

THE COVETER

DICKINSON NEW YORK





THE COVETER

CURATED BY ALEX GLAUBER

FEBRUARY 16 - MARCH 5, 2016

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Curatorial Statement

“For what you really collect is always yourself”
(Jean Baudrillard, *Le Système Des Objets*)

Fundamental to the human experience is the impulse to collect. It allows us to safeguard the past, understand the present, and organize the future. As Walter Benjamin noted, “Ownership is the most intimate relationship one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them.”¹ Stemming from the Latin *legere* meaning “to gather”, it linguistically syncs to our earliest roles as hunter-gatherers. What fuels this quest for beauty is desire and while its focus is mutable, the tendency is not. Whether religious relics in the Middle Ages or antiquities like those assembled on the Grand Tours of the 18th century, individuals have always coveted material culture. For each of the artists in *The Coveter*, collecting informs, actuates, or determines his or her work. Whether expressed in content or concept—the compulsion to collect is inescapable.

Functioning as portraits of collections, Louise Lawler’s images capture the journeys of artworks after their creation. Lawler’s photographs are at once forensic and candid, and expand the frame of the image to make the act of collecting an unwitting subject. Insight and commentary into the psychological underpinnings of collecting can be found in the work of another Pictures Generation artist, Barbara Bloom. Throughout her practice, Bloom explores the meaning accumulated and coded into objects as they pass through various modes of exchange. Operating as gifts and collectibles, Bloom’s objects often function as metaphors for how the human psyche propels items in and out of ownership. In contrast to the hyper specificity of Lawler and Bloom, Allan McCollum’s Surrogates are presented as readymade collections. Referring to them as painting in a “generalized state”, McCollum’s molded paintings deflect attention away from the objects themselves and towards the constructs through which they are disseminated.

For other artists, the very act of collecting, organizing, and presenting forms the basis of their work. *Wunderkammern*, or cabinets of curiosities, are part of a collecting tradition that dates back to the 16th century during the Renaissance, one that found renewed interest in Victorian England. As an epistemic exercise in taxonomy these cabinets revealed as much about their authors as they do about world they inhabit. Within a *theatrum mundi* (theater of the world), collectors would typically assemble objects from four categories: artificialia, naturalia, exotica, and scientifica. This tradition finds formal and conceptual resonance with a number of artists including Joseph Cornell. Known as a “dime store connoisseur”, Cornell turned his studio into a repository of curios, filling folders with names such as “Tower of Visions”, “Metaphysique d’Ephemera”, “Portrait Encasement”, “Center of a Labyrinth”, “Childhood Regained”, “Feuilleton”, and “Keepsake”. Cornell’s signature boxes borrow from the *Wunderkammern* tradition and merge it with the shop windows through which he peered. Within these enclosures, Cornell could both preserve and present his deeply personal collection of objects. More informal but equally curated were Robert Rauschenberg’s *Scatole Personali* (Personal Boxes) made in 1952-53 while the artist was traveling through Northern Africa with Cy Twombly. These intimate works anticipate his Combines in many ways, and as he reflected: “The Material used for these Constructions were chosen for either of two reasons: the richness of their past: like bone, hair, faded cloth and photos, broken fixtures, feathers, sticks, rocks, string, and rope; or for their vivid abstract reality: like mirrors, bells, watch parts, bugs,

fringe, pearls, glass, and shells...You may develop your own ritual about the objects.”² The assemblages vacillate between the humble and fetishized as the boxes create shrines to perception, and how looking leads to meaning.

Authenticity, rarity, and the ability to possess are the tenets on which most collecting is based. However the works by the following artists are governed by conceptual underpinnings that interfere with these assumptions. In each case, the attempted dispersion or reception of these artworks leads to their destabilization and ambiguity.

Ryan Gander’s Alchemy Boxes demand the faith and trust of their audience. Assuming the role of collector, Gander’s installations are composed of self-styled time capsules for which the contents are enumerated in a text on a nearby wall. As the box is sealed, it is impossible to confirm its contents without destroying the work. This inevitably prompts the question: are you collecting the object or the idea of the object?

Whereas Gander creates doubt at the point of inception, Darren Bader intervenes in the covenant of ownership. The prosaic items that make up Bader’s “To Have and to Hold” series are disparate in source but uniform in price and direction. Each object comes with a set of 7 directions that lead the owner on a quest for value - intellectual, emotional, personal. However, in following Bader’s directions, intensifying one’s relationship to the object simultaneously means sabotaging it, as he encourages the owner to dilute its value by first collecting identical objects and then eventually destroying the indexical object. In doing so Bader provides a roadmap for the ultimate collecting experience while negating it at the same time.

Within Bader’s work there lays a fundamental tension in the act of collecting between the exacting forces of connoisseurship and accumulation. When intermingled, a mania begins. Each of the artists in *The Coveter* approaches the word “collect” as a different part of speech. Whether looking at collections, acting as a collector, or infiltrating the act of collecting, each captures this shared impulse to have and to hold.

Alex Glauber
New York, March 2016

¹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, (1931; rpt., London: Fontana, 1973) 60.

² Rauschenberg quoted in W. Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s, Houston*, 1991, p. 232.

Robert Rauschenberg

Untitled (Scatole Personali), 1952

Assemblage: hinged wood box with fabric, twig,
beetle and collage under glass

4 1/2 x 3 1/2 x 1 1/4 in.

11 x 9 x 3 cm.



Robert Rauschenberg

Untitled (Scatole Personali), 1952

Assemblage: lidded wood box with dirt, nails,
glass lens and cut photograph

3 x 2 x 1 1/2 in.

8 x 5 x 4 cm.



Joseph Cornell

Histoire Naturelle, 1960

Mixed media box construction

8 1/2 x 12 3/4 x 5 in.

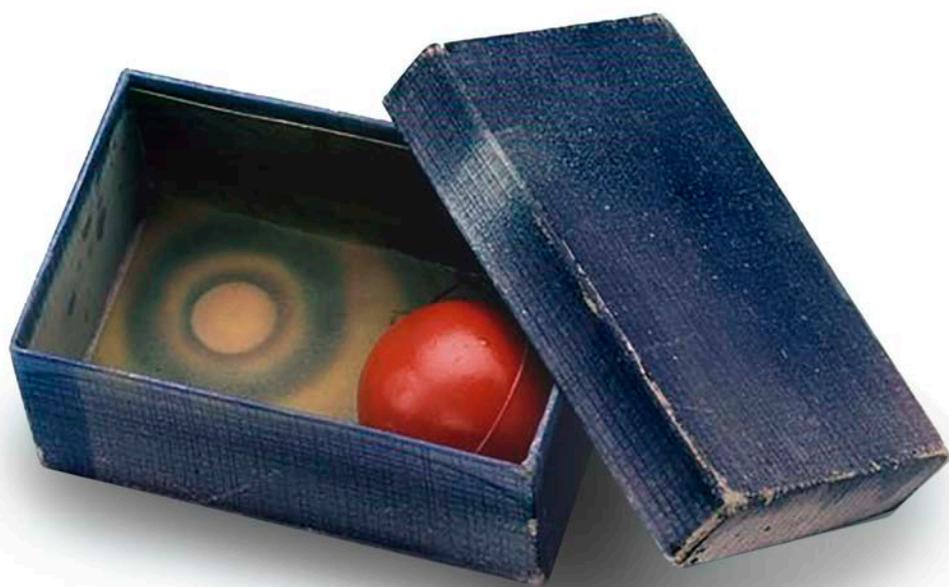
21.6 x 32.4 x 12.7 cm.



Joseph Cornell
Untitled (for Tina), 1962
Mixed media construction
1 x 1 5/8 x 2 7/8 in.
2.5 x 4.1 x 7.3 cm.



Joseph Cornell
Untitled (for Yayoi), 1964
Mixed media construction
1 1/4 x 3 1/4 x 2 1/8 in.
3.2 x 8.3 x 5.4 cm.



Allan McCollum

Collection of Five Plaster Surrogates, 1982/1992

Enamel on cast hydrostone

Dimensions variable

This image:

20 x 75 1/2 in.

50.8 x 191.8 cm.

Unique, each signed and numbered on the back of each surrogate



Louise Lawler

Persimmon and Bottle, 1993/2010

Cibachrome face mounted to plexi on museum box

37 3/4 x 29 in.

95.9 x 73.7 cm.

Edition 2/5, 1 AP



Barbara Bloom

Broken (Vase), 2001/2013

Broken celadon object repaired with gold,
gift box with computer generated paper,
specialized papers and ribbons sealed with
wax, x-ray of object framed diwith black lighting

Frame: 16 3/4 x 12 3/4 x 11 1/2 in. 42.5 x 32.3 x 29.2 cm.

Ceramic: 9 5/8 x 3 1/2 x 3 1/2 in. 24.6 x 8.9 x 8.9 cm.

Gift box: 8 1/2 x 8 3/4 x 8 3/4 in. 21.6 x 22.2 x 22.2 cm.

Unique



Louise Lawler

*Il m'aime, un peu, beaucoup, passionnément,
à la folie, pas du tout*, 2008/2009

Cibachrome face mounted on museum box

47 3/4 x 55 3/4 in.

121.3 x 141.6 cm.

Edition 5/5





Ryan Gander

What you don't know can't inform you - (Alchemy Box # 18), 2011

Poof, concrete bollard, articles sealed inside, wall vinyl sticker,
and rubdown transfer on a wall

Each element (w x h x d):

17 3/4 x 16 1/2 x 17 3/4 in.

45 x 42 x 45 cm.

Unique



Darren Bader
To Have and to Hold: Object A2
Dimensions variable





List of Plates:

1. Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008)

Untitled (Scatole Personali), 1952

Assemblage: hinged wood box with fabric, twig,
beetle and collage under glass

4 1/2 x 3 1/2 x 1 1/4 in.

11 x 9 x 3 cm.

The Sonnabend Collection Foundation and Antonio Homem

Art © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

2. Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008)

Untitled (Scatole Personali), 1952

Assemblage: lidded wood box with dirt, nails, glass lens and cut photograph

3 x 2 x 1 1/2 in.

8 x 5 x 4 cm.

The Sonnabend Collection Foundation and Antonio Homem

Art © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

3. Joseph Cornell (1903-1972)

Histoire Naturelle, 1960

Mixed media box construction

8 1/2 x 12 3/4 x 5 in.

21.6 x 32.4 x 12.7 cm.

Art © The Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

4. Joseph Cornell (1903-1972)

Untitled (for Tina), 1962

Mixed media construction

1 x 1 5/8 x 2 7/8 in.

2.5 x 4.1 x 7.3 cm.

Art © The Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

5. Joseph Cornell (1903-1972)

Untitled (for Yayoi), 1964

Mixed media construction

1 1/4 x 3 1/4 x 2 1/8 in.

3.2 x 8.3 x 5.4 cm.

Art © The Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

6. Allan McCollum (b. 1944)

Collection of Five Plaster Surrogates, 1982/1992

Enamel on cast hydrostone

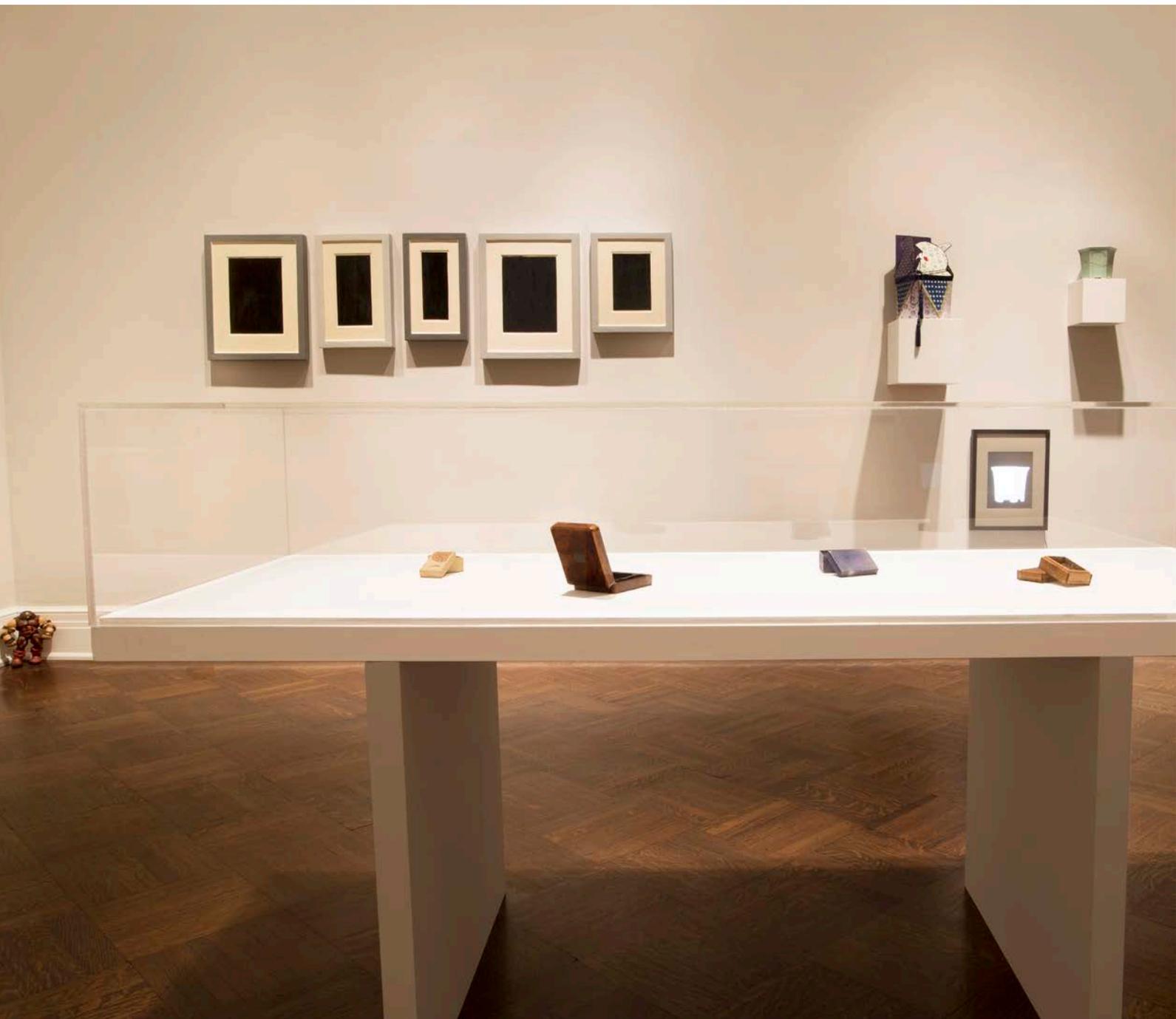
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Image Courtesy of the Artist and Friedrich Petzel Gallery



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We are extremely grateful to all of our lenders and consignors whose generosity made this project possible.

Curated by Alex Glauber

Organized by Roxana Bruno and Mary Carlson

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JOSEPH CORNELL
RYAN GANDER
LOUISE LAWLER
ALLAN MCCOLLUM
ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

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