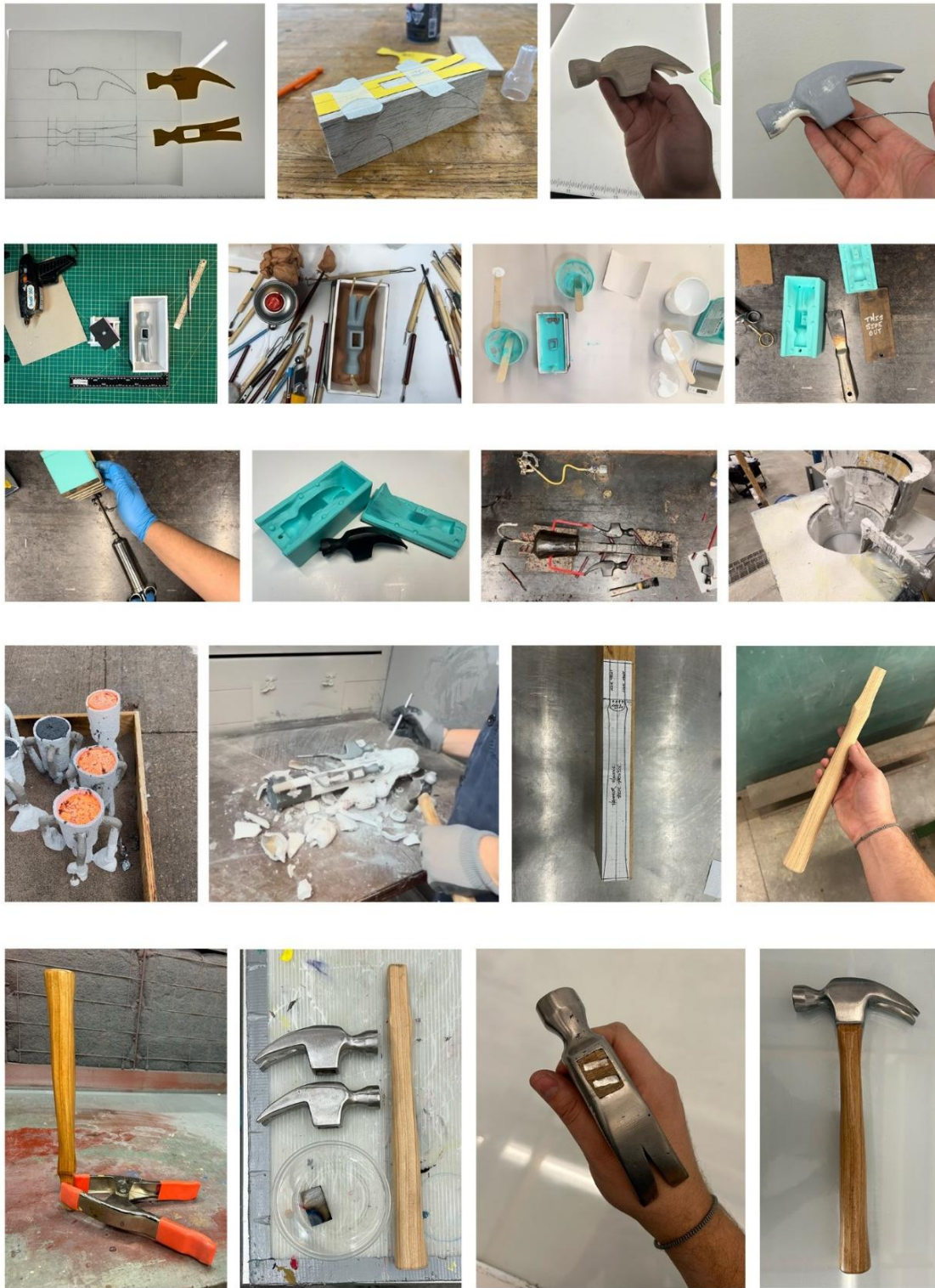


Figure 4: Hammer Production Photo Series

Coat Check Tag

- Step 1: I determined the size of the tag. Using photoshop to design the layout, the ruler function was used to mark out edges, cuts, folds, holes, and perforations. I decided how many colours and layers to use and whether to print on both sides. Designs were then drawn by hand, scanned onto the computer, and 'cleaned up'. In doing this, each colour was designed as a separate layer/film for the printing process. Registration and cut marks were then added before digitally outputting the films.
- Step 2: A screen with the suitable mesh count for the design was selected and coated with photo sensitive emulsion.
- Step 3: After the screen was dry, I laid the films from step 1 on the bed of the exposure unit and placed the screen on top. Once everything was in the correct position I closed the exposure unit, turned on the vacuum to ensure proper contact between the film and the screen and then exposed the screen for 2 minutes and 30 seconds.
- Step 4: I carefully washed away any unexposed emulsion, leaving my designs on the screen. I then dried the screen and post exposed it to harden the emulsion before printing.
- Step 5: I selected the appropriate paper stock, cut it to size, and punched holes in it to aid with registration. I selected the inks to be used and then mixed them to a consistency that would lay nicely on the paper stock. This involved constantly testing each colour on paper off cuts and performing 'draw downs' to understand how the ink would look when printed.
- Step 6: Before commencing printing, I determined the order to print the layers. I prepared the screens using packing tape to block out areas I didn't want to print and attached spacers to the backs of the screens. I then attached the screen to the printing table using clamps to ensure it wouldn't move. I also attached a sheet of acetate to the table to help with registration and made sure I had my paper, squeegee, ink, sponge, rag, pins, and tape ready to go.
- Step 7: In advance of printing the first layer I aligned the image on the page. I then printed the image on all the sheets and washed the screen. To align the second layer, I printed on the sheet of acetate first. I then lined up my paper under the acetate, secured it with pins and tape, flipped the acetate out of the way and continued to print on the paper.
- Step 8: I washed the screen and repeated the same process for each subsequent colour/layer. To align the print on the other side of the paper, I used the light table to transfer the registration marks to the back and repeated the same printing process again.
- Step 9: After all the printing was complete, different tools were used to cut, punch and perforate the object to realize its final form.
- Step 10: Lastly, I tore the ticket into separate segments and aged the stub appropriately.

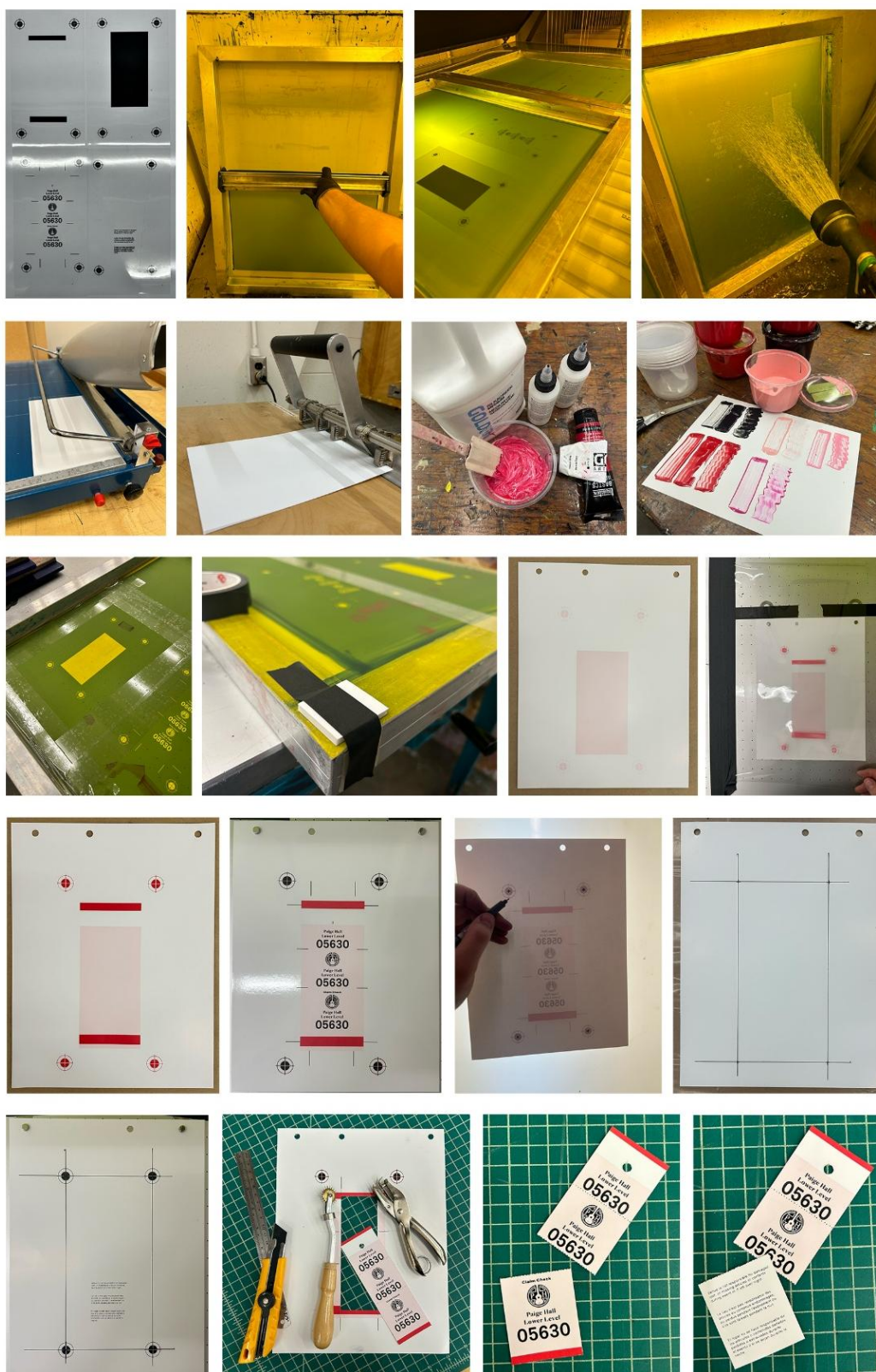


Figure 5: Coat Check Tag Production Photo Series

But Why?

In the art world today, the use of ‘readymades’ or collaboration with other artisans with specialized skills is common practice. This has brought into question my need to make everything myself in this project.

Being personally invested with these simple things throughout the process of re-creating has allowed me to know and understand these things as much as possible. Furthermore, meticulous care in re-creating traditionally mass-produced goods is a way to restore attention and assert the importance of those things mass production has largely rendered invisible. The manual remaking of industrial processes is an act of reclamation of sorts; a way of confronting those forces that have led to such disregard of the everyday; a way to transform the apparent mundane into something magical; a way to disrupt complacency, allowing us to find a deeper meaning and appreciation for the objects that fill our daily lives.

Through the process of re-creating, the object is, in a sense, re-enchanted. Even the simplest of re-creations require human presence, effort, skills, and resources that differ significantly from those required in purely mechanical mass production. Skills and resources that, absent in the mass produced, have diluted the spirit and killed the ‘aura’ of an object.¹⁹ Vision, observation, planning, organizing, sensing, judging, evaluating, reflecting, problem solving, patience, focus, attention, effort, time, energy. Skills and resources that assert a human connection and infuse the made with social qualities, energy, and a sense of authenticity and value that is absent when items are mass produced. Investing these skills and resources in the process of re-creating is intended to transmit a spirit of worth and restore the ‘aura’ of the object.

¹⁹ Core argument from Walter Benjamin’s essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”.

Referred to as ‘singularization’, Kopytoff explains that in this, objects are pulled out of their context as a commodity and transformed into a unique entity worthy of contemplation and consideration.²⁰

Re-creating mundane objects also has the potential to reframe them as art. This prompts viewers to reconsider the objects’ meaning and value. For example, in her work *To Fix the Image in Memory* (1977-82), Vija Celmins invested immense labour and attention in recreating rocks with no apparent value with such precision they were inadvertently elevated to the status of high art.²¹ Ironically, in this the rocks attained a sense of worth that drew contemplation and consideration and a level of attention they would never receive in the ‘wild’.



Figure 6: Vija Celmins, *To Fix the Image in Memory*, (1977-82), Museum of Modern Art, New York.

In my work it is hoped the labour-intensive processes of re-creating and rendering the mundane down to its minute details will also endow it with a sense of value that transcends its original perceived insignificance.

²⁰ Igor Kopytoff. “The Cultural Biography of Things”, 73.

²¹ Vija Celmins. *To Fix the Image in Memory I-XI*. 1977-82. MoMA

While display of the production materials will provide clues to the making, they will not ‘spoon feed’. Mirroring the elements in a junk drawer, disjoint elements on shelves and tucked away in bins with elements partially or fully hidden will again entice the viewer to look closer. Focused on connecting the process work with the final product, the production materials will bring the viewer to attention and draw them to examine more closely as they reflect on and engage with evidence of the making.

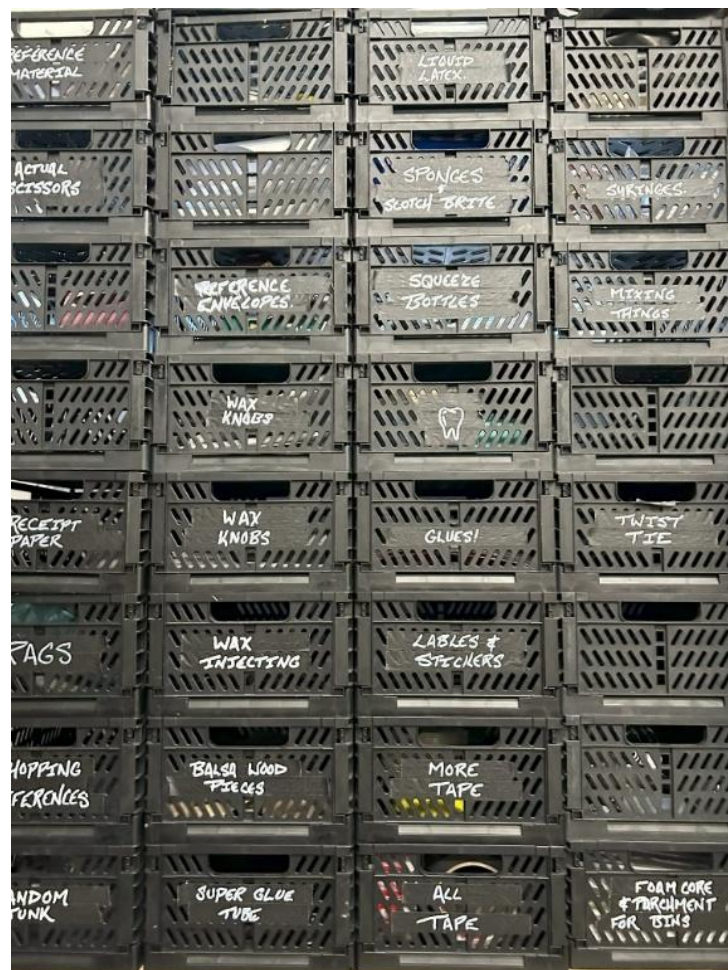


Figure 8: Bins Containing Production Work and Materials.

Such big processes of looking are intertwined with slowing down. While slowing down is often regarded as a form of failure in modern society, there are inherent benefits. York University Professor Dan Adler argues ‘slowness’ is “a critical medium and a means to intensify our temporal and spatial experiences”.²³ It is, he says, an important means that “helps us to register the multiple layers of time, history, and motion that constitute our present”.²⁴ In his book *In Praise of Slow*, Carl Honoré also promotes the benefits of ‘slowness’ claiming it acts as “an antidote to the fractured, harried pace of modern life.”²⁵ He argues “the great benefit of slowing down is reclaiming the time and tranquility to make meaningful connections— with people, with culture, with work, with nature, with our own bodies and minds.”²⁶ Ultimately, slowness can transform how we see and experience the world, it can strengthen our experiences and connections with others, and it can cultivate richer perceptions of daily life. Furthermore, Honoré asserts ‘slow looking’ is an important mode of learning.²⁷ It engages responses such as examining, analyzing, interpreting, considering, probing, and discerning.²⁸ It can promote active, reflective, critical, and creative ‘high-level thinking’.

In her book, *How to Do Nothing*, Jenny Odell explains the importance of looking and drawing attention to the everyday. Attention, she argues, is our most precious and overdrawn resource. She advocates for reclaiming attention that is being stolen away by social media, digital platforms, and a society focused on speed, efficiency, and productivity. Odell promotes the potential of art in doing that. She explains, “art can teach us new scales and tones of attention”

²³ Noted in the Course Description section of the Course Syllabus of Professor Dan Adlers GS/VISA 5610 graduate course at York University (2025 winter term)

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Carl Honoré, C. *In Praise of Slow: How a Worldwide Movement is Challenging the Cult of Speed*. 14.

²⁶ Ibid. 14

²⁷ Ibid. 149

²⁸ Ibid. 147-148

that help “disentangle ourselves from the attention economy” and “learn to wield attention in a more intentional way”.²⁹ In her *Bureau of Suspended Objects*, for example, Odell focused on drawing intensive attention to items discarded as garbage to reframe them, highlight their histories, and critique notions of consumption and disposability. Odell argues that reclaiming and reorienting attention, especially to overlooked details, enriches reality, encourages more thoughtful engagement with the physical world, rewires perception and presence, and promotes self-awareness and resistance.³⁰ Meanwhile, in her study “Live Methods and Live Things”, Sophie Woodward explains that “being attentive involves not only noticing these things but also actively tuning in to their material vibrancies, how things are alive, how they resonate with pasts, potentials and how they affect people.”³¹ She elaborates that “if we are able to be attentive then we can develop a more expansive vital sociology and way of thinking about how people feel connected to each other and the world they live in.”³² Attentiveness, she says, has potential to open sociological approaches to areas that are challenging to understand, as well as to offer a different perspective on everyday life.³³

²⁹ Jenny Odell. *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*, Introduction xxi

³⁰ Ibid. Introduction xxii

³¹ Sophie, Woodward. “Live Methods and Live Things: Cultivating Attentiveness to Dormant Things to Develop a Vital Sociology of the Everyday”, 1052.

³² Ibid. 1053.

³³ Ibid. 1054

The Making of a Fictional World

Appearing in The Gales Gallery at York University, the exhibition *Rules of re-Semblance* will immerse the viewer in a sort of fictional world. A world of ‘made-up’ objects. Objects that can only exist here, in this context, in this gallery, in this show. Objects that you can’t find anywhere else in the world and that can essentially only exist within their own. Heavy black velvet curtains at the entrance of the gallery create an experience of entering and emphasize a delineation with the outside (Appendix Figure C1). Functioning as a portal into the gallery space, the curtains control the interior environment, stopping outside light from leaking in. Within, black walls will allow the outside world to fall away, leaving the viewer to focus on what is in front of them in the moment (Appendix Figure C2). The black carpet covering the floor muffles the noise of the viewers own footsteps and changes the way they perceive how they move through the space. Surrounded by darkness, the viewer may feel as if they have entered a drawer themselves. Strategic lighting will guide the viewer to the works exhibited that are spaced out throughout the gallery: a recessed wall shelf, a hallway table, a plastic bag, a kitchen cupboard, and shoe boxes.

Through the natural progression of the space, the viewer will first encounter the shelf recessed within the wall of the gallery (Appendix Figure C3). This is the sort of shelf you might encounter by the front door or in the hallway of a home, functioning as a catch all for objects that are left or collected as people come and go. Moving past the shelf the viewer will be greeted by a walnut hallway table, or possibly a desk, with one drawer opened, filled with objects that don't have anywhere else to go (Appendix Figures C4 and C5). Beyond that, a stack of three shoe boxes with one opened will reveal an iteration of a memory box with old letters, cards, and objects from the past (Appendix Figures C6 and C7). Next a kitchen cabinet, where many

peoples junk drawers are found in the communal heart of the home, will be filled with things from around the house (Appendix Figures C8 and C9). And lastly, a plastic bag filled with junk appears as if someone was moving and just didn't have time to sort through their junk drawer so they brought it all with them (Appendix Figure C10). Well lit and raised on plinths, disjunct combinations of the re-created junk embraced within will assert importance. Removed from the world, here the modest and unpretentious items gain an aesthetic presence and aura that forces the viewer to question their perceptions and engage with the objects differently.

Within the gallery, a self-contained closet space containing the production materials will further immerse the viewer in a fictional world (Appendix Figure C11). Staged as a storage room with dim incandescent lights and cheap shelving, inside many of the materials used in the production of the objects will be stored. Here, surrounded by boxes, bins, and folders containing the molds, casts, films, plans, sketches, and templates used, the viewer will be forced to acknowledge and consider the complexities involved in the making: the techniques, processes, structure, design, engineering. Complexities that are typically overlooked and taken for granted in the real world where items are cheap and abundant and produced through methods of mass production. Confronted with evidence of making that is human, involved, unfamiliar, unclear, strange, and 'magical' will create a cognitive shift that asserts the junks material presence.

Ambiguity and Contradiction

This work says nothing with clarity. Instead, the nature of the items involved and contradictory ideas elicited introduce uncertainty, ambiguity, and tension. These forces are powerful. They disrupt efficient communication and invoke broad thought and consideration as the viewer struggles to make sense.

Display of such mundane objects in a gallery setting, in itself, provokes uncertainty and tension that draws attention and thought. Furthermore, the likeness of the ‘made’ to the ‘real’ creates ambiguity that invokes further contemplation as the viewer considers ideas regarding ‘sameness’. Occupying a liminal space between being kept and being discarded, the junk drawer items are in a transitory state. Having some sort of life that is ambiguous also invokes consideration. Furthermore, the disparate nature of the items fail to cohere and create uncertainty that prompts broader speculative interpretations. Humble, non-precious, outdated and discarded or cast aside, Adler refers to these as ‘tainted goods’.³⁴ He argues that disjunctive combinations of these items appear as goods that are ‘struggling to matter’.³⁵ With no clear, coherent, meaning they create tension and prod the viewer in conjuring up a plethora of ideas, critiques, and narratives as the viewer grapples to reconcile an understanding.³⁶

Contradictory ideas also build tension. This engages the viewer as an active participant in thought that disrupts linear ways of thinking. Primarily, the contradictory ideas of ‘real’ versus ‘made’ promote two very distinct and disjoint streams of thought. Perceived as ‘real’, interpretations and processes of meaning making will be informed by the object’s social context,

³⁴ Dan Adler, *Contemporary Sculpture and the Critique of Display Cultures: Tainted Goods*.11

³⁵ Ibid.11

³⁶ Ibid.11

use, and the human narratives and experiences woven around it.³⁷ Individually, the items may speak to fragments of a time, place, and life and collectively, they may manifest and mediate a sort of fictional inhabitant. Conversely, perceived as ‘made’, the viewer may focus on a history that is confined to the making – their materiality and their fabrication. They may recognize and come to appreciate the design features, details, construction, and complexities that are usually given little regard. From considerations regarding labor, effort and the importance of human touch and involvement, they may question the intention behind the creation. Or, they may consider how views change when production is central. How mass production makes us complacent and how removed from production, we become oblivious to the complexities and brilliance inherent within even the most basic of designs. How much we take for granted and how little regard we have for ‘things’ that surround us. The viewer may consider larger issues relating to consumption, waste, and the implications. While these two paths of thought are very disjoint, it is hoped the likeness of the made to the real will prompt thinking in both realms and possibly a reconciling of thought between the realms. Regardless, the broad and disjoint nature of the ideas generated do not seem to meld with any clarity, challenging the viewer to consider diverse possibilities.

Other contradictory ideas also build tension and engage the viewer in thought. For example, ‘elevating’ a sense of importance for objects through the process of creation and then simultaneously divesting them of that by placing them in a drawer or box confronts the viewer with a stark contradiction. With considerable effort invested in their making, the items don’t feel like cast-offs and doing this feels wrong, elevating tension. Other contradictory ideas – past versus present, useful versus obsolete, personal versus public – also build tension.

³⁷ Igor Kopytoff. “The Cultural Biography of things”, 67.

Without a clear message or answers, it is the viewer who is left to complete the creative act. Informed by their own personal, cultural, and intellectual background, lacking clarity, the nature of the work and contradictory ideas elicited promote broad reflection, evaluation, and consideration that push and pull the viewer between different ideas as they attempt to construct a single reconciled understanding of their own making. Without ideas easily fusing, there may be no fixed conclusion or definitive end. Instead, the viewer may be left with an uncertainty that is not resolved, that they will carry with them into the real world.

Conclusion

“The world will never starve for want of wonders; but only for want of wonder”.³⁸

G.K. Chesterson

As Bennett argues, in order to better attune ourselves to the messy, complex world we’re enmeshed with we need to change our mindsets. We need to acknowledge human lives are entangled with nonhuman things and forces and we need to disrupt the tendency to overlook these things. Instead, we need to cultivate a sensibility of wonder towards the “liveliness of the ordinary nonhuman entities and processes by which we live”.¹³ We need to spark ‘perceptual practices’ that foster an “enchantment” or sense of wonder for the world’s materials and attunes human perception to the vitality that exists, within even the ‘mundane’.¹⁴ My thesis work has aimed to facilitate this.

Let me be clear. While acknowledging mass production has largely contributed to the disregard we have for the everyday material world, *Rules of re-Semblance* is not solely intended to be a critique of mass production. Ultimately, it is hoped this work will create pause and spark ‘re-vision’. A re-vision that invokes giving our time and attention in looking, looking again and looking closer. A re-vision that acknowledges the ‘everyday’ and our complicated relationship with it. A re-vision that revives the senses and triggers broad thought, reflection, and evaluation, and resists prescriptive ways of thinking. A re-vision without ‘correct’ interpretation. That instead, heightens aesthetic and sensory awareness. And, in this, fosters the discovery of beauty and meaning in the unexpected and a deeper appreciation and understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

³⁸ This quote appeared in G.K. Chesterton’s book of essays, *Tremendous Trifles* (1909) 7

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Appendix A

List of Objects

50/50 tickets	appointment cards	birthday cards	bound diary
boxes	business cards	buttons	ceramic tiles
clothespins	coat check tags	coin rollers	chopsticks
coupons	crayons	cribbage board	drawer pulls
ear plugs	elastic bands	envelopes	firecrackers
fishing floats	fortune slips	golf tees	golf score cards
graph paper	greeting cards	hair pins	hall table
hammer	handles	hinges	honey dipper
J-cloths	keychains	key tags	kitchen cupboard
labels	letters	mail	matchbooks
memo pads	mouthguard	mug	notes
notebooks	paper bags	permits	pencils
plastic bags	price stickers	letters	lined paper
paperclips	postcards	raffle tickets	receipts
recessed wall shelf	ring	screws	staples
sudoku sheets	salt packets	silica packets	sticky notes
sugar packets	tape	t-pins	twist ties
yard sale signs			

and more planned and in process.

Appendix B

Reflecting on the Absurdity of It

The typical reaction to this work during the production phases was a sense of absurdity. Most notably, why would I want to meticulously reproduce ‘things’ that have relatively little value in such a labour intensive, cost ineffective, and time-consuming manner. This, in itself, I believe speaks volumes. It shows a lack of appreciation for the everyday, overlooked, and apparent ‘mundane’ in a society consumed with extravagance and excess. It shows a lack of regard for labour and making or doing things ‘the hard way’. It demonstrates a reliance on technology and automation to figure things out and do things for us quickly, easily, and cheaply. A society where traditional skills, problem solving, and creative and critical thinking are no longer necessary or valued in production. Ultimately, it reflects a society that is laser focused on efficiency, productivity, and the more significant. A society where ‘more is better’ and ‘bigger is better.’ Where people don’t have time to pause. Instead, they are fixated on the next big thing and have lost sight of all the joy that can be found in between.

Sensing the absurdity myself and faced with challenges that sometimes consumed me, I reflect on why I have remained invested in this work. Strangely, I have found there is much satisfaction working through the drudgery of it - in making the fountain.³⁹ This project has provided a means to question, study, understand, and register every miniscule detail of ‘the ordinary’. I have sharpened my focus in the process. It has provided a framework to engage my passion for exploration, experimentation, and creation utilizing and combining diverse materials and techniques. In this, my practice has been strengthened and diversified. I have encountered endless opportunities to improve my problem solving, observational, and technical skills. I have

³⁹ In reference to Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917) using a ‘readymade’ urinal

built confidence in my ability to successfully adapt typical creation methods, and I have found that some things can only be learned through making. Sourcing materials has been an adventure and has led me to strange and interesting places across the city and beyond. On my travels I have met and connected with many people. Ultimately, I have found that in challenging the boundaries of re-creating, as I solve problems and something ‘clicks’, there is great satisfaction as I gain a sense of agency in reclaiming fabrication that is typically industrial – not individual. There is great satisfaction as I gain a sense of agency in unpacking the simple brilliance within the everyday and those small ‘threads’ that connect us to our past, our identity, and our shared human experience.

Appendix C

Exhibition Documentation

Rules of re-Semblance

April 13-17, 2026

Gales Gallery

York University



Figure C1: Entrance to *Rules of re-Semblance* Exhibition



Figure C2: View from Within Gallery



Figure C3: *Recessed Wall Shelf*



Figure C4: *Hall Table*



Figure C5: *Hall Table*, Objects in Drawer



Figure C6: *Shoe Boxes*



Figure C7: *Shoe Boxes, Contents*



Figure C8: *Kitchen Cabinet*



Figure C9: *Kitchen Cabinet, Drawer Contents*



Figure C10: *Plastic Bag*



Figure C11: *Production Room*

Appendix D

The Forgotten, The Overlooked, and the Text with No Home

In the spirit of this project, I thought it was only appropriate to embrace the underlying theme of this work in writing. Just like the objects that have no other place to go, there are other thoughts, points, and questions that didn't quite fit into the main body of this paper. Not wanting to discard them and not knowing where else to put them, they ended up here.

- I feel that I have to acknowledge Andy Warhol's Brillo Boxes but wasn't sure how.
- I like Jun's term for my work: "real fake things".
- I hate naming things.
- I still have not looked up the definition of 'junk'.
- A step too far? Throughout the entirety of this project, I often questioned where to draw the line. Is making my own staples too far? Cellophane tape? Individual springs for clothespins? Apparently not, as in this project I found myself making all these things and questioning, "why am I doing this?" I think it ties back to this innate need to understand what I am surrounded by and how things are made. And let me tell you, once you've made your own tape, you will never look at any piece of tape the same way again.

Maybe this entire project was a step too far?
- Maybe it's really all about the objects?