Implied science

Kelly E. Hart
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IMPLIED SCIENCE

by

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B.F.A. University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho, 1998

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana

December 2003

Approved by:

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Dean, Graduate School

1-2-04

Date
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INTRODUCTION

I have been a collector of things, from manufactured goods early in life, to natural objects later, to photographs and science images presently. I have always felt the desire to assemble and organize things that interest me.

The work in my MFA Thesis Exhibition, *Implied Science*, is another type of collection: that of my thoughts and ideas about science. I drew on a collection of my personal experiences, for example, attending museums, for inspiration and knowledge for assembling the installation. My purpose in making the work is to encourage a viewer to look critically at the world, specifically the scientific world, and to question what he or she accepts as truthful and important in life.

My interest in science lies in its imagery as well as its correlation to artmaking. Science and art both depend upon an individual's spirit of experimentation. New discovery is the lifeblood of each. But the absoluteness in science, perhaps announced in the popular media as a significant finding, is counter to the way I look at the world. There is so much uncertainty, which I believe will never be understood through science. In *Implied Science*, I use collected past experience and knowledge and humor to address this conflict.

Figure 1, *Floss*, 2002
ROOTS OF IMPLIED SCIENCE

Influences

Visual elements, such as color, rhythm and balance, have been the primary and continually influential factors of my interest in and creation of my own art. Many artists' work that I find aesthetically pleasing may not interest me conceptually. As a viewer, I interpret the work according to my personal experience despite the intent of the artist. Viewers inevitably assign individual meaning to artwork, and, if content is lacking or unexciting, I can still be satisfied with a work visually.

Art that is attractive to me often leads me to diminish the importance of content in other art as well. Powerful work, dominated by formal qualities, reinforces the importance of such qualities and leads me to seek out the same qualities in all artwork. Although the idea behind the art is essential in much great work of the Modern Art Era, there is also a great deal of art from this era clearly dominated by qualities such as color or repetition. However, textbook analyses and other academic critics and scholars frequently interpret the work with convoluted meaning under the guise of "artist intent." For example, in Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, a popular undergraduate art history text, Andy Warhol's work is presented in this way:

Because Warhol affected an anti-narrative approach, using his canvas surface much like his film as a random and continuous medium in the spirit of cinéma vérité, visual facts are perceived as arbitrary and isolated moments rather than as an observed series of particular events. One of his important subjects is the reproduction technology itself, the coarse scrim of halftone dots that mediate his images in the photomechanical silkscreen process. The handmade original painting, with its sacrosanct historical and ceremonial associations, has been renounced in favor of commercial reproduction, whose ubiquity assures the subjects' swift decline into nostalgic clichés.

It is possible to look at the images displayed next to the text (Figures 2 and 3) and comprehend the message, but the passage barely addresses the significant formal
qualities of the work. There is only one additional paragraph on the artist in the textbook, and it, too, lacks in any mention of color, rhythm, and repetition, which are key elements in many of his pieces. I consider these factors of the utmost importance to the artist in the creation of his work, and, as a result, I find these analyses artificial and shortsighted.

In part due to the misdirected examination by critics and some of my undergraduate professors, formal qualities became increasingly vital in the conception and construction of my work. In order to be honest in the creation of my artwork and in discussion about my work, I began to acknowledge the significance of the style elements. As a result, those elements became as fundamental as any concept I might employ to make new work. Subsequently, I created a majority of my undergraduate artwork based on formal issues. As I became more comfortable with these elements, I developed a visual instinct which would eventually become essential to the process of creating the work in *Implied Science*.

William Wegman, the American artist best known for creating photographs of his Weimeraner dogs, is the first artist that I studied and consciously wanted to emulate. Ironically, his work that interested me most is neither colorful nor stylistically dynamic. Dogs, the large Polaroid format, and even his photographic skill, per se, do not motivate me. What attracts and inspires me is Wegman’s liberal usage of unpretentious humor. Absurdity and ridiculous intellectual simplicity in his photography (and in his subsequent drawings and paintings) were not only a component of his work, but the foundation on which much of it was created.
In Cotto, (Figure 4) the artist photographed his own hand, adorned with little ink circles on each primary knuckle and wearing a visually parallel ring, touching salami on a dotted table. He had noticed the relationship between the like objects at a party and rushed home to document his observations with camera. He refers to the finding as, “a ‘Eureka’ type experience.”

Although I am not attracted aesthetically to the image, I am inspired by the silliness in the act of photographing deli meat based on its relationships with other objects and also that the creation of the work is viewed by the artist as a discovery. I imagine him in a laboratory, the crazed scientist achieving his goal, which is perhaps similar to the situation in the darkroom as he printed the image. The simplicity and lucidity of thought behind the photograph is inspiring as well. His verbal description:

I remember one photo in particular, Cotto (1970). I had drawn little rings –little circles on my left hand on my fingers with my ring on my index finger and went to a party. Well, a plate of salami was on the table and reaching in I was struck by the peculiar relationship of these little rings with the rings in the salami—the peppercorns.

Many of his other works make equally quirky observations and comparisons. In Little Big (Figure 5), Wegman makes a comparison between two people and objects clearly very similar, and still clearly differing. Consequently, I became fascinated with the notion of simple thought as noteworthy and humor as concept.
My Own Private Taxonomy

Not long after observing Wegman's work for the first time, I began working in a similar mode. By creating relationships between what I do not understand, or which may be too convoluted for me to want to learn, and what I know well, I began to organize knowledge into comprehensible parcels, with humor as an aid. Similar to a cataloger in a library or a museum of natural history, I attempted to break information into discernible parts. In my series, Do As You Told (Figure 6) I created backdrops by enlarging simple illustrations from a 1950s First Aid manual. I asked the models to look at the images and apply the bandages in a similar way. I wanted to compare the simple illustrations with the more complex function that they were trying to illustrate. The photographs were created to demonstrate the fallacy of 2D illustration as adequate and also to amuse, as I imagine was the goal of many of Wegman's early photographs. Additionally, the comparisons acted as a vehicle for discernment of visual information, distorted as it may be.

I still work in a parallel way, using simple comparison as a method for the expression of humorous content. For example, after collecting natural objects in the forest one day, I started to think about whether pinecones are cones at all. The pinecones that I had picked up that day hardly represented their namesake shape. Not until I went back to the studio to look at others that I had previously collected did I realize that indeed some could pass as coned shape. I had taken for granted the variety of shapes and textures of the objects. Months later, when I came across a mathematical image of a cone, I was reminded of the day that I briefly thought they
should be called “pineovals”. I thought a direct visual comparison would be a strong basis for a new piece. Playing with the natural objects and image, I arranged and rearranged them until I was satisfied with the basic composition. I created the piece 3 Cones: 2 Pine, 1 Regular (Figure 7) as a personal system of memory and understanding. However, I saw the humor in this line of thinking and that became the inspiration for eventually assembling the work. The final work is straightforward in its comparison and meaning. Like the Do As You’re Told series, the purpose is to demonstrate potential fallacy in the acceptance of certain aspects of science.

Photography and Collecting

Photography is more than a set of skills I have acquired or an art form for me to practice. It is also a tool that encourages and allows me to collect. Photography enables me to capture images quickly and consequently to gather anything and everything I am currently, or potentially, interested in. Not only can I physically collect a unique seashell, but also an image of the ocean or beach where I found it. Photocopying and digital scanning also provide photo-based methods of attaining objects, (Figure 8). Through imagery, I can collect rivers, buildings, mountains, and people—virtually everything that I can see I can collect.

As a child I had a pig collection that included stuffed animals, plastic figurines, and bathroom soaps. As a teenager I began a seashell collection, that is still growing, and I own about twenty cameras of varying age, that I continue to add to as well. Photography is a natural extension of my desire to collect. Photographs that I take—whether printed as straight black and whites, one-hour Wal-Mart 4"x6"s, or
inkjet prints—become a new sort of collection. Though I may be unable to own the tangible thing, its image becomes equally as valuable to me. Of course the authentic object is highly prized, but because of my photography background, I value a photograph of the object equally as its own unique entity. Although my work would not be what it is without both images and physical objects, I can be satisfied with a specific object for my work even when I can only obtain it in a visual sense.

Even though I had not yet consciously become interested in *Wunderkammer* and the collecting and display tendencies of late nineteenth and early twentieth century museums, the correlation between my earliest collections and the collections of such institutions, is now evident. In the introduction to his book *Art And Artifact: The Museum as Medium*, James Putnam writes:

> The artist’s urge to accumulate objects in the studio is part of the age-old human impulse to gather and hoard. But artistic collecting is very different from that of the hobbyist or the serious collector and it has a distinct character which links it to the creative process.

**Drawing on Past Experience**

Before starting graduate school, I had the nagging idea of photographing enlarged pictorial illustrations similar to those used in the *Do As Your Told* series and in another early group of work, the *Projected Man Series* (Figure 9), in a natural setting.

The *Projected Man* series was an attempt at humorous, or at least curious, pairing of two dissimilar illustrations, as an exercise in meaning-making through forced comparison. In the newly imagined images, I wanted to contrast the simplicity of common illustration with the complexity of real nature. By coupling dissimilar subjects, I hoped to use humor to encourage viewers to question the reliability of such imagery and to be entertained.
By this point, I had been incorporating dictionary and other commonplace illustration into my work for years and increasingly became more amused by the oversimplification of structure and/or biological process some of these images embodied. To create the new work, I enlarged three or four images to roughly four feet tall by either projection-aided painting or computer tiling. I hung them using strings and clips in various natural locations, such as Missoula's Greenough Park or in the Lolo National Forest off the side of a remote logging road. I did not have specific ideas about the formal characteristics of the photographs but was more concerned with the idea, which was an unusual way for me to work.

The resulting photographs were somewhat interesting but lacked humor and discernible meaning. (Figure 10) As an artist and art observer, I believe viewer interpretation to be a vital part of all artwork. Nonetheless, I think that as the creator of a specific work of art, my intent, if I have one, should be identifiable. With this I was dissatisfied in that regard. I did not want to give up on the idea though, and believed that with more exploration the work would be successful. The processes of enlarging illustrations and driving to various locations was time consuming so I decided to continue working in a similar way, but on a much smaller scale.

Humor as Concept

Since the first semester of my undergraduate courses in art, I had thought the art world was taking itself much too seriously. I was viewing slides in lectures and images in textbooks that were unmistakably funny, but humor was never the perspec-
tive from which the images were critiqued. I was becoming more familiar with the Dadaists, Surrealists, and Pop Artists who had successfully incorporated humor into their work, but the information about the art was from critics and professors concerned with art being taken seriously.

Despite this potential obstacle, I was interested in making art that could entertain and amuse as well as be visually appealing and maybe even intellectually stimulating. I was anxious to work in the style of the Surrealist and Dada artists, among others who often utilized absurdity and wit to further concepts.

I began researching humor while working on my BFA Thesis. My interest was in the psychological aspects of humor, specifically the major theories of humor and their application in the study of the idea of “Truth” in photography. I appreciated and acknowledged the objectivity of humor (and art) but wanted to better understand why photography worked so well as the medium most appropriate for funny art. I concluded that the society-wide acceptance of photography as a communicator of “Truth” allows for the conveyance of humor, because the situations and individuals pictured are perceived as real or truthful. I still believe my theory to be relevant; although now, as a mixed-media artist, I suppose I am equally as capable of conveying humor, while using a wider variety of materials.

I also researched artists such as Herbert Bayer (Figure 11), and Philippe Halsman, (Figure 12), based on my perceptions of humor in their work. But the more I researched, the more frustrated I became trying to find reputable critics and artists who addressed art from this perspective. Eventually, the lack of humor-based art

Figure 11, Self-Portrait (H. Bayer), 1932
criticism motivated me to become more blatantly silly. I knew that funny artwork existed and that it was legitimate art. So I decided to make work that could not be denied as amusing by anyone who viewed it or would ever write about it.

One major strategy to make undeniably funny artwork was through the titling of the work. I was vaguely familiar with Damien Hirst from images in art magazines and popular media but knew very little about the artist, the young British artists with whom he is associated, or what drove his work. Certainly Damien Hirst's work would eventually formally influence my work to some degree; in particular I have become more aware of the importance of precise presentation as a result of studying his installation methods. The greatest lesson I learned from studying Hirst, however, is the potential authority the title of an artwork possesses. I discovered that an artist could exude his or her lightheartedness or any defined mood through the title without limiting the viewers' personal interpretation of the work. Hirst's sculpture, Hymn (Figure 13), reveals a possible sense of play in the creation of the work, at least in the conceptual creation, and with the words that describe it. The word sounds like him, referring to the 40-foot science model as a person. But it is spelled "hymn", referring to a religious song or chant, possibly talking about human worship of the body. Or, perhaps, he is
attempting to create an association in the viewer between his giant creation, or even himself, and God. Maybe it is just a clever bit of word play that stuck. Regardless of how Hirst finally came to name the work, his titles positively inspired me to start titling my pieces.

When asked about the humorous element in his art "at the expense of the poetic side of the work"\(^5\), Hirst's response was ironic. "I'm totally aware that if you get too romantic, you're not going to be taken seriously."\(^7\) The concept of humor as a means of being taken seriously is fresh. He goes on to credit his humor as a means of "staying ahead of the visual game."\(^6\) His statement asserts a direct link between humor and creativity and I am inspired by his notion of humor as a powerful art tool.

Humor as a primary subject was prevalent in my art, and was becoming more so in the naming of the work. For example, \textit{It's About Time} (Figure 14) is literally a work about time. Time is the common thread, although I did not create the work with the title in mind. After its construction, I looked at the work and started mentally forging titles until one fit. Just as the completion of each piece is for me dependent on visual intuition, knowing when the title is the right one is also instinctual. Eventually, I came up with and chose \textit{It's About Time} because it is simple, familiar, expresses the sense of fun that went into making the piece, and illustrates to the viewer the myriad implications of forming relationships between unlike objects.

Another more simplistic type of wordplay that interests me and that I often 
employ is simple rhyme. In Striation Relation (Figure 15), I assembled the natural objects and image based on visual similarity: the stick, insect in the image and rock all were striped, but to varying degrees. By way of the title, I wanted to clue the viewer into my basis for assembling the objects and to emphasize the lucidity of thought in doing so. Also, by creating a system of super simplification, I am commenting on similar systems in the scientific community—specifically, questioning the need for excessively complex systems. I used the word "striation" because it is more often used in scientific description than the commonplace "stripe." And, through trial and error, I tested potential complementary words deciding quickly on "relation" because it was both amusing to me and appropriate in meaning.

ELEMENTS OF THE EXHIBIT

Plasterwork

To best communicate humorous ideas clearly, I wanted to keep the work stylistically uncomplicated. I had worked with plaster years earlier and loved its properties. I kept plaster in my studio, although I did not have specific plans for using it. As a result, when experimenting with the objects that I was collecting, it was readily available as a means by which to assemble the work. Plaster has a clean and simple appearance in its total lack of color; it solidifies quickly and requires spontaneous or intuitive decisions, and it appealed to me since my process was experimental. In addition, the medium declares a permanence or certainty in the statement or idea presented because of its set-in-stone quality, that echoes the implied certainty of the new scientific fact.
I decided to make the pieces look aged as well, to further imply their legitimacy as facts. There is a comfort or nostalgia in age that hints at honesty. Plaster is very receptive to scratches and discolorations, created with ink and shoe polish; and with a little experimentation, I was able to achieve the appearance I intended and in turn enhanced the notion of the archaic fact, (Figure 16). By marring the hard surface of Rendezvous and other pieces I created earlier, I individualized the medium and ultimately pushed the viewer to accept the pieces as declarations of scientific truths. A cleaner surface would have worked against the notion of the sustained scientific fact.

After making four or five of the small plasterworks, I was very satisfied both with the aesthetic properties of the work and their ability to convey the ideas I had tried to express earlier, (Figure 10). From initial responses in the studio, I knew the work was much more successful than the photographs had been in enticing the viewer to generate relationships between objects in order to identify meaning. I attribute that to the three-dimensionality and size of the work, and the unfamiliarity of the media. I also enjoyed creating the work because it allowed for spontaneous formal decisions. I quickly concluded that I would continue in this direction in my thesis work.

Found Objects

The influence of several select artists and movements, along with a personal interest in natural history imagery, shaped my thesis presentation. Joseph Cornell, a mid-Twentieth century American artist, influenced my work aesthetically more than
any other, although the influence was certainly gradual. I became familiar with his work early on in my art education and found his pieces curiously amusing—more so than the surrealist works with which they are often associated. His work made me aware of the potential of everyday objects to be art media. I had learned of Cornell’s friend, Marcel Duchamp, and his concept of the readymade, but was less interested in his idea of the found object as art by declaration than in the concept of anything as art material. Accordingly, I started to collect and utilize toys, that I had accumulated and photographed as an undergraduate, and other popular culture items. I liked the potential for broader understanding and absurdity that the new objects brought into my work. An eager collector with New York City junk shops as his hunting ground, Cornell found, cataloged, cherished and finally utilized varied commonplace stuff, from maps to marbles. Printed materials such as photographs, theatrical programs, and bookplate images were also fair game as both the artist’s collection and source materials. Cornell’s box constructions are clever, rustic and quite often whimsical in content and formality. (Figures 17 and 18).

Inspired by Cornell’s work (among others’), I could see the potential for practically anything to be useable art material. I had collected images and natural objects, assembled them in simple experimental configurations, and now wanted to include
nearly any appropriately sized object that was available. In *Questioning Probes*, (Figure 19), I combined a photocopy of a doctor image, a strange and apparently natural hornish object that I found on my mother-in-law’s lawn, and the plastic buttocks of an 11-inch tall baby doll. Inspired by the image of the doctor (from a 1950s children’s dictionary) who appears to be snapping his rubber glove in preparation for a thorough rectal examination, the probe-like horn and subsequently the plastic butt came to mind as complimentary objects.

As with my usual process for assembly, I found the appropriate size box to cast the work in, (I utilize thin cardboard food boxes from my recycling bin, generally from 2”x3” up to 8” x12”), shuffled the items around until I had a general idea of what would go where, mixed and poured the plaster in the box, and after waiting for the plaster to begin to set up, pushed each part into the plaster. After waiting about 24 hours, I coated the hardened dry plaster with polyvinyl acetate (pva), an archival glue. After waiting another 24 hours for drying, I used various small sharp tools, such as straight pins, pointed screws and nails to scratch the surface. Initially, as the next step, I used brown and black shoe polish to discolor the assembled work, for an aged effect, but I soon found its chemical properties too unpredictable. After some experimentation, I discovered that a simple ink and water mixture filled the scratches and darkened the surface to my needs.

**Natural Objects**

Without knowing exactly how my collections of images, seashells, rocks, and other things would integrate into my work, I continued to collect everyday things and...
also included specialized natural matter such as hellgrammite casings and rarely noticed, but common, flower parts. Each item became an important element, either as source material or inspiration, when I began working in the smaller scale. German photographer Karl Blossfeldt’s images were the inspiration for many of the new collections.

Blossfeldt was trained as an artist and drawing instructor in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century. He photographed plants of various types to use as studies for the drawing classes he taught. His images are at once uncomplicated and detailed. They work simultaneously on levels of clean composition and complex texture. The subject matter is quite often whimsical in structure, with curlcues and twists dominating many of his images, as in *Adiantum Pedaum* (Figure 20). The backgrounds are usually a sterile white or gray creating a scientific feel, but the details in leaf veins or in the cross section of a stem, for example, create an impact that would be lost in something more recognizable.

I was familiar with some of Blossfeldt’s images from popular culture advertising, such as the Ikea catalog, but was unfamiliar with the larger body of his work. Only about 300 images are known to exist, while it is speculated that he created over 6000 plant photographs. After browsing books of his work, I became drawn to the images by the purity of their composition but was engrossed in the plates because of their uniqueness and detail (Figure 21). I found them pleasing, amusing, and educational. I was already working with natural objects in my art but was on a quest for distinctive items and was encouraged by Blossfeldt’s photographs. On subsequent excursions
into the woods, my yard, or on the riverbank, I began really seeing, texture, line pattern and forms that I had not previously noticed in natural objects. As a result, the number of objects I collected and had available to work with grew exponentially. Additionally, by means of my new observations, I became increasingly concerned with the loss of wonderment in the modern world and considered this direction as my conceptual theme. Ultimately though, I decided against using this idea as a theme. Scientific information as truthful information and the way in which I was addressing it was a sufficiently complex topic. Wonderment continued as a motivating factor for collecting, although its growth as a tangential theory was halted.

**Imagery**

As I became more interested in utilizing scientific and medical imagery, I began researching artists who explore related topics. Damien Hirst's work became more influential in the creation of my work. There is great diversity in Hirst's work, although it is still visually concise. From dissected animals trapped forever in formaldehyde, to installation art based visually on the repetition of similar objects, to giant sculpture, I am intrigued by the originality of his aesthetic as well as the cleanliness of his presentation. I am also attracted by the humor, dark as it often is, that I find in most of his pieces. Even when the subject matter seems serious, the implication is always one of harmlessly poking fun. In *Isolated Elements Swimming in the Same Direction for the Purpose of Understanding* (Figure 22), Hirst makes fun of the smarter than thou scientific community through a convoluted title. There are possible alternative motivations driving the work, but regardless of what other intentions Hirst had in producing it, the nonsensical side of
science is undeniable. As a result of studying Hirst's work, I began seeing more clearly the possibility of scientific imagery as a tool for communicating my ideas about the absurdity of science.

The Museum Setting

The way in which I present the work is as important as the imagery and objects I use in creating the plasterwork. My artistic sensibilities and personal interest in museums merged in the creation of the presentation.

I have enjoyed visiting museums of all sorts since childhood. Until recently though, I had not thought about why. Growing up in Ohio, the Center of Science and Industry (COSI) in Columbus was my favorite and most frequently visited museum. The Hall of Presidents, with each man standing only about 4 feet tall, and the Gestation of a Plastic Fetus/Child (Figure 23), and the swinging pendulum in the lobby were some of my favorite exhibits. I took comfort in knowing that each time I visited, even if there was nothing new I was interested in, I would have those few exhibits to return to. After seeing them 4 or 5 times, and thoroughly understanding their message, I was able to start examining their formal qualities. Even if they were not attractive (for example, the Plastic Fetus exhibit), I enjoyed studying their colors and construction. I can appreciate the solace in familiar knowledge and recognizable display. Understanding the physical properties of an exhibit makes it even more satisfying for me.

I began enjoying visits to similar places—the local art museum, the historical society, various aquariums and monuments—because I associated feelings of comfort, anticipation, and contemplation with these institutions. I continue to

Figure 23, Plastic Fetus Exhibit
visit museums of all sorts, hoping to make new discoveries, whether informational or functional. There is a sense of peace in the museum, enabled by the familiar, which creates the potential for "getting lost" in museum exhibits that is hard to find in the natural world. I wanted to bring this quality to my thesis exhibition.

In a small art gallery, however, there is usually a consciousness of space and of looking at art which inevitably influences the viewers' perceptions of the work. From the onset of this project there were questions relating to how the work would be displayed. I had previously "packaged" the work in convenient boxes (Figure 24), composed of stained brownish-orange wood (a reference to natural history museum display cases) for ease in hanging. Also, after having worked primarily as a 2D artist for so long, it was hard for me to make the transition to a display method that would enhance the more sculptural new forms that I was displaying. I was satisfied with the overall look of the "frames", so I still wanted to incorporate that aesthetic into the work. However, I wanted to present each plaster piece as its own entity, so that the integrity of the original personal thought behind the particular object was not lost. I imagined a unified space in the gallery that would enhance each piece and take the consciousness of being in an art gallery away. The intent was to have the viewer study each work as she or he might in a museum or laboratory. By controlling the environment I also planned to influence the perception of my artwork as credible thought, akin to new scientific ideas.

London Museums Research
While creating the work for *Implied Science*, I visited London and was fortunate enough to spend most of my week there in some of the world's great museums: the recently constructed and well-stocked Tate Modern; the Victoria and Albert; the Museum of Natural History; the Sir John Sloan Museum; and the British Museum. All were influential in the creation of my installation space. The display cabinets and chunky wood frames, abundant in the latter three institutions, held visual interest for me in the details as did the richness of the wood and history apparent through fine craftsmanship. I observed that the mood created in such places, is essential to how the material is taken in. For example, collections of flora and fauna would be appreciated in different ways under more precise lighting and shiny metal or all-glass cabinets.

Equally as influential during my visit was my observation of the cleanliness of presentation and technologically advanced methods of display at the art museums. The Tate Modern is an enormous space, dissected near its entrance with an imposing glass and stainless steel escalator and is composed of numerous white galleries all perfectly partitioned and seamlessly lit. Many contain super high-tech video and sound installation but with all unsightly equipment unnoticeable. Paintings, photographs and traditional 3D sculpture are all presented without a hint as to how they were hung or otherwise positioned. There are no distractions in floor coloring, ornately carved railings, or chunky wood frames. The only exceptions were that many Modernist pieces were framed according to their era. I understood this to be part of the history of the work more than to a design choice of museum curators. The Victoria and Albert Museum had been recently remodeled and was similarly pristine and innovative in appearance.

These art museums also would ultimately have an impact on displaying my work that I did not anticipate. As a result of my trip, I began to formulate meaningful ideas about the look and construction of my thesis installation.
Elements of the Presentation

I came back to Missoula with the idea of making a space in which the viewer would be aware of the dichotomy of old information versus new information. Previously, in collecting illustrations and subsequently in producing the plaster pieces, I had become interested in obsolete or expired information, and in imagery that conveys archaic facts. However, I did not limit myself to collecting pictures from the early twentieth century, although they were the most aesthetically pleasing to me. I was also attracted to current medical and science discoveries. I regularly came across visual proof that scientists had made supposedly important discoveries years ago, only to be discarded by some future generation. I do not believe all discoveries will be proven wrong eventually, but instead that we as a society, especially in this time of mega-media exposure, should learn to take the information we are fed with a grain of salt. While this notion did inform my plasterwork, it was not a driving force in the creation of the pieces, which were based more on humor and formal issues. Still, I knew that I could underscore the concept of antiquated science versus modern technology through meaningful display methods keeping this notion in mind.

The walls in the Gallery of Visual Art's interior hallway, which is approximately eight feet wide by twelve feet long, were painted dark blue to create an even more intimate space, and to visually separate it from the other rooms in the gallery. (Figure 25). The color carries with it a sense of regality and for-
mality associated with Victorian influenced natural science museums which I thought was important to convey. I knew that I would light each piece individually so I chose a shade of blue that would stay dark even with numerous individual lights. Additionally, it was a somewhat unexpected color for that particular space which enhanced the peculiarity between the elements of display.

Critique of my early boxed pieces, (Figure 24), focused on the dark orange color of the wooden boxes as a detractor from the work, so I was anxious to test other methods of presentation. But, I knew that the implied age in that presentation would still be vital in emphasizing antiquity of information. A white or clear resting surface would be the solution to minimal interference with the plaster. After some experimentation I chose Plexiglas as the shelving material because it was drillable (which was necessary for the design) and embodied the look of technology, or, the new, in science, (Figure 26).

Concerned by the probable monotony created by simply lining the room with equally spaced shelves, I chose to hang them at varying levels, which I hoped would enhance the humor of the pieces through unexpected incongruity and indirect light-heartedness, (Figure 27). The way in which museum workers choose to display objects ultimately influences viewers’ perceptions of the objects: wall color; lighting; viewing position (height); and juxtaposition with other objects all have the potential to alter or enhance an object. I wanted to indirectly inform the audience of the possibility of cu-
rational persuasion, by way of such factors, without deviating from my thesis.

The lighting method would be vital in the creation of the installation because lights have the potential to create a specific ambiance while visually enhancing the work. To light the show, I constructed my own hanging lamps after looking for, but not finding, a direct source of light that would illuminate each piece sufficiently while visually emphasizing an atmosphere of introspection, (Figure 28). Lamps and small lights that fit this description exist but most looked too manufactured or too commercial and generally were too expensive. I also needed the lights to fit into the *old* versus *new* strategy. By selecting and assembling each element that would eventually make up the lamp I was able to create something that seemed old and new at the same time. The scratched metal shades—chosen for their unique shape—were created from three and a half inch galvanized tin planters purchased in the craft department at Wal-Mart. I sanded the galvanized surface and removed the ball feet to eliminate any reference to their intended purpose. Although I originally planned to wire the new lamps with black cord that would blend in with the dark walls (and hopefully go unnoticed), I knew immediately that the silver colored cord was the right choice when I saw it because it would visually promote the *old* versus *new* concept.

Above each shelf, a silver toned nameplate labeled each piece, (Figure 29). Again, in keeping with the *old* versus *new* theme, I designed a metallic nameplate; its shape based on a traditional paper hanging tag. The shape also mimicked brass plates often found on old framed paintings. A local trophy shop laser-cut and engraved the plates out of a bendable, but still authentic looking, silver plastic material. The formality of the plates’ appearance also works to lend a dignity to the titles which otherwise
could be easily discarded as one-liners. Since the titles had become increasingly significant to me, I was able to emphasize their importance without using commonly invasive white labels, which often compete visually with the work.

With so little experience creating installation art, I was hesitant to think of *Implied Science* as an installation. Even months into the project, I did not consider my ideas about presentation "installation". As each element of the display evolved, however, I began to recognize the strength that each individual artwork would gain, not only through the particulars, but how each would become more powerful as part of a defined unique space. Once it was assembled and mounted, I was able to understand and accept *Implied Science* as an installation artwork, and knew that for this reason it was a more powerful exhibit.
CONCLUSION

Creating the artwork and installation components for *Implied Science* was exper­

tial, informative and enjoyable. As I made the plaster pieces I discovered more about

myself as an artist. I learned that I work most effectively utilizing my intuition. I learned

how to utilize that knowledge to push my work further: by allowing myself to work in the

way in which is most productive and satisfying for me, as opposed to how others think I

should work. I also gained valuable knowledge of and experience with processes which I

will be able to continue to utilize or expand upon.

I included objects from my personal collections in my artwork and utilized stylistic

themes based on my interests in collecting and museums, which in turn motivated me to

be more passionate about the work. I incorporated science imagery from one of my collec­

tions, which allowed me to examine the notion of reliable, ostensibly imperative, new sci­

entific information. Additionally, I produced this body of work with humor, which conse­

quently made the process more enjoyable and edifying.
NOTES


3 Ibid.


7 Ibid. 212.

8 Ibid.


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