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Abstract of Master's Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to describe my current body of work and the processes involved in its creation. The paper starts by detailing the troubling change that I have observed in our natural world due to the prevalence of man-made materials. It is then explained how my sculptural work, through the use of natural and synthetic materials, represents what nature has become due to excessive human intervention. Next, I reveal that in an attempt to limit my own wasteful practices, I exclusively use found materials. Further information is then provided about the collection of the items that comprise my work. After, the general processes that I utilize when in my studio are detailed. Next, an in-depth account of my decision making while creating one specific piece is provided. By focusing on a single sculpture, I shed light on my artistic practice as a whole, since my aims and motivations remain relatively consistent no matter what piece I am creating. A description of how I intend to display my body of work in a gallery setting follows. The thesis concludes by asking what will happen to our natural world if wasteful practices continue.

FROM THE COLLECTION OF

By

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BA French Studies, Smith College, 2013

Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in *Studio Arts*.

Syracuse University
May 2020

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Introduction

Thin twigs are piled high, interwoven and assembled into a small structure that resembles a tent of sorts. In front of this intricate creation, piles of carefully organized found materials rest on the ground. On one side, nearly a hundred shiny red berries are amassed. To the left, there is a pile of soggy orange leaves. Bright blue tattered plastic bags sit lifelessly nearby. At the base of the twig structure lay crumpled soda cans. [1]

Native to Australia and New Guinea, the male bowerbird creates complex structures called bowers to attract a mate. The entrances to the bowers are decorated with colorful objects that are carefully organized in order to catch a female's eye. The birds rely on an array of found materials to adorn their structures. They once exclusively turned to berries, leaves, and twigs for decoration. Now, however, they have started using man-made materials, as they are readily available to them in their habitat.

The bowerbird first captured my attention almost a year ago when I came across a photograph of a bower that had been decorated with both natural and synthetic materials. Seeing that an animal so easily adapted to human influences in its habitat filled me with unease. I, in turn, looked more closely at the natural world I interacted with on a daily basis. I found that the landscape I knew so well was undergoing a troubling metamorphosis. Due to excessive consumption, man-made materials were no longer an unexpected rarity but rather a common element.

[1] The description of the bowerbird and the bowers that they create are based on images found in the book *Animal Architecture* by Ingo Arndt.

This was particularly apparent in the nature preserves that I frequently hiked in near my home. While walking, I would often come across sights like white fungi punctuated with delicate ruffles growing on the base of a tree.[2] I would notice a morning glory bud that had not yet opened, spiraled so perfectly that it looked like a machine created it. Yet, among the flora, there were also other elements. It was not uncommon to see scraps of tattered plastic bags stuck on a branch fluttering in the wind, an old aluminum can glistening under a pile of decomposing leaves, or a styrofoam cup crumpled and wedged between two rocks.

In response to the changes that I noticed, I have started to create small sculptures. Each one consists of carefully selected found materials and natural objects. The pieces mimic the interaction of the natural and man-made that I have increasingly observed.[3]

Ultimately, my work is intended to demonstrate the repercussions of our actions. Most of us have developed incredibly wasteful practices, rarely considering what happens to the refuse that we create each day. It does not simply disappear when we are finished with it; what we discard may reappear in unexpected places and have unintended consequences.[4]

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[2] Upon completing *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate: Discoveries from a Secret World* by Peter Wohlleben, I started looking more closely at the plant life that I encountered while hiking. I soon appreciated what I would have usually overlooked. Within the text, Wohlleben highlights the complex systems that are at play within a forest. Although many may not be visible to the human eye, it does not mean that they are insignificant. For instance, trees and other plants rely heavily upon complex fungal networks in order to communicate with one another and to receive nutrients. A teaspoon of soil from a forest can contain miles of fungal filaments.

[3] I became increasingly interested in depicting the delicate balance that is at play within our natural world after completing *The Invention of Nature: Alexander Von Humboldt's New World* by Andrea Wulf. The text focuses on the life of Alexander von Humboldt, a scientist who lived from 1769-1859. He is perhaps best known for his belief that everything in nature is connected. This view was considered quite revolutionary at the time. Andrea Wulf, when detailing Humboldt's views stated "When nature is perceived as a web, its vulnerability also becomes obvious. Everything hangs together. If one thread is pulled, the whole tapestry may unravel" (6).

[4] In Peter Wohlleben's book, *The Secret Wisdom of Nature: Trees, Animals, and the Extraordinary Balance of All Living Things: Stories from Science and Observation*, he focuses on the relationship between animals, plants, and humans within various ecosystems. Wohlleben's writings, much like Alexander von Humboldt's, emphasize the interconnectedness of our natural world. When plants and animals are thrown off balance there can be surprising repercussions. For instance, within the text, Wohlleben discusses how on North America's northwest coast, spawning salmon have a direct influence on tree growth.

Collecting

Upon ruminating on the negative impact that we are having on our natural world, I began to look more closely at my own wasteful habits, especially in the studio. I realized that my cabinets were filled with synthetic products mass-produced in factories far away. Paper, wire, yarn, styrofoam balls, wooden dowels, acrylic paint, among others, overflowed from boxes. Without thought, I used to run to the store every time I needed something for my work. I never considered how it was produced or what happened to it once it was disposed of.

After coming to the disturbing realization that I was so disconnected from the products I purchased, I began to think about all the materials that I throw away on a daily basis. We are all taught to quickly get rid of something as soon as its purpose has been served. I frequently tossed old art supplies in the trash without much consideration. Most of the items were not biodegradable and will exist long after I am gone.[5]

Becoming more aware of my wasteful habits has caused me to seek out alternative materials. I now try to exclusively use found items in my work. I can no longer justify buying things and adding to the massive amount of waste that already exists.[6] Instead of supporting

[5] I was compelled to further reflect on the consequences of our actions after completing the book *The World Without Us* by Alan Weisman. The text explores what would happen to Earth if humans completely disappeared one day. Weisman details how long human impact would be visible if we no longer existed. Our legacy will be apparent for an astonishing amount of time. For instance, traces of plastic may remain within the natural world indefinitely (148).

[6] According to the EPA, as of 2017, each person in the United States made about 4.51 pounds of municipal solid waste (trash) each day. Therefore, in 2017, 267.8 million tons of waste was produced in total. About 52.1 percent of the total waste produced (139 million tons) was placed in landfills ("National Overview: Facts and Figures on Materials, Wastes and Recycling", epa.gov).

systems that quicken the degradation of our natural world, I would rather repurpose materials that are destined for landfills or use naturally occurring ones that quickly biodegrade.[7]

I have discovered that my surroundings are filled with perfectly viable art making materials that I do not need to purchase. I now regard what I would usually overlook with new insight.[8] I find beauty in the mundane, creating meticulous and distinctive objects from what most would consider trash.[9]

Over time, I have accumulated quite a collection of found materials. My acquisitions are carefully organized and stored with other items that have similar properties. My studio is now brimming with bags and boxes that are labeled so that I can quickly find what I am looking for. In my studio cabinet currently, a bag stuffed with drying daylily leaves rests next to another bag holding grass reeds.[10] Stored nearby in a box are colorful mesh bags normally used to house produce. Above that sits a bin containing tufts of wool and thick felt.

Process

[7] It is now increasingly important for me to create a sustainable artistic practice. I have looked to artists who are particularly concerned with responsibly sourcing the materials that they use in their work, in order to limit their dependence upon systems that harm the environment. I have especially drawn inspiration from the Dutch textile artist Claudy Jongstra. She produces all the materials used in her artwork on her farm. She is best known for her felted wool pieces, which are created from fiber sourced from her own flock of sheep. Additionally, the wool that she produces is dyed using organic pigments that are grown in her own garden.

[8] Upon beginning to utilize found materials, I became increasingly interested in the work of Joseph Cornell. His use of found objects within his shadow boxes is particularly compelling. I appreciate how inventive his compositions are, using common materials in unexpected ways.

[9] Although she does not utilize found materials, I have always admired the artist Tara Donovan and her ability to transform everyday objects into beautifully intricate creations. For example, in her site-specific installations, hundreds of styrofoam cups are attached and transformed into billowing cloud-like forms. While, in another, thousands of index cards are piled high to create stacks that resemble geological formations. Additionally, I appreciate the way she approaches the materials that she works with, allowing experimentation to determine the final product.

[10] When using natural materials, I often look to the artist Andy Goldsworthy and his site-specific installations. Whether working with rocks, leaves, twigs, or ice, Goldsworthy presents these common materials in unexpected ways. He pays close attention to the items he is working with, allowing their unique properties to come to the forefront. For example, in order to create a freestanding circular sculpture from rectangular bricks of compacted snow, Goldsworthy relied only on gravity and friction to keep the form upright.

Upon working exclusively with non-traditional materials, my artistic practice has begun to shift. It is now centered on material explorations. When I find a new item to work with, I can spend hours just moving it around on my desk, becoming acquainted with it. I conduct small experiments in order to learn about the material and how it responds to different forms of manipulation. I may try ten or more ways to shape or alter the item, pulling, stretching, cutting, knotting, wrapping, or disassembling. These small experiments provide a wealth of information, allowing me to determine how best to incorporate the material into a piece.

In most cases, I try to let the item I'm working with dictate the final form, removing evidence of my own hand. I allow the inherent properties of the materials to shine through. For example, when using crinkled wrapping paper, I do not attempt to smooth it out. When incorporating a curled, dried leaf into a piece, I work with it as is instead of flattening it. Relinquishing control by minimally handling materials leaves more room for discoveries and surprises.

I use common objects that we are accustomed to seeing in our everyday lives and present them in an unexpected manner so that they are not immediately identifiable. I am inclined to create work that generally fits within my palm. Using a smaller scale encourages the viewer to bend down and investigate the intricate forms that are created. By interacting with my sculptures on a more intimate level, it might be easier for the viewer to think of my sculptures as somewhat precious objects. In turn, they may be inclined to look at the trash that they create each day in a new light.

One way or another, my study of the natural world informs how I handle the materials that I am working with. As I hike in nature preserves and examine my surroundings, I take photographs of noteworthy findings. I often stop to look closely at the plant and animal life that I encounter. I see marvelous feats of engineering in even the simplest of organisms, many of which resemble delicately crafted sculptures.[11] I frequently look through the images that I have taken, studying and memorizing them.

I intend for my pieces to look as if they were assembled by natural forces, so that viewers can easily imagine come across creations like my own within the natural world. In order to achieve such results, my observations of the plant and animal life that I encounter often dictate how I handle the materials I work with. For instance, I may fold tracing paper so that it resembles lichen found on a rock, or arrange thin plastic fibers so that they look like blades of grass.

I readily turn to time-consuming and repetitive processes, as they allow me to replicate the complexity of natural forms and textures that I have observed. While repeating the same task over and over, I am personally filled with a sense of calm. It allows me to channel my often nervous energy into something productive. On some occasions, it gives me the space to think about and process the work that I am creating. While, in other instances, performing the same task again and again causes my brain to go into auto-pilot mode. It is occasionally nice to not think and to just make.

[11] This is particularly demonstrated by Ernst Haeckel's *Art Forms in Nature*. I became fascinated with Haeckel's study and portrayal of radiolarians, which are single-celled organisms. They exist as zooplankton in the ocean and create complex mineral skeletons. Haeckel's illustrations of the organisms' construction are fascinating, appearing as if they are from an alien planet. It is almost hard to believe that they occur naturally, as they are so ornate.

Yet, I often have a hard time knowing when to stop working. I am a perfectionist and cannot easily relinquish control. I must make sure every detail is just so. I constantly fight the urge to overwork a material and must consciously step back before the spontaneity is lost. If I am not careful, I can end up working and re-working the same piece for months before I can consider it finished.

However, in order to fully understand my work as a whole, it is best to detail the thought process and decision-making that was employed when creating one specific piece in my studio. This will shed light on all of my work, as my motivations remain relatively consistent no matter what piece I am creating.

Decision-Making

A few months ago, I was in my studio hunting through a box that contained synthetic yarn, rope, and thread that I had amassed. As I hadn't examined the container for quite some time, I sorted through its contents to see if there was a fragment or scrap that I might be interested in incorporating into a new piece.

Amongst a clump of knotted thick black yarn and several spools of white thread, something caught my eye. I came across several feet of bright blue rope that was left over from a class. I was immediately mesmerized by the color and the sheen of the fiber. Intrigued, I quickly plucked the rope fragment from the box and sat down at my desk. I ran the silky cord through my hands and noticed that one of the ends was frayed, revealing a tuft of light orange fiber. It was the color of a pale peach. I needed to see more of it.

I proceeded to pull the orange material from the center of the rope. I wasn't expecting much. I thought I was just pulling out another smaller woven cord. However, as I undid the rope, I discovered that it was a tightly crimped coil of smooth and shiny polyester fibers. I pulled and pulled until the blue rope was hollow inside. I found that after the orange rope center was manipulated, it immediately sprang back to its original formation. It was a fascinating material to work with. I decided that I must incorporate it into a piece.

I initially took the orange fiber in my hands and hung it in the air to see how the coils would respond to the new position. However, the material was too slippery and fell from my hand. Unsure what to do next, I balled the cord into a clump and rested it on my desk. I sat back and studied what was presented before me. Although it was not in a complex arrangement, the fibers were quite alluring just left on their own. The clump reminded me of a strange anemone you might come across while exploring a coral reef. There were so many subtle intricacies in the crimping of the rope's interior that a simple arrangement seemed to suit it best. I resisted the urge to continue to touch the rope. I feared that if I worked with it more, much of the spontaneity of the form would be lost.

I needed to add something else. I couldn't just leave the rope on its own, as the piece felt incomplete. I went back to my boxes of materials and looked around for potential additions to the piece. I first held up a strip of a black trash bag. Months earlier, I found a large roll of trash bags in the trunk of my car. Their slippery surface immediately drew me in. Upon bringing them to my studio, I unrolled one of the bags and held it before me. It appeared too large and unmanageable so I began cutting it into strips about a quarter of an inch thick. I enjoyed the repetitive motion, continuing to cut the bags up until I ran out. As the strips piled on my desk,

they created a mass of what looked like sickly worms. I then set them aside for months, as I was unsure how to use them.

I thought that the trash bag strips could be a possible addition to the piece I was working on. Their dark coloring and smooth texture were so different from that of the rope. I held a few of the slick plastic strips in my hand but they quickly slipped through my fingers and fell on top of the orange rope that sat below. Just resting on top of one another, it was interesting to see how the differing materials worked together. Yet, the black coloring of the trash bags dominated the piece. Additionally, the strips appeared too identifiable. It was obvious what they were made of. I needed to incorporate a different, more subtle material.

I then considered a ball of white plastic string that I had found while walking through a classroom near my studio. I had originally noticed a large clump next to the trash can and discovered that it was being thrown away by another student and was drawn to its elastic and rubbery quality. I quickly took it for myself and squirreled it away in my studio cabinet.

While working with the rope, I thought the stark white coloring of the string might be a strong addition to the piece. I started by tightly wrapping the string around the clump of rope. Yet, this arrangement felt too constrictive. The rope was overpowered but maybe a different formation would work better.

I instead cut a small piece of the plastic string and knotted it. I then created a dense line of small knots. Under the tension created by the manipulation, the plastic cord became quite sinuous. It almost looked like a root. Fascinated with what occurred before me, I created twenty or so small knotted segments. I then attached them to one another using thread, as it seemed like the strongest option and still allowed for flexibility. I ended up with a cord several feet long,

which I began winding in and out of the rope. However, as the rope was so tightly coiled, it commanded quite a bit of attention. The knotted plastic string also had a complex texture and, when combined with the rope, created too much chaos.

I continued to look for a more suitable material. An idea popped into my mind. I had completely forgotten about all of the mesh produce bags that I had accumulated. I originally noticed these bags a few months earlier when I had purchased lemons. I usually quickly cut open the mesh bags and toss them in the trash. However, that day, when I had been thinking about the waste that I create in my studio, something stopped me and I took a closer look. The bag was such a vibrant color, like a red delicious apple. It was also incredibly stretchy and flexible. I saved it and brought it to my studio, quickly learning that it could take any number of forms. I could cut it, stretch it, or tie it.

I rifled through my collection of bags, looking for the perfect color. Much to my delight, I located a purple bag that had been used to hold avocados. The purple, a darker value, could stand up nicely against the light orange rope. As I had learned from the previous materials that I had experimented with, the rope could easily be overpowered. Therefore, I chose to minimally alter the mesh bag so that the focus remained on the orange cord. I first cut a small square of the mesh about four inches by four inches and placed the clump of rope inside. I then twisted the ends of the square together so that the rope was completely covered in mesh. The latticework of the bag was quite thin, making it rather transparent. A small delicate pillow that resembled a piece of moss was formed. It was about two inches long and two inches wide. I was intrigued, as the mesh was very subtle, allowing the rope to shine through. However, something was missing. The formation appeared a bit too planned. There was not much spontaneity. I would set the piece

aside for the day. I hung the rope and mesh form on the wall and looked at it from across the room.

Although I was not actually working on the piece for the rest of the day, it was always at the back of my mind. I envisioned different arrangements of the rope and mesh bag. Maybe only part of the rope was wrapped in mesh, letting the rest of the fibers hang freely. Or I could incorporate a different colored mesh bag to add even more visual interest. I would need to think about it a little more before working with the materials again.

The next day I returned to the studio and was determined to resolve the piece. I tossed the small pillow that I had created from hand to hand. As it moved before my eyes, I came to the conclusion that having all of the rope wrapped in the mesh was too constricting. Some of the orange fibers needed to be bursting out of the mesh, letting the seductive material truly be appreciated by the viewer.

At random, I carefully pulled segments of the rope through the bag. In some areas I only pulled out about an inch of fiber. At other sections, a length about a foot long extended outwards. Ultimately, a glamorous train of rope trailed behind the pillow-like form. I was quite pleased with the result, as there is a certain harmony created between the chaos of the rope and the order created by the mesh bag. I was particularly drawn to the rope that was extending outwards, as it looked like it was in the process of growing. It did not appear stagnant.

Now I needed to incorporate a natural element with these synthetic materials. I went over to a brown paper bag that housed a large clump of daylily leaves that I had collected months earlier while staying in Massachusetts for the summer. During my stay, I noticed that one by one the daylily leaves would slowly shrivel up and lay around the base of the plant. Normally a

vibrant emerald green, when dried the leaves were a light brown color with subtle variations in value. I decided to start gathering them, as they appeared to be relatively malleable and strong. I had used them in a previous piece; however, since then, they sat untouched in my studio.

I thought that the muted brown coloring of the leaves would highlight the rope and mesh arrangement well and decided to bring a few leaves over to my desk. At first, I simply placed the small pillow on a long leaf that had grown brittle with time, just to see how the two elements would work together. I then wrapped the narrow leaf around the rope formation. Yet, the sense of movement created by the long extending rope fragments was lost with the daylily leaf. I needed a different material.

I quickly came across a bag filled with grass reeds. Over the summer, a clump of ornamental grass outside my studio window had also caught my eye. The plant was punctuated by long, slender bright green blades of grass. The base was surrounded by short hollow reeds that were left behind as the grass died off for the season. When I went out to get a closer look, I was immediately captivated by the thin reeds. Only a few centimeters wide and about two feet tall, they were slightly flexible, yet seemed sturdy enough to create a structure of sorts. I originally used them to create a complex scaffolding for another piece and had quite a large amount left over.

I brought a handful of the remaining reeds over to my desk and cut a few small segments that ranged in size from one inch to two inches long. I didn't know what to do with them. Out of frustration, I simply began poking the soft pillow with the reeds. After a moment, I realized that I could easily insert the reeds into the center of the pillow, yet they would still extend an inch or so out beyond it. I inserted the eight reed pieces that I had cut and stepped back.

At this point, the pillow lay on my desk. The area where the corners of the mesh square met was visible, as the reeds extended upwards. It looked like a small bug that was stuck on its back. I flipped the form over and was thrilled with the results. All of a sudden the pillow had wobbly awkward legs. It looked like it could walk off my desk at any moment. Behind the body of the piece trailed a luxurious mane of rope. A strange creature that I could envision living amongst moss in the forest became animated before my eyes. It had a real sense of character.

I forced myself to stop there and placed it on a two feet by eight feet portion of my studio floor that I had painted white. Seeing the piece against the white background made it easier to view and analyze it from all angles. Resting there on the floor, it truly resembled a strange bug with an unruly mop of orange hair. If I added anything else, much of the magic would be lost. It was perfect as is.

Display

As the months passed, I continued to create small sculptures like the one detailed above. Eventually around one hundred and seventy pieces accumulated on my studio floor. While studying them from my desk chair, they began to remind me of specimens that a naturalist exploring a landscape heavily shaped by human intervention would come across and collect.[12] In a sense, my creations might now be more accurate representations of our natural world than what

[12] When beginning to think of my work as specimens, I was reminded again of Alexander von Humboldt. He gained recognition for detailing his explorations of various regions of the world, especially South America, in a number of publications. He brought faraway lands to the homes of individuals who had never travelled before. During his expeditions, he collected an enormous quantity of specimens that he brought back to Europe so that they could be studied at length and catalogued. In turn, I began contemplating what Alexander von Humboldt would collect if he were to go on an expedition today through landscapes that have been heavily shaped by human intervention. Would the collected specimens look like my own work?

is housed in the walls of natural history museums. As much of the plant and animal life on Earth is threatened now, what will be left to add to the collections of these museums in the future?[13] More and more I am convinced that synthetic materials might start to infiltrate the display cases where rare plant and animal species were once held. Upon coming to this conclusion, I became increasingly interested in displaying my work as if it were on view within a natural history museum, portraying what these institutions could look like in the future.

When thinking of potential installation methods, my mind kept wandering back to the Harvard Museum of Natural History in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which I had previously visited on many occasions. I decided it would be best to make another trip to the museum to see how they present their collections to the public. Perhaps I could adopt similar practices when displaying my own work.

Several weeks later I visited the museum. I was quickly drawn to the room that housed an extensive rare mineral and gemstone collection. The majority of the space was filled with rows upon rows of glass cases only a few feet tall, containing small specimens carefully ordered by their physical properties. The cases were situated so that viewers could easily peer down at their contents. On the outer perimeter of the exhibition space, taller glass cabinets exhibited larger minerals and gemstones. Each object delicately perched upon its own small pedestal, shimmered under spotlights.

After taking note of what I observed in the mineral and gemstone room, I started to envision what my pieces would look like if they were displayed within a similar way. Much like

[13] The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Global Assessment states it is believed that there are around 8 million plant and animal species on Earth. Yet, nearly 1 million of those species could soon become extinct ("UN Report: Nature's Dangerous Decline 'Unprecedented'; Species Extinction Rates 'Accelerating' - United Nations Sustainable Development", un.org).

the glass cases I had observed at the museum, I wanted to have my pieces displayed several feet high so that the viewer could look down and closely examine them. However, I did not want my work to be housed within an actual glass case. It would appear unapproachable and removed in such a scenario. As my work is made from found materials that would usually be thrown away, they are not necessarily rare objects. Our world is overrun with viable materials that we deem useless. I determined a table might be a more appropriate way to present my work. It would reference how commonplace the materials on display are, while also allowing the viewer to closely inspect the objects before them without a barrier.

I quickly visualized a simple and straightforward table about three feet tall, eight feet long, and two feet wide that viewers could walk all the way around to inspect the presented specimens. A long narrow table seemed most suitable because it would emphasize the sheer quantity of items on view. Additionally, as the viewer walked around the table, they would be encouraged to contemplate all the materials that they could easily reuse or repurpose instead of throwing away.

Like the specimens on view within the museum, I concluded that my pieces needed to be presented against a clean and simple background several inches from one another. As my sculptures are quite detailed and colorful, they are best viewed on a white surface. Therefore, the table where my work would rest needed to be painted white. However, in order to create a certain amount of visual interest, my pieces needed to be displayed at different heights. Building small pedestals like the ones used to present the gemstones and minerals seemed to be the best solution. Much like the table that would display the work, the pedestals would need to be simple, as to not distract from the pieces on view. I ultimately determined that it would be best to

construct the table and pedestals myself so that I could dictate exactly what each element looked like.

After giving it more thought, I realized that I could not fit all the pieces that I had created on one single table. I instead decided to only place the largest pieces, between four and eight inches long, on the table. The most complex ones would be raised up on pedestals. If my calculations were correct, around ninety smaller sculptures would be left over. I needed to find a different method to display the remaining work.

As I continued to walk through the Harvard Museum of Natural History, I came to the room in which arthropods are displayed. I was quickly drawn to the framed shallow boxes that adorned the walls of the room. Each box housed insects that were carefully arranged depending on their classification. They glistened like rare jewels.

Considering I was left with my smallest of pieces, most no larger than three inches long, I determined that they could easily be exhibited like the insects in the museum. I could create shallow boxes about two feet wide, two feet tall, and several inches deep. These boxes would also need to be straightforward and simple. Like the table, they would not have a glass cover in order to make them more accessible to the viewer. Within each box, I could present about fifteen of my small sculptures neatly arranged in several rows.

When ordering my pieces on the table and in the display boxes, I wanted to reference the specific methods that were used to catalogue and organize the specimens that I viewed at the museum. In turn, I concluded that I would divide my pieces up so that they were presented with other items made from similar materials.

I then began contemplating how the display boxes and table would be viewed within an exhibition space. In order to create a museum-like environment, I imagined hanging six display boxes along one wall of a gallery. They would be four feet above the ground and mounted several inches from one another. The table presenting the remainder of my work would be placed several feet in front of the display boxes. After devising a general plan for my work, I couldn't wait to return to my studio to finalize my ideas and begin working in the woodshop.

Conclusion

When visiting a natural history museum, we are accustomed to seeing rows of perfectly ordered stuffed birds or dioramas of marine habitats filled with lifelike replicas of plants and animals. Yet, will these displays soon be accompanied by specimens of a new type? Perhaps scraps of bark intertwined with candy wrappers and leaves enveloped in plastic fibers will soon sit within dioramas of forest ecosystems.

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