

PITMAN SELF-STORAGE AND SERVICES, HONOLULU, HAWAI'I

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REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

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By

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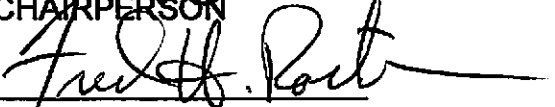

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

I moved to Hawai'i from Minnesota in 2005, leaving everything behind except a couple of suitcases of clothing and a couple of boxes of books. By moving to O'ahu to attend graduate school, I left behind most that was familiar to me. I had no idea what it actually meant to leave everything and found myself utterly alone; without any recognizable sights, faces, foods, textures, sounds, climates, landscapes, mileposts or landmarks. I had no personal horizon lines or points of connection. I had the literal sensation of spinning and was diagnosed with an inner ear problem manifesting itself through vertigo soon after arriving. While I abruptly left behind and stored many things, other aspects of my previous life faded more slowly. Certain things did not depart at all. For example, I found some aspects were recognizable in both locations such as two kinds of birds, chickens and cardinals. Much of this material informed my work here. While I no longer have vertigo, I have come to recognize that this process has been a deeply psychological one as well as a geographical one. I find myself studying both my present location and space and my present consciousness and their relationship to each other. This psycho-geographical process manifests through my interdisciplinary artistic practice in this thesis project titled Pitman Self-Storage and

Services, Honolulu, Hawai'i. What is stored, archived, kept or retained as we move through our lives? What is lost, discarded, forgotten or released? What initiates these choices? How are they made and what informs them?

Born and raised in the vast open expanse of space in the American Midwest, I have been challenged to be mindful in ways I never comprehended before living in Hawai'i. Living temporarily on a small island has made me carefully evaluate each object I take into my possession and each object I make. I do this because I know that one day I will be leaving. Living here has taught me to look at each object I choose to possess or make and carefully evaluate it with an eye toward how much time it will be with me and what will I do with it when I no longer want it or need it.

What does it really mean to be isolated (either psychologically or geographically)? Is it even possible to be isolated in any way, today? I am still struck by how places that are perceived as isolated are often defined by an urgent sense of staying or leaving that is openly shared and discussed in these communities. I found this is true in small towns in the American Midwest in addition to being true in Hawai'i. What makes it seem like these places are outposts and who or what benefits from this

continuously constructed notion in an age where actual isolation may be impossible?

I am of European ancestry and a settler colonist. One of my initial points of reference here in Hawai'i occurred through working at a museum dedicated to preserving the history of European settler colonists on O'ahu. Through this job, I saw my own ancestral cultural artifacts reflected daily in their collection and my own through their historic site and architecture. This experience had a profound effect on me. I saw objects that I had taken as commonplace and mundane in the American Midwest carefully stored, handled, exhibited and researched. Hand-made quilts that you can still find in second hand stores in my hometown were being displayed as incredibly precious and rare here. Part of this experience made me feel disoriented. Part of me had to carefully re-think and re-evaluate my notions of what is valuable and why and how location and circumstance affects this value. Any group of people can gather around a set of objects and say they are valuable and work to construct an institutional authority that will validate and continue to reinforce that belief.

This inquiry is personally manifested through the objects I chose to possess here in Honolulu. Like a museum collection of material culture artifacts, these objects were carefully chosen as tools relating to both function and service. These two components, function and service, relate

to my personal heritage and ancestral background growing up in a rural area where these two qualities were highly valued.

Function, service, personal consciousness/psychology and sense of location form the conceptual framework of this project which is materially made visible through the process of exploring what it means to archive, collect and catalog objects, in this case, my own. The final element is the transactional nature of human interactions as demonstrated by what I have chosen to do in the gallery.

The definition of an archive incorporates a variety of perspectives. An archive can be any organized body of records fixed on any media. It is also defined as a collection of historical material generated as a by-product of normal human activities, unpublished and unique. These materials may consist of (but are not limited to) letters, papers, photos, computer files, scrapbooks, financial records and diaries. Living archives are works which are open-ended and unfinished. Generally, archives provide first-hand, first-person information about the past, and serve as a container for memories or to hold evidence.<sup>1</sup>

An archive often stores first-person accounts. It is my belief that archives and archiving could be considered a personal practice or act of

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<sup>1</sup> [www.americanhistory.si.edu/archives/a-1.htm](http://www.americanhistory.si.edu/archives/a-1.htm)

democracy. A man's letter, a woman's photograph, or their scrapbooks all could be viewed as "votes" for providing a perspective on an occurrence, for example. An accumulation of gathered evidence through personal first-person accounts can function to construct a clearer picture of actual events. By sifting through archival material and museum collections, one can begin to construct a picture of the reality of some event, perspective or passage of time. I have a great deal of interest in the construction of history and have decided to explore this concept personally through carefully looking at and cataloging my own mundane material culture items such as power tools, underwear and shoes, for example. So much of my own history has been lost or is unclear and this reminds me of all the other lost histories this planet has witnessed. This enormous loss of mundane material culture information is finally acknowledged as nations are slowly being held accountable by their people for this loss.

Lola Young states that recent attempts to "democratize" history and heritage acknowledge the partial nature of recorded accounts of the past, and that interpretations of documents, texts and images are written from particular points of view. Tools, domestic objects, memorabilia and oral testimonies also known as the material culture of everyday life are beginning to be recognized as important aspects of a nation's past. "The increasing popularity of family history, and efforts to encourage a broader

spectrum of visitors to national monuments, heritage sites, museums and archives have also contributed to a wider conceptualization of what constitutes the national heritage and what is worth preserving and conserving.”<sup>2</sup> As an interdisciplinary visual artist, I have borrowed from and “re-purposed” the archive and the museum’s material cultural collection to explore my own autobiographical re-construction in Pitman Self-Storage and Services, Honolulu, Hawai’i.

The thesis project consisted of briefly converting the Commons Gallery at the University of Hawai’i at Manoa into a self-storage facility that also functioned as a visual and mnemonic catalog of everything I own in Honolulu. In addition, this space offered a sundry variety of free services to the public on demand such as mending, daily storing of bicycles and backpacks, homework help and momentary child care (15 minutes to less than one hour). By combining these multiple purposes into a dialogic space, I briefly asserted that I was a small, open-ended cultural institution and archive, in addition to being a small family business. Through confronting this material/site, the viewer found themselves mapping and navigating my archive/collection with my assistance as docent, collector, artist, collection manager, registrar, facility manager, boss, worker and the

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<sup>2</sup> Lola Young, “Cultural Policy and Inclusion”, *Museums, Society, Inequality*, ed. Richard Sandell (New York, Routledge, 2002) 209

authority figure who stationed herself behind the counter, in the space, temporarily. My goal was to initiate a dialogue that generated tension and questions for both the viewer and myself which lead to a new understanding.

A parallel metaphor is a dinner party; a gathering of individuals around a table for a meal. No one is sure what will happen but within a loosely assigned timeframe, certain elements will be in play such as people, food, eating, talking and the passage of time. I am interested in the spontaneity and surprise, the discovery and the provisional agreement among individuals within a loose framework.

In the Museum Studies Graduate Certificate program I learned more about the concept of communities presenting their own smaller “collections” instead of teams of people buying or stealing others items to make them into a part of a larger encyclopedic collection, far away. Much of my research into this theme has influenced my Master of Fine Arts thesis paper and project. It is not the purpose of my Master of Fine Arts thesis to go in depth into the politics of museological practice, but its influence will be noticeable. My acts of categorizing and visually presenting every object I own in Hawai'i also acknowledges local issues of clutter, consumerism and waste removal in addition to the massive expansion of self-storage units paired with the rapid decline of affordable

housing. This project could never come close to addressing these large social issues, nor would I ever want it to, but they do certainly influence my thesis work and inspire it, to a limited degree.

My previous body of work is another aspect of the context I am working in, my own history as an artist. Throughout much of this work, roughly a decade or more, I placed myself naked in situations of my own fashioning and documented these occurrences through photography. These “places” all existed within rural American, Midwestern, or European locations which indicates to me that all this work occurred in a rural Europeanized American or European context, the one of my ancestry. Because I was placing myself naked there, this body of work was also highly gendered.

In my thesis project this personal exploration continued but from a very different angle; through what I own, use as tools and make. The tool's very nature as a material object or consumer-oriented product contrasted with my previously gendered and ancestrally- oriented projects. Both bodies of work were highly personalized and highly constructed which is what makes them artistic, to me. I believe that this shift in orientation from personal ancestry and gender to one of objects and consumption reflects how I have literally stepped out of my site of origin (and site of comfort) to view myself from an entirely different perspective,



here on O'ahu. Viewing myself from a very different perspective and making work about viewing myself from a very different perspective was my prime intention when I moved to Hawai'i and is of enormous benefit to me. It is too soon to gauge the impact of this perspective on future work but I am pleased with the results so far.

## CHAPTER 2

### INFLUENCES, SOURCES AND BACKGROUND

The following is my most recent artist's statement:

***"I exist in a general state of disassociation and struggle to see myself. This is why I continue to find myself engaged in an artistic practice of my own provisional definition despite my ongoing resistance. My reality resembles the discovery of a mysterious fleet of crates on my doorstep every couple of weeks that need to be moved indoors and carefully unpacked, inventoried, documented, stored and researched in order to expose their context, purpose and place. Simultaneously, in the middle of the night, objects are sneaking out the back door every couple of weeks. My artistic practice is a life-long coping mechanism to manage this constant breaking and forming, loss and arrival. Often my work is process-driven. Certainly it is conceptual as opposed to product-oriented since the objects themselves are only fodder for the movement. My work is the accumulation of residue from the process of navigation through all the mutable broken pieces that I then attempt to compartmentalize, categorize, and reformulate into some kind of comprehensive whole which then breaks down again, continuing the cycle. This work is not made to be signed, shipped, sold or admired; in fact, it may not even last much longer than a couple of minutes. I am not interested in changing the world; contributing to the history of art, inspiring anyone, gaining wealth or fame, my sole interest is in making it through another day.***

***As an artist who is actively engaged in using the tools of invisibility, anonymity, introspection and dislocation/disassociation and their compensating flip-sides, I generate a variety of personas, props and situations in order to function and exist in the world. I have been relatively successful in appearing to be an articulate, competent, motivated, passionate artist and educator who can walk the walk and talk the talk. I can show up on time, do good work and collect a paycheck. However, stumbling upon the Museum Studies Program in the American Studies Department at UH Manoa was like finding a mansion for a homeless part of myself. Here was an arena of research that studied institutionalized compartmentalization, categorization, archiving, collection storage and the ongoing***

***provisional act of interpreting and exhibiting “pieces” of some larger whole. These pieces may be completely mysterious but eventually some subjective pattern emerges. Suddenly a sustainable partnership between all of my various processes, value systems, psyches, identities and careers/lifestyles appeared to join for the first time in my life. Museum Studies has had a substantial impact on my artistic practice in ways that may take years for me to truly understand.***

***I named this present accumulation PITMAN SELF-STORAGE AND SERVICES, HONOLULU, HAWAI’I because the past three years of graduate school have forced me to a skeletal existence on many levels. I have never lived with so little. This project consists of an open-ended, first-person archive and collection of my self at this particular moment.***

***I make work and situations to see what happens outside of my self that will ultimately reveal some part of me that has been hidden from my own view (encoded). In this way, my work is the only way for me to see what I am (crack the code). Without it, I am blind, deaf and without a voice.”***

I was born and raised in the rural American Midwest. I am descended from European settler colonists who arrived in America through Ellis Island in the early and mid-1800’s. My parents were both public school teachers and raised me with a respect for inquiry and a natural tendency towards curiosity. Coming from a rural background; farmers, farming and rural life greatly instilled in me a fierce independence, interdependence with the natural world/outdoors and a quirky sense of creativity. My work is highly personal and driven by my present location and state of mind. Independent curator Brian Szott once said to me, “Like politics, all art is local. In order for a work of art to

become truly great it must, above all else, succeed locally. To fully appreciate a work of art, one must understand the context in which it was made."<sup>3</sup> This context is a shared site or common ground that I draw inspiration and influence from. For me, this common ground is an essential bridge that I use as a tool in generating understanding and tolerance between me, my work, the viewer/participant, the community the piece is occurring in and the site itself.

I have had the privilege of observing over thirty years of my own artistic production and some consistent patterns have emerged which I would like to briefly describe. These patterns are important for they make up my visual vocabulary out of which I make my work.

I have always been drawn to **repetition and reflexive patterning**; finding it a calming influence which is also spiritual. Wallpaper design, knitting, sewing, breathing and repetitive tasks have always soothed me and kept me sane. I naturally incorporate this visually or physically in everything I do. This way of working was influenced by watching my mother, aunts and grandmother knit, sew and crochet. This also taught me that by making and putting together small units I create highly portable, massive pieces of art. My studio becomes portable and can exist anywhere when making small repetitive units. Karsten Bott, Agnes

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<sup>3</sup> Brian Szott, personal interview, June 1999

Martin and Yayoi Kusama have all inspired me in this respect. Their works are all examples of incorporating endless numbers of individual units to create a whole; Bott in his use of mundane collections of massive numbers of objects like bars of used soap or used pencils, Martin in her large paintings of carefully charted grids and lines and Kusama by covering an actual boat or sofa in thousands of stuffed polka-dot fabric phalluses.

I view the **site** of my work as an equal partner in all I do. Each site voices clear requests of what it wants and does not want. There is no such thing as neutral space and I am eager to engage with the history, materials, weather, architecture and occupants of any site I work in. Some of the artists that have influenced me in this respect have been Robert Smithson, Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds and Ann Hamilton. Smithson was one of the first modernists to question the idea of where art should exist and be viewed. Heap of Birds is very attentive to the history of his site in his installation and sculptural work. He chooses sites where little known Native American or indigenous atrocity occurred near the gallery or museum he is showing his two-dimensional works in. Hamilton researches her sites for years before working and draws directly from the historical components present through sound, textures, gestures, materials, scents and imagery. I am reluctant to enter into sites where I

have not been invited, preferring to work in sites where I have some kind of established ongoing relationship, personal connection or context. I believe that humans and land/sites bear witness to each other, care for each other and are locked in an intimate bond that cannot be broken.

**Reversals and inversions** figure prominently in my work as a tool of surprise and a generator of tension and wonder. This can take the form of reversing the purpose of a location such as turning an art gallery into a commercial space or inverting materials by making curtains out of desiccated tomato slices instead of fabric or replacing barbed wire fencing with a crocheted hemp facsimile. Challenging the social practices of people in certain sites can also create an inversion or reversal such as inviting people to store their bike in an art gallery or lie down and take a nap in a KGB interrogation room replica. Fred Wilson has used this technique to great effect when he displays iron slave shackles in the same exhibition case as fine embellished sterling silver pitchers, utensils and coffee service under the title of "Metal Work" from the American 18<sup>th</sup> century.

A visual or text-based **narrative** incorporating highly personal material runs through my work. I believe my sole authority lies in what I have experienced first-hand. I can only talk about or make work from what I actually know. Risk lies in a narrative of this nature because I

confide, confess or give away revealing storylines that weave tension into what is seen. This technique works to both draw and repel the viewer simultaneously, as my story interacts with their own. The main artist that has inspired me in this respect is Tracey Emin although Joseph Beuys employed this as well as Vera Frenkel and Christian Boltanski, all artists who hypnotically attract the viewer with a storyline that employs emotional and psychological devices. The act of revelation opens the door for others to do the same, at least internally.

I am usually physically **present** in my work, often appearing to be a model, prop, naturalist, employee or bystander, rarely coming across as being the maker. Often surprising conversations occur with viewers because I remain with my work or have daily tasks I perform in conjunction with the work. This immediately challenges the exhibitionary complex of neutrality. Vito Acconci (early works), Marina Abramovic, Mierle Ukeles and Michael Landy come to mind when I consider great examples of the range in which an artist can be physically present in their work as a performer, as an object themselves, an ambassador, advocate, player or a worker on site.

I am interested in engaging in **the visual poetics of the mundane**. Like working in partnership with the site, I have found that common, easily recognizable objects can be bridges in themselves between the work and

the viewer. If you use a ladder or a pair of shoes in your work, there is the immediate identification of realism. John Baldessari and Heli Rekkula are good examples of artists/photographers who work magically with the mundane, often incorporating common everyday occurrences and materials into their highly conceptual work. Christoff Büchel is a contemporary practitioner of this technique, also, often in the form of large installations that encourage the questioning of the boundaries between art and life.

**Change** is incorporated into much of my work; I come in and move things around, remove things, alter things throughout an exhibition. Often I will include materials that change over time; things that dry up, shrink, need to be watered, etc. Much of my work no longer exists because of this. Change is part of life and to make work that pretends to be permanent and static is a lie. Fluxists Alison Knowles and Yoko Ono come to mind when considering the highly temporary nature of art and life and of course Alan Kaprow is considered one of the original “happening” modernist artists who questioned the intransigence of the buying and selling of art objects through no longer making anything that could be brought or sold.

Finally, I enjoy working in **teams** with many different kinds of people, it is simply a lot more fun than working alone in a studio but it also



adds a depth and dimension to work that just doesn't happen when an artist works alone. This way of working easily allows something as pretentious as an "exhibition" to become a much more manageable "project," a "sculpture" can easily become a "prop," etc. It is a great way to prevent all involved from taking this activity too seriously. No artist works wholly alone, so I have never understood why anyone would want to pretend that they do and claim their work as their own genius. Andy Warhol, Harrell Fletcher and Mark Dion come to mind when I consider various ways artist's work as part of a larger team effort. Warhol instigated the factory idea and explored the aesthetic of advertising, copying and multiples through printmaking and his revolving door of friends and collaborators throughout his life. Both Fletcher and Dion rely heavily upon outside assistance, Fletcher from inspiration to conception through to execution, Dion in execution only. Regardless, the biggest egos of art today rarely lift a finger to make their own work yet continue to present an image of the lone genius working behind closed doors. I seek to counter this artistic stereotype in my own life and career.

All of these qualities are present in Pitman Self Storage and Services, Honolulu, Hawai'i Repetition occurs in the act of making hundreds of drawings, taking thousands of photographs and archiving and cataloging everything I own. The site of the Commons Gallery spoke

directly to me the first day I laid eyes on it three years ago- the windows are the predominant feature. I knew I would need to make strong use of them. Honolulu itself is an influence in this project, specifically the explosion of self-storage units, the presence of mixtures of handmade and manufactured objects in commercial ventures and locations and the multi-tasking entrepreneurship of small family run businesses and common spaces. It is a reversal to temporarily alter the use of the space from one of a precious "jewel-box" fine art gallery to that of a self-storage unit that also provides free services to the public (and then back to an art gallery) inside of six days. It is a reversal to make a drawing from a digital photograph for archival purposes or to hand write a years worth of email conversations which I did in an earlier piece. The act of reversal brings sharp attention to mundane daily habitual occurrences and/or actions or objects and wakes us up to question our relationship to them and what role we play as we come into contact with them. Reversals expose hidden or forgotten relationships and assumptions. Being on the premises from eight to eight daily is also a reversal; I have rarely seen an artist "gallery sit" their own show much less take an interest in any visitor interpretation of what they have presented in that space since enrolling in the program in 2005.

My personal narrative is the locus of the project; making a visual inventory of everything I presently own in Honolulu, Hawai'i. This includes all my bras, every pen and every plastic bag. What is absent or missing is also of importance and reveals a lot about me and who I am. I was present on-site from eight to eight for each of the days I was assigned that space for my thesis exhibit, physically inhabiting the project and embodying the exhibition in my various roles. This project partially becomes "visible" through drawings of mundane objects and their inherent beauty in their ordinariness. I celebrate this poetic ordinariness we all share and have in common. What was seen and what happened in the Commons Gallery space was constantly changing through the comings and goings of people and objects and also through notations and presentations on a large blackboard near the entrance. I employed and worked with a team of highly skilled individuals to help me install and build the space quickly and provide skills in areas I am lacking such as graphic design. In addition, I offered free services to anyone who passed through the University of Hawai'i Department of Art and Art History. This incorporated a wide variety of people who actually became a part of the piece through their participation in the activities and services offered by my project. Visitors included individuals from many departments beyond the Department of Art, maintenance workers, others with no close

association with the University and others who include the University grounds as part of their daily “pathway.”

Before attending graduate school I continued my education by working for or with artists that I admired greatly. The inspiration and role modeling that this kind of practical education generated fuels me like little else does. I have been greatly influenced by the brilliance, courage, discipline and professionalism of a variety of professional artists, some who are quite famous and some who are not. Face-to-face daily confrontation with excellence is something I have always been most grateful for and simultaneously struggle with whether it is in visual art or culinary art, architecture, thinking or singing. My work is truly interdisciplinary in that it incorporates so much of my daily experiences, materials, concepts and beliefs that can only be described as the practice of daily life. I use the word practice to broaden and expand the definition of what an artist does. An example that comes to mind is looking at the job description of an artist as if it were an ongoing meditation or spiritual practice which would include conducting daily tasks with increasing gratitude, awareness, understanding, tolerance and compassion. The seamlessness of art and life is key for me.

## CHAPTER 3

### SOCIO-HISTORICAL ARTISTIC PRECEDENTS

In this chapter I will attempt to show how my Master of Fine Arts Thesis project, Pitman Self Storage and Services Honolulu, Hawai'i fits into a socio-historical context. I will demonstrate the art historical precedent of my thesis project.

Some say that Duchamp's *Boîtes-en-valise* (1938) is an early attempt at presenting work inspired by the critique of museum practice and the practices of archiving and collecting. This piece consists of a miniaturized group of Duchamp's major works that fit inside of a carrying case (Figure 1).



Figure 1, Marcel Duchamp, *Boîtes-en-valise*, 1938

In Ingrid Schaffner's 1998 article "Deep Storage," she quotes Jackie McAlister and Benjamin Weil's exhibition catalog essay about the 1989 Whitney Museum of American Art's The Desire of the Museum in reference to the *Valise* "...it parodies the museum as an enclosed space for displaying art, mocks its archival activity and satirically suggests that the artist is a traveling salesman whose concerns are as promotional as they are aesthetic." Schaffner goes on to say that the task of assembling and producing editions of the *Valise* stretched beyond Duchamp's death in 1964 and that in the end the project was not only autobiographical but anticipatory as well. As an artwork designed to be unpacked, the viewing of the *Valises* carries the same sense of expectation and event as opening the crate of a great work of art in the back room of a museum.<sup>4</sup> The Dada and Surrealist movements along with Duchamp certainly set the stage for the more recent practice of archiving as art. Through his principle of the "Readymade," Duchamp was able to demonstrate that something as mundane as a standard urinal could be "afforded the title of Fountain and

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<sup>4</sup> Ingrid Schaffner, "Deep Storage," in *Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing and Archiving in Art*, eds. Ingrid Schaffner and Matthias Winzen (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1998) 11

transformed at will into an art object.”<sup>5</sup> James Putnam goes on to say that Duchamp chose these mundane objects in moments of aesthetic amnesia and displayed them alone and empty of aesthetic presumption in order to ridicule the aura of value and prestige usually assigned to art objects.

Duchamp’s practice was echoed in the 1960’s through the post World War II consumer goods explosion where artists such as Rauschenberg, Arman, Kaprow and Keinholz incorporated cast-offs, junk and flea market finds into their work. The rapidly increasing supply of materials showing up everywhere did not go unnoticed by the artists of this era and continues to be of interest to artists today, myself included. As the sheer numbers of things further clutters our vision we cannot help but question and re-evaluate what makes one object worth millions and another worth nothing and why?

From here I will turn to Andy Warhol’s obsession with collections and the collecting of the trivial. Matthias Winzen argues that like all collecting, artistic collecting changes the individual piece through its absorption into the collection but that the change is reversed when artists collect trivia or mundane objects. “Now the worthless, unnoticed, anything-but-rare piece is rendered exceptional. This suggests that if a

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<sup>5</sup> James Putnam, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Metaphor*, (New York, Thames and Hudson, 2001) 12

paradox such as that of the similarly dissimilar is hard and real in conventional collecting, that it is inevitable that it can be reversed as well. In artistic collection, it can be used backwards, so to speak.” An example of this might be Karsten Botts massive collection of used toothbrushes or pencils used to the point where they are discarded. Winzen goes on to describe how the “treacherousness” of the object, the unavoidable trivialization of the exceptional object as a result of being collected is not denied but validated. The turn to the trivial and the everyday, the ennobling of the completely worthless, overlooked and ridiculous is the backbone of some of the most productive and consequential art since the 1960's.<sup>6</sup> I would trace this practice from Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol and Joseph Beuys to Christian Boltanski, Louise Lawler and Martin Kippenberger to Jason Rhoades, Karsten Bott Michael Landy, Christoff Büchel, Tracey Emin, Fred Wilson and Jöelle Tuerlinckx.

Given Warhol's interests in collecting and consumerism it is not surprising that he owned two of Duchamps *Valise*. This piece had an enormous influence on him and may have been the inspiration for the 1979 *Reversals and Retrospectives* series of paintings in which he reworked some of his most well known works. Capturing and controlling

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<sup>6</sup> Matthian Winzen, “Collecting-so normal, so paradoxical,” in *Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing and Archiving in Art*, eds. Ingrid Schaffner and Matthias Winzen (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1998) 28



his past is also evident in his *Time Capsules*.<sup>7</sup> These pieces consisted of tossing whatever came across his desk such as newspaper clippings and ads, a pair of shoes or a Polaroid into a cardboard box and telling an assistant to “ship it off to Jersey” (in fact they usually stayed in his 27-room residence in Manhattan) at the end of each month.

In consideration of Warhol, I am also interested in making visible a specific period of time. Unlike him, however, I am not all that interested in the actual physical accumulation. When I am finished most of my material will be sold or given away prior to leaving the island- a common occurrence here. I will be left with the drawings, digital photographs and related paperwork like this thesis. When Warhol was invited to act as curator in 1970 for the Rhode Island School of Design, *Raid the Icebox* exhibition, staff voiced a concern that he was only exhibiting “storage” rather than works of art<sup>8</sup> but in his vision (which I share), all things become part of the whole and we know what is being exhibited is Andy Warhol, or in the case of my thesis project, myself. When Warhol took the stored items out into the exhibition space he removed a barrier that functions as a device to construct and manipulate a certain point of view, a curatorial

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<sup>7</sup> John Smith, “Andy Warhol,” in *Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing and Archiving in Art*, eds. Ingrid Schaffner and Matthias Winzen (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1998) 280

<sup>8</sup> James Putnam, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Metaphor*, (New York, Thames and Hudson, 2001) 18

one. He exposes this truth by removing this boundary just like the Mighty Oz was exposed to simply be a man behind a curtain. Warhol used the opportunity of being asked to curate as an opportunity to expose what it actually means to curate—to construct meaning.

Next, I want to focus on the work of Jöelle Turlinckx, a contemporary Belgian interdisciplinary artist who is relatively unknown in the United States. Her most recent exhibition at The Drawing Center in New York was titled *Jöelle Tuerlinckx-Drawing Inventory* (Figures 2, 3). In this 2007 exhibition she drew on an unconventional combination of materials taken from the immediate environment of the gallery and the non-profit organization of The Drawing Center. These materials included items like the office coffee cup collection, various office supplies and organizing materials. She creates drawings by tracing images of these materials from prolonged video projections incorporating the videos slight shifts, grain, movements and change in light. These tracings (taken from a time-based medium) freeze as assortments of slight changes into one elegant surface. In some cases, her drawings are barely discernable grids over entire walls or large bold shapes drawn onto actual shelving.



Figure 2, Joëlle Tuerlinckx, 2006, The Drawing Center, New York

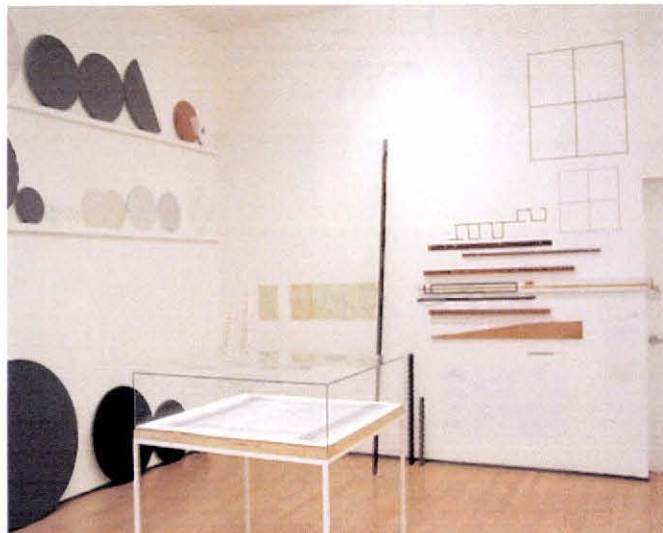


Figure 3, Joëlle Tuerlinckx, 2006, The Drawing Center, New York

In her work she culls and arranges generic objects in ways that address and consciously expand methods of drawing. Her installations

often resemble archeological sites that are overflowing with materials categorized according to multiple associations. She often displays them on the floor, on tables or in vitrine and exhibits an inventory of objects such as wooden sticks, stacks of doilies or pencils. Tuerlinckx's marks, arrangements and films reconsider the roles and functions of collecting, preserving and exhibiting within art institutions<sup>9</sup>.

The construction of truth, meaning and usefulness through cultural categorization and classification is of interest to me as an artist. I seek to explore my own personal historical amnesia of forgetting and remembering by examining this similar act, institutionally. Both Tuerlinckx and I share an interest in the process (as opposed to the product) of categorizing and archiving. Her work is extremely impersonal in order to focus the viewer on highly formal elements such as line, shape, texture, hue and spatial relationships that are usually overlooked in everyday life.

I acknowledge my own amnesia (and the construction of an ahistorical archive) through the methodical process of producing an inventory and archive of my own "stuff", the objects from my everyday life. I believe that many people, not just myself, experience a contemporary reality that is based in a deeply entrenched (albeit unaware) ahistoricism.

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<sup>9</sup> [www.drawingcenter.org](http://www.drawingcenter.org)

In order to cope with this constant barrage of denial and amnesia, I need and readily employ my artistic practice.

As an artist, ahistoricism can be a tool just as a saw or paintbrush can be. It has certainly been a creative tool for many curators wishing to give voice to their own agenda or the agenda of their museums/collections. Susan Stewart very succinctly states that, "The collection seeks a form of self-enclosure which is possible because of its ahistoricism. The collection replaces history with classification, with order beyond the realm of temporality. In the collection, time is not something to be restored to an origin, rather, all time is made simultaneous or synchronous within the collectors world." She goes on to say that the collection represents a total aestheticization of use value. The collection involves the reframing of objects and the manipulation of context. "The collection is its own hermetic world...a world which is both full and singular, which has banished repetition and achieved authority."<sup>10</sup> It's the ultimate control trip.

It is also functioning in a similar way as any traditional art exhibition in any gallery although it certainly does not look it. By assigning the carefully constructed neutral space of the Commons Gallery a commercial

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<sup>10</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 2003) 151

sounding, non-neutral role (that of Self Storage and Services), I hoped to bring attention to the act of transaction that occurs in both types of space. Other cues such as not having an opening, remaining present on-site and deliberately downplaying aesthetically pleasing elements such as incandescent track lighting and parquet flooring all generate an image of a function-first anti-aesthetic. This reversal is not unlike Kader Attia's *Illegal Studio Hallal* (2004) where he turned a gallery into a temporary illegal garment sweatshop. It is my goal to comment on the gallery as a place of transaction which often appears to be focused on aesthetics and cultivating aesthetic taste.

In direct contrast to Tuerlinckx, my own work is highly personal and contains much personal narrative. For me, this is essential in engaging the viewer and in bringing the project into a dialogic realm which Tuerlinckx is clearly not interested in. She chooses to follow in the footsteps of the original conceptual artists, which I choose to comment on and break free of.

Although my objects may have little or no monetary value they are transformed into unique artifacts and then displayed together mimicking traditional museum collection storage methods. For those artists who participate in this kind of activity, the objects can have very personal associations as in the case of Christian Boltanski's *Vitrine de Reference*

series (Figure 4) or Joseph Beuy's work in vitrines which contain relics from his past actions and performances.<sup>11</sup>



Figure 4, Christian Boltanski, *Vitrines de Reference*, 1971

The self can provide the most fundamental subject matter for an artist's personal museum and can act as a vehicle for expressing an individual's ideology. Artists often investigate themselves through their work but not usually for sentimental reasons. We work in a kind of self-portraiture process because such associations tend to represent broader social insights. When I take digital images of everything I own I am not placing more or less value on certain objects but "flattening" (or

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<sup>11</sup> James Putnam, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium*, (New York, Thames and Hudson, 2001) 68

democratizing) them to all be of equal value just like in many museum collections. In museum collections, the object worth \$40,000 is catalogued and classified and registered in the exact same way as one worth \$400. No sentimental value is ever taken into consideration in the inventory process. I consciously chose to digitally photograph each object I own before drawing it from the photograph in order to generate a flattening effect so my wedding rings are the same size as my circular saw which is the same size as my car or my paper clip.

In the case of Tracey Emin's 1995 piece *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1962-1995* (Figure 5), the artist uses her personal associations and narrative to represent broader social insights into areas of class, gender and sexual politics. In this piece, Emin stitched the names of people she had slept with into the insides of a tent which also functioned as her studio and gallery. This piece was part of her *Tracey Emin Museum* located in a storefront in London 1995-98.<sup>12</sup> This work generates a variety of provocative questions like, what does she mean when she says "sleeping with"? This leads me to muse over my own definitions of what this might really mean to me, also. A small, enclosed temporary space suited for one or two people has a lot of very different associations

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<sup>12</sup> James Putnam, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium*, (New York, Thames and Hudson, 2001) 79



and meanings depending upon your perspective. Emin was born in 1962, who was she sleeping with then if this piece includes that year? Her mother or parents? Was I sleeping with someone the year I was born?

This ongoing highly intimate “call-and response” mirroring activates tension with every moment of engagement. We all can recognize a tent, we look inside and see all these names and read the title of the piece. Our mind begins to connect the dots through filtering through our own personal stories and memories. In my mind, this process of engagement is a hallmark of excellence in art. The force of art is to “open the doors of perception, not herd thought and spirit into adherence to a campaign program or a subscribed agenda.”<sup>13</sup> It has been my experience that this opening occurs more strongly when authentic personal material is involved, summoning up the viewers own authentic personal material. Was this piece consciously created to skate the narrow tension between the sinister trauma of childhood sexual abuse (which I know is a part of Emin’s history) and happy-go-lucky childhood camping trips? I am quite sure it was. At the same time this piece is an archive of sorts and a self-portrait of the artist herself. What would my own tent of “everyone I ever slept with” look like? It makes me aware of the idea that each and every

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<sup>13</sup> Johanna Drucker, *Sweet Dreams: Contemporary Art and Complicity* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005) 253

one of us has an idea for their own tent filled with their own names or even with a few or no names. This is the kind of metaphor we can all relate to and an artist does his or her job well when a visitor or viewer begins to wonder and begins the incredible act of self-reflection that the piece instigates. It is my goal to make as much work as possible that functions on this level-- I am very interested in making work that relates to the viewer and makes them think of their own experiences and wonder.



Figure 5, Tracey Emin, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1962-1995*, 1995

Tracey Emin opens her book *Strangeland with text by an eleventh century poet named Ahmad Ibu-al-Qaf; "I poured out my worries to a friend. Hoping it would make me feel better. But what I told him became an open secret. Fireflies in the dark".*<sup>14</sup> This poem speaks of the nature of confessional sharing so central to the formation of human intimacy which is ultimately an act of healing. In this book, just like in any of her work, Emin creates her own space lying between the Margate of her childhood, the Turkey of her ancestors and her life in present-day London. This series of written confessions and memoirs is deeply intimate and powerfully engaging. Her texts have always been central to her work as a visual artist and function to pull the viewer in through the sharing of her experience through a vivid, intensely emotional narrative. The only authority any of us truly has is what our own life story brings to us. I cannot make work about anything I have not experienced personally.

Part of what makes Emin's work so compelling is the absolute authority she draws from in creating her work. Emin's insistence is part of her power. She demands attention. Nicolas Lezard's 2007 review of *Strangeland* in *The Guardian* says, "...I remember looking at her famous installation *My Bed* and thinking: but for the sanitary towels, that is pretty

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<sup>14</sup> Tracey Emin, *Strangeland*, (London, Sceptre, 2005) 2

much what my bed looked like until my wife-to-be moved in. Then I heard in an interview with her in which she said that the bed was a recreation of the bed she was in when she nearly decided to kill herself. Ah, I thought, now I get it; her art is not just a way of life to her: its life itself, the opposite of death, yet in quite alarming proximity to it.”<sup>15</sup> How can Lezard really say this as he looks at a re-constructed object inside a museum or gallery? How “real” is this form of realism? If it is completely re-constructed how can it be real at all? I think a more accurate analysis of the phenomena of confessional autobiographical work like Emin’s comes from Melanie McGrath’s essay for Tate Magazine. In this section she is referring to one of Emin’s 2002 blanket pieces titled *There Is Something Wrong*. She argues that many of Emin’s critics see her as being nothing more than a narcissistic documentarist and believe her work is so unmediated, they wonder if its even art. McGrath states that this both misunderstands and misses the point. While it is true that little of Emin’s work is a commentary of the business of art itself,

“Emin is herself the mediator between her experience and its expression. The human world consist of individual lives lived and connections between them. By exposing her own life to public view, Emin makes those connections. Anxiety, neediness, powerlessness, exhilaration, tenderness, the fear that one is condemned to live inside a reflection of oneself, attached only to the image. Who has not felt these things? Who has not looked in the mirror and thought, ‘There is something wrong’?”

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<sup>15</sup> <http://books.guardian.co.uk/print/O,,329594118-110738.html>

Earlier, McGrath asserts that the intimacy of Emin's work is comfortingly dangerous in the same way watching a car crash on TV can be comfortingly dangerous. It is simultaneously subversive and conservative. This contradiction gives the work its dynamism and context and allows Emin to reach beyond the academy. It tells of life the way it is.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> [www.tate.org.uk/magazine/issue1/something.htm](http://www.tate.org.uk/magazine/issue1/something.htm)

## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT

At this point, I would like to focus on the installation and “performance” aspect of my project. Throughout, I deliberately worked to keep this project open-ended and multi-faceted and somewhat difficult to pin-down in its purpose, complexity and activities while retaining a very strict and simple structure of “self storage and services.” This blend kept all involved on our toes and leveled the playing field, so to speak, so no one individual or action or element was able to elicit more attention than another and be turned into a spectacle. The result was a well-paced unfolding saga of textures, stories, images, dialogs and transactions.

The project became its own envelope of space without an obvious authority figure, only a facilitator through which a range of possibilities could occur for anyone who entered into it. I carefully designed my role as maker, actor, worker, manager and facilitator as central to this project and my presence was key specifically in the gallery itself drawing visitors through a provisional dialogical process. However, I was rarely the focus at any given time— the tasks, accumulation of objects, and activities occurring within with the space itself, were the focus. This was my ultimate goal.

While aspects of the piece were clearly a self-portrait, the project resulted in visitors departing thinking about themselves and the things that surround their lives. When I took photographs and then made drawings of everything I owned, the viewer instantly began to think about what their own efforts towards this end might look like, "what would all my stuff look like if it were all spread out over a surface like this?" was the question on the lips of many visitors. I created this effect visually through the archive of catalogued drawings themselves which were echoed textually through questions in the forms I designed and repeated again visually through the accumulation of the visitor drawings on the blackboard, also known as the Project Archive. Finally, the same thoughts were acknowledged and verbalized through the dialogue that occurred between the participants and myself.

Grant Kestor opens his book on dialogic artistic practices by describing the practice as departing from the monologic tradition of object making and adopting a performative and process-based approach to the making of art. He describes those of artists who choose to work this way as context providers instead of content providers. A variety of artists and art collectives are defining their practice around the facilitation of dialogue. From WochenKlausur's boat colloquies to Suzanne Lacy's community-based projects this collaborative and consultative approach has roots in

the combining of both art history and activism. The term dialogic and the idea of a dialogic art practice comes from Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin who argued that works of art can be viewed as a kind of conversation; a locus of meanings, interpretations and points of view.<sup>17</sup> To me, this sounds very similar to the definitions of what an archive is.

As the project or collection manager, I created a clear timeline, specific mileposts, task lists and countdown points similar to any kind of event planning process such as a wedding or construction project incorporating the professional services of others. Planning was closely controlled and monitored and was preceded by research, budgeting and fundraising.

Retaining a cluster of visual and technical options allows for some spontaneity like tools waiting to be used in a toolbox in case they are needed. This allows for some flexibility in the project because nothing turns out exactly as planned and corrections, adjustments and insertions are handy to have on hand. An example of this was having the ability, time and materials to paint commercial signage directly on the windows or door (which I ended up not doing but could have if I felt I needed to). Some specific elements were left free to evolve such as the arrangement

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<sup>17</sup> Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 2004) 10



of the drawings on the glass windows of the space, for example, once each drawing was categorized into certain window bays. I categorized the drawings for each window, placed the proper drawings into a huge pile and left the final arrangement and installation of these drawings to others. Members of the project enjoyed having total control over what went where and the final look of the windows and I was able to troubleshoot some other problems elsewhere in the gallery, maintaining a smooth pace and achieving a timely conclusion.

### **Location and Community**

I chose the Commons Gallery as the space in which to complete this project. I considered other retail and commercial spaces elsewhere in Honolulu but kept returning to the Commons Gallery simply because it lies at the heart of where I am located and where I identify which seemed quite appropriate considering the autobiographical nature of this project. The reason I came to Honolulu was very simply to attend graduate school at the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. Although I live in Palolo Valley, I spent most of my time at school and most of my relationships are based in the building that houses the art department.

The issue of location is complicated and would be good to analyze through a project by United States based artist Rirkrit Tiravanija in

Cologne in 1996-97. This artist is well known for work that creates parallel spaces in which he assembles cafes, dining rooms and playhouses in galleries and museums where they are celebrated as embodiments of arts power to transcend institutional and cultural boundaries. These spaces are then often described as utopian spaces of free and open exchange of food and/or conversation.

In the case of the Cologne project, Tiravanija reconstructed his New York apartment in the gallery as an open space for cooking, eating and communal celebration. While this was under construction, the Cologne police were just outside of the gallery breaking up and driving out a settlement of homeless people. While Cologne's press lauded Tiravanija's installation in the gallery as a model of intercultural exchange, a number of local artists and activists found the juxtaposition of Tiravanija's magnanimity and the brutal gesture of the police attacks on the homeless literally feet away problematic. While Tiravanija cannot be blamed for the attacks on the homeless outside of the gallery, this particular outcome demonstrates the challenges artists face when they claim a dedication to dialogue but ignore the context in which that dialogue is situated.<sup>18</sup> My take is that while Tiravanija certainly did not plan this blatant juxtaposition which may be viewed as making his work (and this

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<sup>18</sup> (Kester 2004, 105)

way of working as an artist) highly suspect, in the end it certainly created an effective theater in which the issues got thoroughly publicized because of the presence of Tiravanija's work. I do object to how his lack of awareness, context and research in this case builds roadblocks to others who are trying to work in this way. I do not know if this artist changed his way of working in response to this occurrence.

Because I have lived for three years in the area in which this project occurred, I felt qualified to make choices that would be successful within not only the University context but within less visible contexts that were subsequently made visible through the piece itself. These less visible factors included the use of the space by individuals without discreet private space in which to keep a backpack, for example, in addition to people who simply included the location as a part of their daily pathway elsewhere. I was acutely aware of the rhythms of traffic, flow and use. I knew what useful objects existed where and to whom they belonged to. I was able to borrow some of the physical elements of the project such as the counter/bar, display shelf and the hot water dispenser instead of making or purchasing them developing relationships and dialogue along the way through negotiating those loans. I had observed what had occurred in the space for three years in order to make something that had not occurred there during that time. As a result, I had a good idea of what

kinds of services people would want and be interested in. All of these aspects were part of the final piece as manifested in the Commons Gallery March 15-20, 2008 (Figure 6-12).



Figure 6, Exterior entrance



Figure 7, Interior chalkboard wall, Project Archive



Figure 8, Interior counter



Figure 9, Interior



Figure 10, Interior counter, back (open to public viewing)



Figure 11, Interior, helping with forms



Figure 12, Interior, bike and backpack storage, mail wall and scissors lift



Figure 13, Exterior

### **Spatial and Interior Features and their Impact**

I chose to transform the precious jewel-box aspect of the Commons Gallery into a more industrial and functional space. After the transformation, many people passed by and asked “where had the gallery gone?” This demonstrated the success of my attempt which I was pleased to observe first hand. I chose to do this in order to surprise and upset the visual practices of that particular campus pathway thus generating a dialogic project space, the goal of much of my work. Visitors entered with questions and I was there to assist them and channel their puzzlement into the project not unlike a spider waiting for an insect to drop



into its web. Viewers instantly became a part of the piece by entering the space with a question on their lips or a puzzled look on their faces.

Grant Kestor asks, "does the work of art leave us to wander, skeptical and disoriented, through the modern forest of signs or can the assault on our conventional knowledge (of art) catalyze new forms of understanding and agency?"<sup>19</sup> Once the phenomenological envelope has been created by briefly interrupting the habitual and the conventional, a facilitator is needed. One of my roles was that of the facilitator in this project.

According to London-based artist Stephen Willats, his practice is about representing the potential self-organizing richness of people within a reductive culture of objects and possessions. Willats is interested in shifting the focus of art from the creator fabricating an exemplary physical object to the experience of his co-participants in the spaces and routines of their everyday lives. Willats postulates a concept of socially interactive culture that redefines art in terms of the discursive relationship that it establishes with the viewer. In this context, conventional art is understood as a process of object production that occurs in isolation. There is almost no opportunity for the viewers' responses to the work they encounter in traditional galleries to be communicated to the artists so that he or she

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<sup>19</sup> (Kester 2004, 82)

might respond or change future works except through the professionalized surrogate of art criticism. Willats argues for a form of aesthetic exchange in which the artists own presuppositions have the potential to be challenged by the viewer through a process of collaboration or feedback. In the case of Willats, both he and his collaborators are able to transform their consciousnesses through the dialogical encounters that are mediated by the production of images and text pieces produced by the project in a public space.<sup>20</sup>

In the case of Pitman Self-Storage and Services, I was present at all times to field, discuss, answer and enter into a dialog with every person who walked through the door. Once the de-centering occurred and the visitor chose to cross the threshold into the space, I was right there to explain the options of what one could choose to “do” once inside. My introduction informed visitors that I was open from 8 to 8 and that one could store their bicycle or backpack here, get some hot water for tea (but they would have to bring their own cup), help themselves to some free food or bring in an object to be included in the Project Archive. I went on to explain what participating in the Project Archive meant (that they present me with an object that I take a digital photograph of, measure and fill out some forms about). I would make a drawing of this object from the

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<sup>20</sup> (Kester 2004, 91)

photo and this drawing would be given to them at the end of the exhibition after it was displayed on the chalkboard wall near the entrance. I then turned and said: "these are my drawings of every single item that I own..." and gestured towards the glass windows. Like clockwork, the visitor's mouth would open and they would look amazed for a moment or two, the wheels in their heads working. Many began to ask questions about how many objects I own or how much space this many things took up, etc. It was clear that they were thinking about their own objects and how they measured up against my own.

Many conversations occurred about how people rarely think about the volume of objects they own. Some people simply chose to leave at this point but most stayed, started talking to each other, continued to look around at the space or began to pull something out of their bags for me to include in the archive. Some who left said they were coming back and many did either with their bike or with an object to include in the archive. In the six days I was open I worked with 122 people who passed through the space and took me up on the storage and services offered either in the form of child care, mending, hemming, Project Archive, bike or backpack storage. Others that were not counted read my journals, brought in or took free food, got hot water for tea or simply came in and chatted. In that brief time I developed a group of around 15 regulars who stopped in daily.

The spatial transformation was completed through covering the floor in black paper so that it would capture and clearly show all the marks and residue of the week's activities. The paper was torn by carts and equipment, littered with paper clippings from the making of the Project Archive three-ring binder and tracked with footprints of visitors. I also changed the lighting from traditional gallery incandescent track lighting to cheap industrial fluorescent lighting which flooded and flattened the space. I believe that this created the most dramatic difference in transforming the space. I chose not to tape or paint the walls, leaving them rough, odd and unfinished. This worked to both create transparency in what the walls are made of and how they are placed in addition to avoiding the construction of a clean neutral context and its references to a theater of illusions.

I focused a great deal of attention on the windows of the space because they were and are a dominant feature of it. Because they are transparent glass walls, I used vellum drawings to create a thin loose grid of overlapping paper that could be viewed from outside or inside, leaving holes and openings for viewers to catch each other looking in or out. When outside, one was perfectly comfortable viewing art in an almost traditional gallery-like situation (salon style) while inside the gallery itself something else entirely was going on in the bright visually protective cocoon of the papered windows. The drawings were layered creating

differing depths of opacity and transparency and interesting relationships (Figure 13, 14).



Figure 14, Window with layered vellum drawings

### **Team**

I chose to work with a team of both paid and unpaid workers. I paid for professional technical assistance in the form of graphic design and construction assistance. There were a total of seven people who worked directly with me on this project. These people were Dan Carbone, Fatiha Kheddaoui, Na'a Makekau, Jun and Jonas Okano, Steven Rosenthal and Terri Wada. It is important for me to incorporate the skills and

perspectives of others into my work. I have blind spots and weaknesses and seek others input in order to create a more complete project. All of these people were friends and/or co-workers from other situations and were interested in working in a dialogic way as part of a group. Not all of them would consider themselves artists. We met together as a group in the form of dinner meetings once before and once after the project. I made hand-embroidered name patches for each team member including myself and we wore garments with these name patches sewn onto them while installing (Figure 15).



Figure 15, Hand-embroidered name patches sewn onto team members own garments

This was both a piece of memorabilia for each team member to keep and was also a uniform for the team. Even though each patch was different in color, all were the same in size and font. Each member was invited to sew their patch onto whatever garment or apron they chose. In my experience, attention to small details like these create a cumulative effect that add depth and texture to the project. The dinner meetings enhance a feeling of familiarity through the sharing of a meal in addition to being a model for much of my work which I initiated a conversation the first time we all get together. I am grateful for these willing team members and the skills, humor and wisdom they brought with them to the project.

#### **Categorization and Archiving of the Drawings of Everything I Own**

Attached as a separate addendum are the final categories I chose in order to archive the drawings of everything I own. Each object was date stamped at the time it was photographed. I developed the categories then created a photographic listing in a three-ring binder assigning numeric accession numbers to each photograph following best museum practices. Numbering covered both 2007 and 2008 sequences. From this numeric/photographic three-ring binder I then created a color-coded card catalog to provide additional hand-written information on each item in my collection.

## **Forms**

Filling out bureaucratic paperwork in duplicate was a way of participating in this project. Individuals came in, sat down and filled out one form in order to store their bike or backpack or drop off mending in addition to receiving a numbered and perforated "coatcheck" tag, the other half of which was attached to the item. Two forms were required to participate in the Project Archive on the blackboard at the front (all forms are included as addendums to this paper). Forms were stamped with both "completed" and "received" stamps upon processing. Paperwork and forms had the effect of further echoing the flattened institutional archival nature of the collection itself and added irony and humor to the process since it was occurring in the highly institutionalized space of the University campus. It also functioned to establish a relationship between the participant and myself as we worked on their paperwork together. Often, I would call out the dimensional measurements of their object to be archived for the individual to record or fill in the dates and time for them. The paperwork became a ground upon which we could meet. The small goals of completing the forms, which we could quickly accomplish together, helped us to form a temporary bond. When all forms were done, they received a receipt to take home.



I learned that you can tell quite a bit about a person when you place a form in front of them and ask them to fill it out. Many were quite comfortable with doing this but some were visibly nervous and even slightly agitated. While no one refused outright, I think a some people might have changed their mind about participating had they known that they were going to be asked to fill out paperwork. I provided very high quality pens which helped, because people love to use nice pens (I know I certainly do). I also sat down with them which also seemed to comfort those who were nervous. Buttons were given out free of any logo or advertising. They stated: "I AM A CULTURAL INSTITUTION" and "I AM A HERITAGE PROJECT." These buttons were readily taken as memorabilia or souvenirs of the project. It was important that these buttons would make bold statements about all of our individual value as walking libraries and museums without directly referencing the name, time or location of this particular project.

### **Signage**

Commercial signs were a necessary element of this project and an important visual element. I began researching small business commercial signage in Honolulu early in the process in addition to referencing this same type of signage from the American Midwest where I was born, raised and lived until arriving on Oahu in 2005 (Figure 16). I constructed

and hand painted all the signage as props. They worked to generate a certain amount of atmosphere and a low level of nostalgia along with adding a clear human hand of unevenness and imperfection.



Figure 16, Signage in studio prior to installation

## Announcement and Activity Book

A great deal of money, time and consideration went into the announcement and Activity Book designed specifically for this project. I worked closely with a carefully chosen professional graphic designer. I made appointments and reviewed the work of seven local graphic designers before choosing Terri Wada. I chose Terri based on her expertise, previous work, sense of humor and shared understanding of my aesthetics and goals. The announcement contained a small magnetized calendar tucked inside that mimicked the appearance of a local insurance advertisement. We designed the announcement to be black so its appearance would become distressed through the process of it going through the postal system just as the black floor of the gallery would retain the residue of its actions upon it (Figure 17, 18).



Figures 17, 18, Announcement and calendar

The activity book held a personal introduction to the project, some excerpts from this thesis, a definition of what an archive is, a word game, a public and private crossword puzzle, a hidden pictures centerfold puzzle and a making pairs game. All the visual imagery in the Activity Book was based on my drawings and all the text related directly to the project and this thesis. It provided a playful and informative context for the viewer to understand the project while visiting the space. It was also became a terrific coloring book while I fulfilled childcare responsibilities.



Figure 19, Activity book

## **Transaction**

Once inside the gallery, no money changed hands between the participants and myself. Regardless of this fact, transactions multiplied and were negotiated rapidly. One of the things I have found to be unique about living on O'ahu is the highly negotiable and face-to-face nature of human interactions here that are all but extinct in the continental portion of the United States. Some examples of how this influenced my project included the negotiated time for momentary child care and the negotiated act of individuals choosing to be taught how to use the scissors lift themselves to place their bicycle high up on the wall mounts.

In the case of the bicycle storage, using the lift encouraged a closer look at the three years worth of opened personal mail that I had taped to the top of this wall in addition to being seen as a fun new experience. The scissors lift was also popular with visitors who had never used one before. In both of these instances, a conversation occurred that began as provisional offers and ended in a mutually agreed upon understanding (Figures 19, 20). All possibilities were discussed and satisfactory agreements were made at all times. No one was hurt or injured and no damage was done to anyone's property.



Figures 20, 21, Bicycle placement using scissors lift and momentary childcare

At one point, a visitor brought in a baby bird found on the sidewalk. This bird needed many things that the person who had brought it in had not been able to find. Within minutes other visitors arrived and with them information, skills and materials needed to aid the bird. By the end of the day a local bird rescue facility had been located and consulted, a syringe had been brought filled with soymilk, someone with baby bird feeding skills showed up and some warmer bedding had been provided. Someone had even brought the bird a birdhouse. When the original owner returned, he took the bird directly to the rescue facility. The point of this story is that resources to solve most problems exist within reach and one of the outcomes of this project was to make visible this intriguing concept. We

are able to accomplish much more and generate more positive human connections by freely combining our skills instead of working alone.

Another interesting transaction occurred at a low table area in the gallery which encouraged the public reading of my personal journals from 2003 to the present day. At first it was extremely difficult for me to sit and observe complete strangers reading about the intimacies of my life and then even more so as friends and acquaintances read them. As people read (sometimes for up to an hour at a time) and then thanked me for opening them up for their review, I felt more and more comfortable and realized that this material was in the past, not unlike my personal handwritten mail. The act of people reading it made me “let it go” which is exactly what I had felt I needed to do as some of it was quite painful. In this way, the visitors unknowingly provided a great service of neutralization and personal closure for me (Figure 21).

A variety of transactions occurred in this project that were complex, intimate, connective and highly functional which benefited all who participated in ways rarely touched by monetary exchange. While I am not pretending that these kinds of things never happen, rarely do they happen in commercial or industrial spaces such as the one I created.



Figure 22, Journal reading station

### **Squares, Rectangles and Compartmentalization**

Every constructed shape in the gallery was square or rectangular emphasizing the compartmental nature of the entire project. These pervasive irregular grids that covered the floor and walls, shaped almost every piece of furniture and were echoed by hundreds of sheets of paper everywhere. These hard-edged shapes functioned as objective containers and frames for everything organically shaped namely our bodies and the many objects and tools that relate to our bodies. While this is some of my most recent work that does not incorporate my own naked body outdoors, the presence of our shared organic shape is still strongly registered in this project because of the hard squares and rectangles.



## **Project Archive**

The final Project Archive included a three-ring binder of forms, a group of photographs and a blackboard wall housing the drawings which were given to their owners at the end of the week (Figure 7). Each participant was invited to define for themselves what they might like to include in the Archive. One chose to include a dance choreography move, another her two daughters. Most chose objects they possessed including pieces of art, a wrench or a book. One woman chose to include her hair which measured nine feet long when unbraided. In the end, the book consisted of 71 entries. This book is a self-selected archive or portrait of the community members who chose to include themselves passing through this location over six days (March 15-20, 2008). I chose to keep this book as the only residue of the project itself. This along with all the receipts and photographs will be what I retain in addition to this thesis.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

When I arrived on O'ahu, I had three goals. The first one was to work exclusively towards a Master of Fine Arts degree and thus spend a few years of intense inquiry into my work, my practice and my role as an artist in society. Second, I wanted to live in a place very different from where I was raised and had lived and anticipated a major re-evaluation or "re-shuffling of the deck." I wanted to live simply and focus on my artistic development. Finally, I wanted to bridge what I felt were two parts of my practice; one being reflective of personal and individual inquiries and explorations and the other being community-driven, public art projects. I believe that I was able to bridge these concerns in Pitman Self-Storage and Services, Honolulu, Hawai'i. In addition, I believe that the concluding project emphasized the often invisible people, pathways, connections and transactions that occur as a part of our mundane daily life. This visibility was enhanced through the dialogic and provisional space of the project itself as located in the Commons Gallery. This dialogic space was underlined through the interactions of various individuals who actively generated an archive, in this space during a designated time period. While some of the work involved the construction of my own self-portrait, the project ended as being a self-portrait of those who participated as well.

When evaluating dialogical art projects, Grant Kester incorporates certain questions of which I will list here. These points acknowledge art as a privileged realm of self-expression that provides a quasi-protected opening to venture into a broader cultural and political area within which various forms of aesthetic knowledge can then be mobilized. Does the project “open” a space in contemporary culture in which anyone may ask questions and would the critical analysis articulated through these questions not be readily processed anywhere else? Does the project promote thinking beyond or outside of immediate self-interest? Does the project promote spatial rather than temporal imagination, the ability to comprehend and represent complex social and environmental systems, identify interconnections among invisible forces that pattern human and environmental existence? Finally, after achieving these durational and spatial insights, does the project proceed to process this material through dialogical and collective insights with others?<sup>21</sup>

While I cannot emphatically say yes to all of the above, I do know that the project did succeed on several of these points, certainly enough for me to say that I did complete an interdisciplinary thesis project that incorporated many dialogical (as opposed to monological) elements.

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<sup>21</sup> (Kester, 2004, 67)

In closing I want to thank these people for their support, wisdom and assistance: Tasha Hock and Julie Wheeler, Betty Humke, Julie and Greg Diltz, John Davidson Pitman, Pat Hickman, Kyoko Higuchi, Michelle Zacks, Maya Portner, Jee-Un Kim, JR Ludlow, Fred Roster, Gaye Chan, Karen Kosasa, Kate Lingley, Wendy Kawabata, Mike Hoyt, Fatiha Kheddaoui, Na'a Makekau, Dan Carbone, Terri Wada, Jun and Jonas Okano, Steven Rosenthal, Pam and Don Lichty, Gwen Wock, Michael Rooks, Hal Lum, Aaron Padilla, Margo Vitarelli, Marcia Morse, Atsumi Yamamoto, Will Williams, Ulla Taskinen, Beatrix Reinhardt, UH Department of Art and Art History and their staff, UH Galleries and their crew, M4 Services and City Mill. Additional photographs (Figure 23-27).



Figure 23, Interior windows covered in vellum drawings of everything I own



Figure 24, Interior



Figure 25, Interior, bicycle storage and 3 years of my personal mail

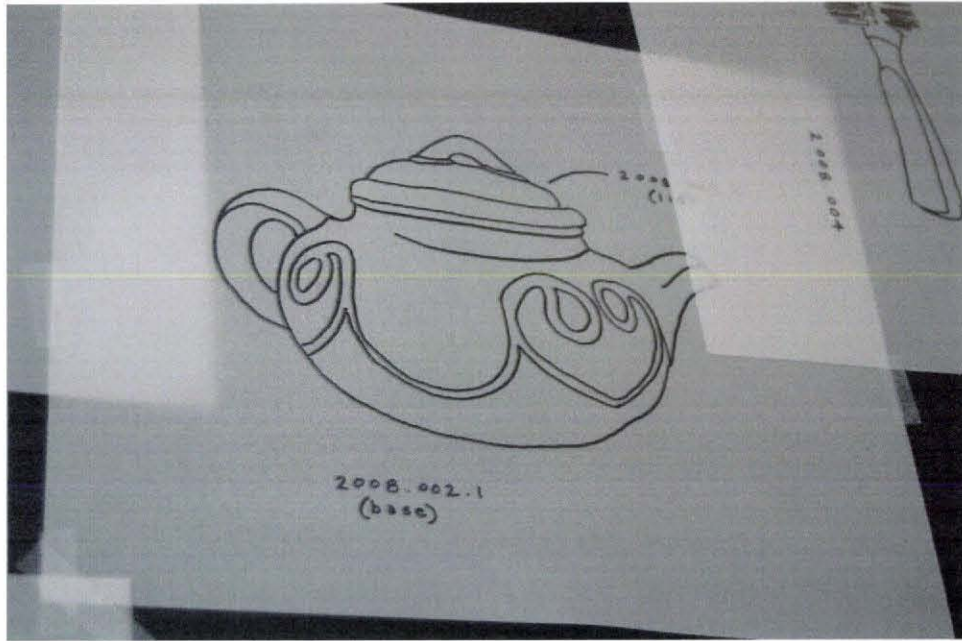


Figure 26, Drawing from Project Archive

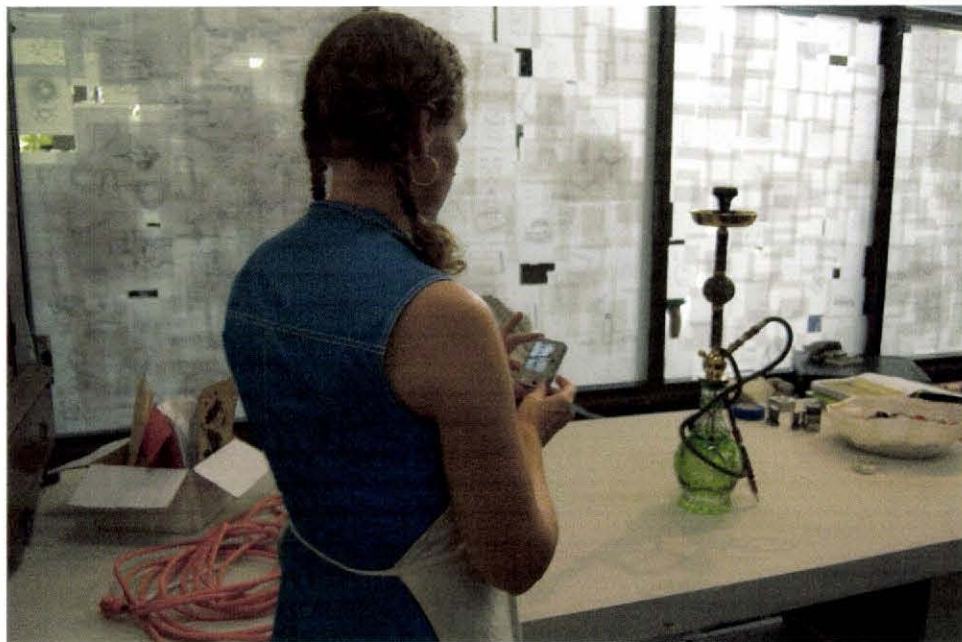


Figure 27, Taking a digital photograph of an object for the Project Archive

APPENDIX 1

Personal Archive categories

TOOL: BAG: HAND:

CAMERA  
COIN PURSE  
COMPUTER SKIN  
PAPER GROCERY  
PLASTIC (7)  
PLASTIC GROCERY (3)

TOOL: BAG: HAND: TOOLBAGS:

PLASTIC (3)  
METAL  
FABRIC (2)

TOOL: BAG: SHOULDER:

BACKPACK  
DUFFEL  
FABRIC (6)  
LEATHER  
PLASTIC (2)

TOOL: BODY: ADORNMENT:

EARS (8)  
FINGERS (8)  
HAIR (6)  
NECK (6)

TOOL: BODY: CLOTHING:

ARMS COVERED (36)  
ARMS EXPOSED (18)  
GLOVES (4)  
LEGS COVERED (19)  
LEGS EXPOSED (14)  
MISCELLANEOUS (2)

TOOL: BODY: CLOTHING: SCARF (9)

TOOL: BODY: CLOTHING: SHAWL (2)

TOOL: BODY: CLOTHING: SOCKS (10)

TOOL: BODY: EYES (3)

TOOL: BODY: SHOES:

COVERED (6)  
EXPOSED (6)

TOOL: CONTAINERS:

ART RELATED FLUIDS (5)  
HAIR (2)  
LIPS (2)  
MEDICAL (6)  
NAILS  
SKIN (6)  
SOAP (3)

TEETH (2)  
UNDERARMS  
WATER (3)

TOOL: FURNITURE:

SIT (3)  
SURFACE (3)

TOOL: HOME: BED:

BLANKET  
DUVET  
DUVET COVER  
PILLOW  
PILLOWCASES (3)  
SHEETS, SETS (2)  
SHEETS, SINGLE (4)

TOOL: HOME: TOWELS:

LARGE  
SMALL (6)

TOOL: JOURNALS (11)

TOOL: NEED ELECTRICITY: COMPONENTS:

BATTERY POWERED TOOLS (4)  
BITS (6)  
CAMERAS AND CHARGER (3)  
CHARGERS AND BATTERIES (4)  
CONVERTERS  
EXTENSION CORDS (2)  
IPOD  
LIGHTBULBS (2)  
PHONE AND CHARGER (2)  
SPEAKER

TOOL: NEED ELECTRICITY SELF-CONTAINED (17)

TOOL: NO ELECTRICITY:

BATTERIES NEEDED (3)  
CLEANING (5)  
EATING (3)  
MISCELLANEOUS (4)  
MNEMONICAL (29)  
OFFICE (9)  
PAPER (4)  
PERSONAL HYGENE (8)  
STUDIO (72)

TOOL: PENS (37)

TOOL: RUGS (3)

TOOL: TIME-KEEPING (2)

1

2

3

4

5

4

5

6

(DOOR)

APPENDIX 2

Project forms

**PITMAN SELF-STORAGE**  
*and Services*

HONOLULU, HAWAII

**SELF-STORAGE FORM**

- 1.) CIRCLE ONE:  
Bicycle      Bag/backpack      object archive      other
- 2.) TIME IN: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME OUT: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3.) TODAY'S DATE: \_\_\_\_\_
- 4.) This represents \_\_\_\_\_ % of what I personally own.
- 5.) MY NAME: \_\_\_\_\_
- 6.) ADDRESS ON OAHU: \_\_\_\_\_
- 7.) CITY/TOWN ON OAHU: \_\_\_\_\_
- 8.) PHONE NUMBER AND EMAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_
- 9.) TRUE OR FALSE (CIRCLE ONE):  
I have felt isolated living in Hawai'i.      T      F  
I have provided free services to a community, here.      T      F

I will not hold Jean Pitman, the University of Hawai'i Art Department, the University of Hawai'i or anyone else responsible for any loss or damage to my personal belongings that I have freely chosen to leave here for whatever reason. I understand and agree that if I do not pick-up my item by 8PM, it goes directly to the free store.

X \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

COMMENTS:

**I APPRECIATE OUR TRANSACTION, THANK YOU!**  
**COME BACK AGAIN**  
JEAN PITMAN, PROPRIETRESS



# PITMAN SELF-STORAGE *and Services*

HONOLULU, HAWAII

## VISUAL ARCHIVE FORM

NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

DONOR NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

CATEGORY (CIRCLE ONE):                      TOOL                      MATERIAL

LOCATION AND DATE ACQUIRED: \_\_\_\_\_

MEASUREMENTS:                      H \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_ W \_\_\_\_\_

CONDITION (CIRCLE ONE):                      Excellent    Good    Poor    Needs Conservation

SKETCH & NOTES REGARDING PROVENANCE, CONDITION DETAILS, ETC:

DOES THE DONOR WISH TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS?                      YES                      NO

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