



Studio Visit: Sculptor Brenda Garand & “Smell. Hang. Collect.”

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Sculptor Brenda Garand took time out this week from her own studio practice and from running the Studio Art Department at Dartmouth to join the Vermont Studio Center (VSC) community as a visiting sculptor. She stopped by my studio this weekend, and what a pleasure it was! She gifted me three lovely marching orders: Smell, Hang, Collect.

One of the fabulous things about this year-in-residence at VSC is the opportunity to invite artists and writers into my studio to discuss work-in-progress. These conversations add a think-tank aspect to a studio practice, which for me, has largely been a solitary endeavor. Given that ideas and experiences of community run through the core of *American (post)*, I love these opportunities to open my door to talk and share. I appreciate both testing out the work and the ways I talk about it and receiving responses to the work from a diverse spectrum of folks. And so, with no further ado, my marching orders from Brenda...

Smell: Basic advice that I always share with my creative writing students is: “Remember all five of senses.” This advice is so basic that I forgot to remember it myself as I have been thinking about translating the poems of *American (post)* into objects. Brenda reminded me. Sight and sound have been central to my process, and touch has been on the periphery of it, but taste and smell fell through the cracks. Smell, in particular, is a sense that could and should be integral to these translations because it has such an intense and direct power to evoke. Remember Maude’s “odorifics” in *Harold and Maude*? “What do you smell?” she asks Harold. “Subways,” he responds. So, I’m off to work on odorifics...

Hang: Since my creative terrain (and training) has only occasionally included the visual arts, I am not accustomed to thinking comprehensively about materials and the mechanics of installation. Sculptor Leonid Lerman tipped me off in a studio visit last September that I had a lot to gain from thinking more (much more) about the possibilities inherent in the beautiful old roofing tin that I’d scavenged to use for the boxes prior to my shazam moment about bronze and retired cymbals: scratch, etch, cut, bend, embellish, etc. As Brenda and I talked this weekend about methods and strategies for cutting the cymbals to make the boxes, she upped the ante by suggesting that I should think about how to hang and install the boxes just as soon as I’ve made some of them. She pointed out that how I hang and install them can be (and should be) integral to the piece. Obvious, right? Well, not until she said it. I’ve now, however, added thoughts and dreams of cable, chains, ropes, monofilament, and installation structures to the mix swirling

around my head, and this line of imagining is augmenting and inflecting the piece and its possibilities.

Collect: I remain both slightly flummoxed and terribly excited about the translation component of this project—from language to thing. Developing a grammar-like structure to traverse media is both just my cup of tea and downright daunting. Brenda triggered a completely unexpected lightbulb moment when she said, “Start collecting things and piling them in your studio so that you don’t get precious about your options and because you never know that *this* goes with *that* until it’s sitting right there together so obviously.” Brenda might as well have been talking about one of my key poetic strategies. Central to my poetics is the practice of collecting bits of language, images, and sounds, and then assembling and abutting them—in ways that would not have otherwise been an obvious move—so that I discover new bits of obvious relationship. Take for example: “Obsession sits down to resonance. Step out of the boat into the barrel of a gun. Knit one. Sheep ruminates in the yard. Rebound off the opposite bank.” Brenda’s suggestion to collect things for the translation-objects parallels my practice of collecting the language that became the plane-poems, and so I’m off to collect things...which is where you come in...

An Invitation: Do you have doohickies, useless plastic items, old costume jewelry, feathers, porcupine quills, bits of bone and antler, dried flowers and herbs, shells, sea glass, and other small or otherwise dis-assemblable odd objects lying around in drawers, boxes, and bins?

If you’re inclined to clean the cupboards, please send me a care package of the goodies you’re about to ship to the curb. Nothing that will rot or otherwise be gross and get one (or both) of us into trouble please, but other than that (obvious?) caveat, please send the weirder, more puzzling, and/or mundane bits my way. I will pile them in my studio and compile them into translation-objects.

The goods may be shipped to: Ashley David c/o VSC 80 Pearl Street Johnson, VT 05656

Additional Invitation: I would love to receive a little note about the source of your goodies and the journey that led you to send them to me, but this little note is, of course, not required. I likewise love a good mystery, and a box full o’ stuff from the ether will be grand!