A P A R T

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For Joshua

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Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the support of my family and friends.

To my parents, who are my firm foundation, thank you for being so steadfast when I was full of doubt. I appreciate that I am who I am because of your love and prayers. To my brother Joshua, I'm so very fond of you. I'm so proud of the man you have become, I'll see you soon. Thank you to Aimee for being so dear a friend. You kept me from the edge and made the purchase of cardboard a joyful event. Thank you for helping me put this book together, and for all the years of readily being there for me. To Adrian, thank you for your friendship, being so patient, and sharing a studio with me all these years. I appreciate your understanding, and all the hours spent pouring over this text. Thank you to Caleb for his time, photography skills and consulting over this catalogue. You are so special to me. Thank you to Sylly, for his dear friendship, kindness, acceptance and being so ready to help me with anything.

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To all the staff at Michaelis who have guided me through the years, thank you for all the opportunities and lessons learnt.

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Things I have learned:

How to remove grease from a surface or finger.

The necessity, therefore, of rags.

The effective action of rendering a thing to pieces.

The sound of escaping electrical current.

The adequate quantity of wood glue.

How to quiet a typewriter.

How to find the straight edge.

The use of my left hand.

In this project I have been concerned with discarded objects, specifically objects in various stages of malfunction and disrepair. In particular, I am interested in the ways in which objects can acquire new identities and functions, and through this prompt human interactions such as participation, recollection and imagination.

My intention has been to assemble a collection of discarded things, the likes of which have few common traits beyond their shared fate of having been disregarded. I have sought out these particular objects and assembled them into a collection that may serve to indicate an object's fate when it is no longer effective for its primary purpose or is considered otherwise unusable. The characteristic of an object's presumed 'unusability' is desirable to me and is a primary motivator for the addition of many objects to my collection. My collection is comprised of objects that demand no attention and may pass unseen until the moment of their malfunction, at which point we see them with a clarity that is often accompanied by feelings of offense and frustration. It is specifically in these moments that these objects are most attended to, handled, replaced and spoken to.

I have had to think of myself as an agent of transformation: in tandem with the act of collecting, I have tasked myself with drawing attention to these objects and creating responses to them. The practical components of my project articulate the changes that have occurred from the point of collection to presentation. In its various forms, my work is comprised of objects enmeshed with each other and cobbled together to perform new functions and declare new opportunities for use. My work also includes objects generated entirely as a response to the collection, at times standing in place of objects I could not keep or acquire. I refer to objects made in response to the collection as objects-in-response, and in some cases they facilitate the display of other objects. Objects made from the parts of other things are referred to as cobbled objects. As both my material and subject matter, I am interested in how an object may have no value in one context but be valued in another, and my intention for the work is primarily to reveal to others the potential of discarded objects. My transformed objects offer new opportunities for interaction and ideally encourage moments of reflection, observation and a kind of object-empathy.

opening

In this project I present a selection of objects from my collection, in company with a series of cobbled objects and objects-in-response. The work is arranged to demonstrate the individual characteristics of each object, achieved primarily through objects-in-response to the collection that function as lighting attachments and recesses in which objects can be placed. Items are placed on the glass and wooden surfaces of objects-in-response, in some instances propped against or on top of each other, simulating the encounters I had while storing them and working with them in my studio. In the exhibition, objects are in drawers and on cobbled pedestals, shifting the eyeline of the viewer from floor to ceiling. The room in which the objects are displayed is warmly lit, and I wanted to utilise the shadows and silhouettes of the various objects to simultaneously obscure and uncover them.

I rely on the terms 'things', 'objects' and 'stuff' in my introduction to this project. Steven Connor describes 'things' as being imbued with magic, inviting a practical reverie that plays with possibility and expands their implied reach: 'We can do whatever we like to things, but magical things are things we allow and expect to do things back to us' (Connor, 2013: 4). I had this experience with my objects, as if in accumulating them as I had, they began to regard me as readily as I had seen them – waiting for me to do something, anything, with them. In this context, things are objects to be 'conjured with', that have power and potential (Connor, 2013: 4). Things are, in accumulation, that with which we form attachments and relationships. In my work, I have attempted to simulate and visit these relationships at the point where attachments are broken or objects are used up.

Anthony Dunne refers to objects as useful in making sense of things, which suggests they have a capacity for description or narration. Dunne often combines the term 'object' with accompanying descriptors, for example 'lost object', 'dreamy object' or 'electronic object' (Dunne, 2005: 2; 92; 130). To a point, these descriptors indicate or anticipate the identity of an object. Similarly, I made objects-in-response in response to the collection to develop core aspects of their identity and function.

'Stuff' may be linked to Michael Newman's definition of generic objects, which he describes as objects that are 'typical enough not to stand out as unique' (1999: 211). Appropriately, 'stuff' is a generic term for things that are valueless or that we are indifferent to – but it may also be attributed to objects with which a person has a personal attachment (Connor, 2013: 9).

As a maker, I performed the roles of the collector, the tinker, the cobbler and the transformer. Each role represents a stage in an object's lifespan within my studio and is specific to the methods I employed during my interactions with an object. As the tinker, I encountered the object post-collection and was primarily concerned with the disarticulation of objects. To disarticulate an object is to remove the structures created by pre-conceived assumptions of that object. As an example, I tinkered with a drill, acquired at no cost as it was no longer able to perform its most intrinsic function, that of drilling. I removed the plastic casings and safeguards normally kept in place to maintain warranties, and distributed the drill's parts across the surface of a studio table. There the drill existed in aged and dirty pieces, little components of plastic, screws, handfuls of grease, copper wires and metal rings. I tinkered with it with the aim of revealing a shapely washer [figure 2.1][1] and now malformed internal gears – parts otherwise unseen. By way of the tinker's method it was no longer a drill, but had instead become a garbled cluster of its own parts, a variety of individual elements and thus many objects in one. Tinkering, for me, is not an act of mending or breaking so much as it is a liberation of the object: the object is primed to become something else.

Figure 2.1 - Shapely washer

1 An unusual description for a washer, but I stand by it.

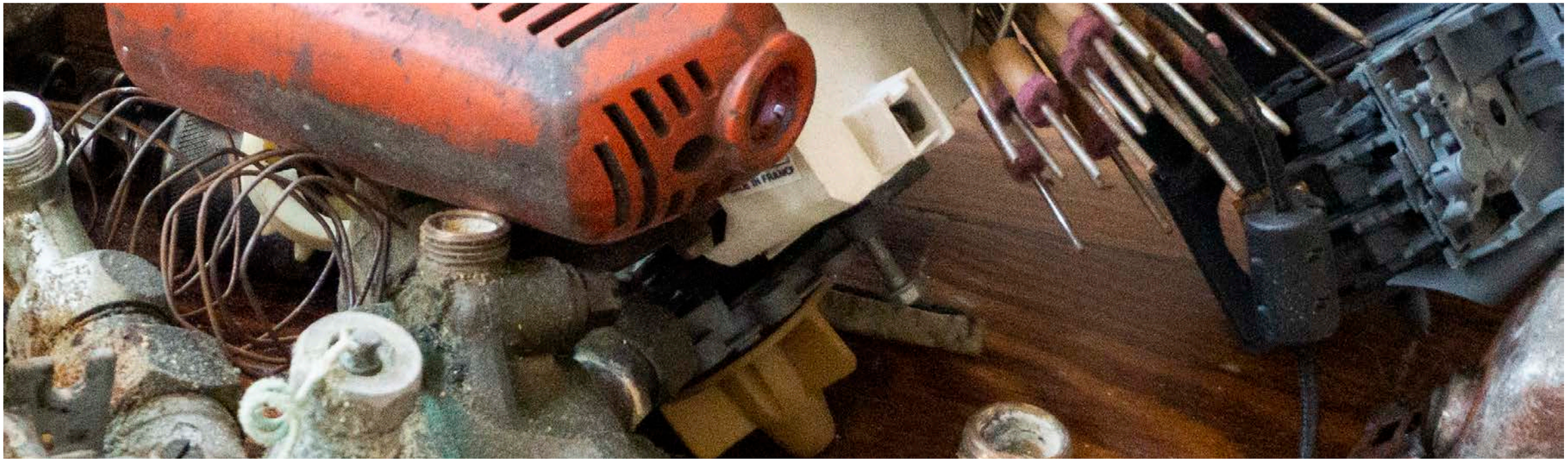
The cobbler succeeds the tinker and pulls on the strings of functional lineage that each object possesses. Consequent to the tinker's disarticulation of parts, the cobbler rearranges and reassigns objects into various aesthetic or mechanical encounters. Objects have a sensory aspect, one in which they are defined by texture and colour, shape and density, electric connections and wires, function and components, smooth planes and sharp edges, the combination of which contributes to an object's appeal to me. In the absence of function, I am free to remake and elevate them into renewed material, visual and sensory forms. An object added to my collection is no longer subject to the manufacturer's prescriptions, and rendering it into pieces offers opportunities to reveal an object's spectrum of potential. In her PhD thesis 'Letting Things Speak', Joanne Bloch documents her experience of making things by, as the title suggests, letting them speak (2016). Bloch acts as the co-producer with things, collaborating with them as an interviewer might with her subjects, manipulating objects to form stories and histories and, most significantly, making them fit (2016: 36). This (in partnership with glue) – with admittedly more haphazard gusto – is the cobbler's occupation.

The transformer is more concerned with objects-in-response than the cobbler, making objects that are more intentionally assembled. I myself had to transform and shift my approach to my practice as the events of 2020 seized all my efforts to collect, tinker or cobble. The transformer is a product of this experience and introduced me to alternate objects – ones I did not exactly collect but that I encountered in the new environments in which I was locked-down[2]. The result is a set of objects-in-response that are situated amongst collected and cobbled objects intended to reveal how objects that lay in wait for me – unlike those I collected – could impact my approach to using them.

I became a custodian during this lockdown period and assumed a more passive interaction with the objects, maintaining them for the duration of this project in my Michaelis studio, then curating them for the sake of display and examination. This custodian emerged in the last phase of my making practice, when objects were treasured in their transformed state. The act of display is intended to return the viewer to the initial moment in which the objects were seen anew, when they stopped functioning and started their process of disarticulation. My objects might go through multiple acts of tinkering and cobbling before settling into their new functions, to be kept by the custodian.

2 During the spread of Covid-19 in 2020, South Africa mandated a series of lockdowns, with the majority of the population staying at home, myself included. During this time, my usual processes of collecting and making in various forms came to a halt.

My studio has been central to my project: here the core ideas and characteristics of the project developed, and it played an essential role in my comprehension of the collection as a whole. As a space in which the assortment of objects was stored, arranged and distributed, the studio reflected the nature of the processes I developed in relation to the objects I collected: the tinker, the cobbler, the transformer and the custodian. Objects placed beside one another across a horizontal surface – a table, my pockets or a shelf – began to reflect possibilities in their shapes, textures and associations. Typically, objects took up space on the walls as well, scaling the vertical surfaces available to me when there was no more space on the floor. In the studio, personal treasures are on the precipice of becoming public (Clifford, 1988: 219). My intention was to display objects after their transformation, to have them redistributed in a separate space for appreciation in an entirely new way by the viewer.



The global events of 2020 rendered my studio inaccessible and eliminated future interactions with the objects I had thus far collected. I moved home, as many did, and confronted the reality of continuing the project with neither my collection nor my studio. The practical freedoms of the Michaelis studio, tools and workshops were no longer available and, in contrast to the essential, solitary procedures of tinkering and cobbling that had guided me before, I now had to make progress in a borrowed and seemingly sterile space. The delight I had garnered from a drill's greasy bearing was not welcome in this new space, and I could not alter the space without permission; I was no longer free to embody the role of the tinker or the cobbler. These unavoidable periods of staying home prevented me from collecting objects and, with very little else to observe, I began to gather sounds. This became a new ritual and, in place of material objects, I accumulated a small symphony of unrelated and otherwise obscure sounds. A few examples are birdsong, the hum of the Wi-Fi router, the sound of the wind, a vacuum cleaner, wood splintering and the cutting open of a box labelled 'bio-hazard' [figure 2.2]. .

Figure 2.2

My process of collecting had always been a private event (shared only at times with my supervisors), but now I had to offer explanations to family about why I had chosen to do this or that. From March to September 2020 this research project was more keenly observed by my immediate family than anything I had done before. I now had an audience, and I became shy. Sounds were the only medium I could enjoy privately and keep as my own – though to my detriment, I kept them from my supervisors as well. It felt, for short, valuable moments, as though I was surrounded by objects in the studio again – something approaching the tangible and usable in an environment that was forgiving of the idiosyncrasies that remained by and large my practice. Returning to my Michaelis studio and my collection in October 2020 gave me the chance to make sense of what I had gained from my time at home. Some of the objects-in-response in my exhibition resemble or attempt to mimic the objects I encountered, but could not collect, during my time away from the collection[2].

Some of the objects I collected remained passively in storage, contingent predominantly on how the object[3]s identity had shifted during its lifespan in the studio. By curating the objects within a space – objects-in-response, cobbled objects, tinkered objects, transformed objects – I have attempted to demonstrate the hidden potential of the discarded object. In doing so, I aim to show how a tinker or a transformer might interfere with preconceived ideas of an object's identity or function. The objects exhibited in this project are intended to be observed and used – I ask that the viewer lingers with them, as I myself have. The curated objects are representative of the three environments in which this project was located: my studio, my home and the gallery. The transformation of objects is evident in the new forms the objects take – sounds, intangible and fleeting, accompany the more consciously made objects-in-response. In contrast to objects-in-response, the cobbled objects have a tendency to 'tilt' precariously or resemble multitudes of other things.

3 Leaving the studio emphasised the importance of its role within my practice, not only as a store for my objects but as the place that facilitated what I did with them.

Artists and Writers

As I reached the end of this project, I reflected on the work of some of the artists who shaped my practice over its course.

Karsten Bott's *One of Each* (Figure 1.1). Installed at MoMa in 1998 as part of the PS1 exhibition *Deep Storage* (MoMa, n.d.), the installation drew on Bott's collection of an unimaginable 500 000 objects, of which only 2 000 were selected for display (Artbook, n.d.). Bott's aim for *One of Each* was to question the relationship between person and object and reflect on how much we consume and what we choose to save or discard (Artbook, n.d.). I am drawn to Bott's process of collection as an overwhelming accumulation of objects, although his collection manifests in entirely different ways to mine. Like me, I perceive Bott as a custodian of objects, although our practices of handling and interacting with objects are markedly different.

Figure 1.1

Mark Dion's *Tate Thames Dig*, 1999 (Figure 1.2). Near the Tate Modern in London, Dion and a team of volunteers combed two stretches of beach at low tide along the Thames River (Fiske, T. & Bottinelli, G., 2002). The two sites yielded a large quantity of items, tokens of life that were meticulously cleaned in archaeological tents erected on the Tate's Millbank lawn. Dion's method of collection, treatment and eventual display of these objects is a testament not only to the inexhaustible boundaries of what is considered 'collectable' but also places these items within the context of a collection. By displaying items in a cabinet, the collection is open to spectatorship (Blacksell, 2013: 61). I took Dion's work to be a contemporary iteration of the cabinet, a store for the residue of places and things. Water-logged and corroded fragments were placed in the cabinet and dissuade us of the passage of time (Fiske, T. & Bottinelli, G., 2002). Dion's objects are of little value, much like my own, but by displaying them in the cabinet their value is elevated such that they may survive the passage of time, transformed from pollutant to artefact (Fiske, T. & Bottinelli, G., 2002).

Figure 1.2

Joseph Cornell's *Bird Boxes*, 1949 (Figure 1.3), specifically *Untitled: Cockatoo with Watch Faces*. Cornell made a number of bird boxes during the 1940s and 1950s, using materials he collected while walking in the woods of Long Island (National Galleries, n.d.). The boxes are typically mixed media assemblages and were, to Cornell, habitats symbolic of the flight path that links heaven and freedom (National Galleries, n.d.). These frozen and fictional accounts of birds mimic the motions and posture of living birds well enough to be recognisable, similar perhaps to the mimicry of some of my own objects' functionality. The boxes exist in a tension between creation and confinement, as the found objects within bustle with vitality, but only for so long as they remain in the box (Zhou, 2018). I found Zhou's interpretation particularly affective when I considered the previously boxed or discarded states in which I found my objects and now choose to display them post-transformation (2018).

Roman Stanczak's *Flight,* 2019 (Figure 1.4). I saw *Flight* at the Polish pavilion at the Venice Biennale. The work is a small aircraft split in half and sewn back together inside out – its wings are folded in on themselves to fit within the cramped space of the plane's interior (Zhou, 2018). The components of the plane are clearly visible, with thick wires, piping, circuits and mechanics all shown in states of breakage or malfunction. While I could not conceive of the impact it would have on my practice at the time, its effects have lingered, and I now understand the work as a macro example of some of the objects I dealt with in this project. I view Stanczak's work as an act of tinkering in its own right – on a much larger scale than my own, but the redistribution of parts and the palpable smell of oils and grease in *Flight* serve as beacons to the tinker in me.

Figure 1.3

Figure 1.4

Joseph Kosuth's *The Play of the Unmentionable* (1990), Brooklyn Museum of Art (Figure 1.5.). Drawing from the Brooklyn Museum's vast collection, Kosuth curated an installation of work chosen specifically for having been considered objectionable at one time, or alternatively, entirely acceptable (Brooklyn Museum, n.d.). The work appeals to me as a practice of curation that brings into cohesion things and ideas from differentiating origins and circumstances – in Kosuth's case, a form of cobbling meanings and histories together.

Nuria Fuster's *Esculpidoras II (Sculptresses II)*, 2012, from the series *Accidentes (Accidents)*, 2011 – (Figure 1.6). Fuster's work depicts two irons on a steel plate that is balanced on two separate columns of wax. The heat from the irons gradually melts the wax, causing the structure to eventually break down completely (Hontoria, n.d.). The work balances between order and chaos, and Fuster is known to be an artist who systematically deconstructs everyday objects in order to formulate new relations with them.

Figure 1.5

Figure 1.6

Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Technological Dreams Series: No. 1, Robots*, 2007 (Figure 1.7). Dunne and Raby's work speaks to the idea that robots will eventually do everything for us – a "dream that refuses to go away" (Dunne & Raby, 2007). As objects, the robots encourage discussion about how we would like to relate to them: independent, subservient, equal, intimate.

Phillipe Parreno's *Untitled* solo exhibition at the Gropius Bau in Berlin, 2018 – 19 (Figure 1.12). I experienced Parreno's work firsthand on a visit to Berlin in 2018. The exhibition has had many iterations, but can now only be viewed through VR headsets (Berliner Festspiele, 2018). The works were in various spaces throughout the Gropius Bau, but I was particularly intrigued by a slowly rotating, cushioned seating area situated next to a large pool of water in the centre of the room, with the water rippling as sound was played below its surface. A baby grand piano compressed its keys and played in response to a second piano located elsewhere in the building. White office blinds against the windows opened and shut when visitors approached, the seating made sounds from within when sat upon, and pools of helium-filled fish swam along the ceiling, guided by currents of air. Fish that lost their gas could be picked up, refloated and pushed back up to the ceiling by visitors. This exhibition was a revelation to me, revealing the scope of possibility inherent in technology in art making, as well as revealing the capacity of mundane things to delight when curated and presented in new ways.

Figure 1.7

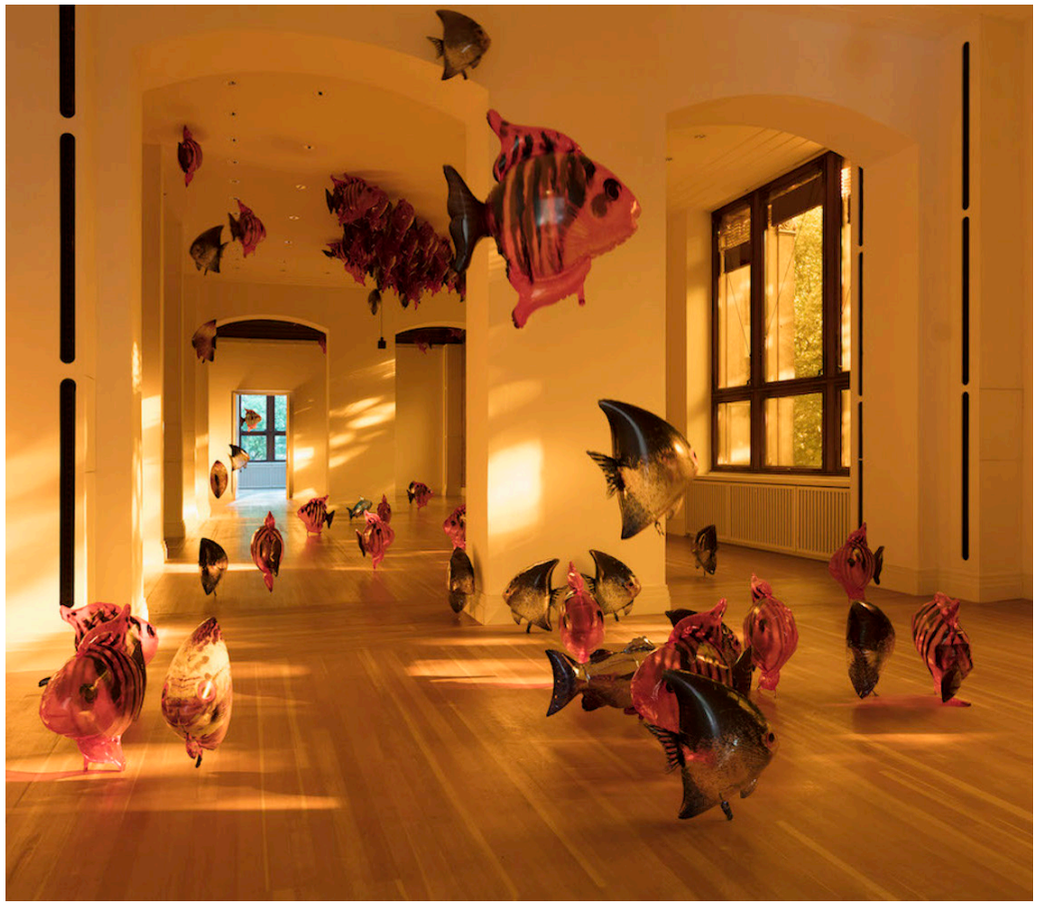


Figure 1.8

During the course of this project, I read the work of multiple authors from different fields of study. Amongst the many authors I read and was provoked by, works by Edmund de Waal and Steven Connor were the most significant.

Edmund de Waal's *The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Hidden Inheritance*, 2010.

The Hare with Amber Eyes details a collection of 264 Japanese wood and ivory carvings and the collections lifespan as it is passed down through generations of De Waal's family. Upon inheriting the collection himself, De Waal becomes part of the lineage of owners, and the collection acts as a conduit for the revelation of previously unknown stories linked to his family. De Waal details many moments that resonated with me, particularly when describing the person-to-object sentiments he expresses so vividly. Netsuke in the collection are an essential component of the uncovering of family stories and also act as points of reference by which to narrate them. The objects in my collection do something similar, conveying potentially fictional accounts of themselves to me, and allowing me, through them, to share their narratives with a viewer.

Steven Connor's *Paraphernalia: The Curious Life of Magical Things*, 2013.

In this book, Connor characterises and demonstrates how we encounter and interpret objects. Connor writes about objects ranging from buttons to newspapers to rubber bands, and chapters animate the objects we frequently encounter but do not assign much thought to. Connor breaks down the multitude of interpretations these objects have with regard to usability, assignable functionality and their capacity to be considered magical.

In addition to these primary authors, other texts also proved pivotal to my research. Michael Newman's chapter in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, 'After Conceptual Art: Joe Scanlan's Nesting Bookcases, Duchamp, Design and the Impossibility of Disappearing' (1999), discusses a hierarchy for the reconsideration of object-hood, generic object, object type, and the visible/ invisible object are discussed. Scanlan's art-object intentionally moves between all three modes of being as an intentional affront to how objects are seen or, rather, not seen in the gallery context. Anthony Dunne's book *Hertzian Tales: Electronic Products, Aesthetic Experience, and Critical Design* (2005) details a world in which objects dream, exist in parallel dimensions and are designed to be fundamental to daily life.

Places and events during my postgraduate journey helped me look at the stories tied to objects differently. I spent time in the Museum of Unheard of Things in Berlin in 2018, where Roland Albrecht curates a collection of unrelated objects, assigning them fictional narratives that detail how they came to be in the museum. I also attended the Berlin Biennale: *We Don't Need Another Hero* in 2018, which utilised various methods of curation and works of differentiating form, material and scale. It was unlike anything I had seen before. The Venice Biennale: *May You Live in Interesting Times* (2019) was an extension of my experiences in Berlin[4].

4 I had the opportunity to travel to Berlin in 2018 with my Honours class, and to Venice in 2019 with my Masters class.

Collector

I meandered around the room of the loud and busy steel factory, full of outdated wall sockets, metal fragments and discards. I uncovered a piece of rusted pipe, about twenty-nine centimetres end to end. It had a very distinct curve that was the primary contributing factor to my choosing it from a pile of unused and equally rusty – but straight – pipes. The pieces of pipe belonged to my uncle, who told me they were discards, leftovers from previous projects and intended for scrap, temporarily relegated to a disused corner. He must have caught something in my demeanour, because he told me quietly that it would be fine if I wanted to keep it. Amongst all those distractions, I had seen the pipe with clarity, and I was genuinely pleased to have found it. I picked it up and cradled it against my chest to compensate for its weight, held in a way uncharacteristic of the general handling of pipes.

Collecting has been an impulse of mine, even though accumulating many things in one place can be a source of anxiety, as stuff is so readily perceivable as clutter. Things I collected in the past have typically been trinkets – bric-a-brac type objects that signify places, events or people I did not want to forget. They were a useful means of communication: when I had been shy or impersonable or confused by a social interaction, an object could then stand in place of me as an: 'I'm sorry about that, please accept this obsolete Kodachrome slide of a magnified shell of butternut, it's excellent'. (Figure 2.3). In this project, I have attempted to shift these impulses into something more considered – a pursuit in which I actively seek objects to add them to a collection. I decided that these objects would be discards (such as the pipe), and that I would find ways of distinguishing them from others of their type (Newman,1999: 207). In this context, discards find their place among objects categorised as stuff, things that have malfunctioned or that are considered unusable.

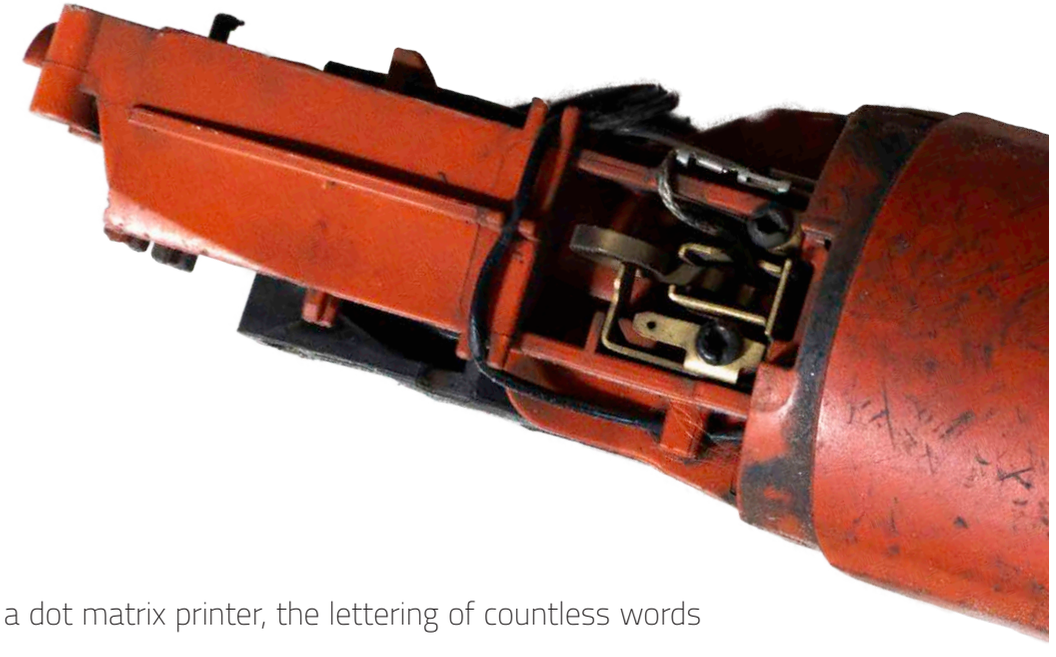
The overlooked objects in my collection were mostly collected in flea markets, factories, warehouses, garages and charity shops. I find it curiously difficult to stop myself from reaching for things in these places. Once seen, objects lingered with me until I self-consciously brought them back to the studio. This happened with the pipe and had already happened with numerous other objects, including half a light bulb, a snapped drill bit, a worn cricket ball and a broken aqua-blue torch.

A number of things interest me about collecting and have influenced my choice of objects to collect. I consider my objects as generic, the type of object prone to perceptual disappearance. Newman (1999: 207) argues that this 'disappearance' is because they are so frequently encountered that they lose all visual appeal. An object's type is defined by its primary functionality, and Newman (1999: 211) suggests that generic objects have achieved a kind of perfection with regards to their type. The identity of the generic object is inherently linked to its ability to function efficiently, with little cause for intervention from the designer or user. The generic object does not stand out, because it has achieved 'a peculiar form of visibility: a visibility that, to be more precise, involves a degree of invisibility' (Newman, 1999: 211). However, a generic object that malfunctions ceases to be invisible to its user; in malfunction, an object becomes a thing to be negotiated with, coaxed, argued with, hit in the hope of dislodging whatever caused it to break. Generic objects are produced in multitudes so vast that we have little expectation of ever lacking them, so there is no apparent need to repair a generic object – barring sentimental attachment. They are easily replaced and therefore easily discarded.

I have a sentimental attachment to a specific electric plug – a standard 220 – 240 V Kitemaster plug (Figure 2.4) that powered a rotunda toaster and could be detached for convenience. During a previous iteration of this project, I had this plug examined by a chemist, who declared it to be contaminated with bacteria. From November 2018, it hung on a wall in the studio, permanently detached from its toaster and quarantined from all the other objects lest it contaminate them. I have sought these seemingly generic objects to collect them, thereby lifting them out of obscurity and settling them into the collection to be tinkered, cobbled and transformed. Objects that were once generic and invisible transcend their original purpose, becoming visible participants in the project. Even when I do not alter them at all, they become a new type of object within the collection and are therefore available to play a new role, to be seen differently or to be appropriated as different kinds of objects.

Figure 2.3

Figure 2.4



Plugs are an essential tether to our technologically motivated world (Dunne, 2005), a link to a network of other related objects humming with electrical current and performing countless programmed tasks. As a 'generic' object, the plug is a link to a network of other objects of its 'type' – all of which rely on the same systems of current to function. Additionally, the plug is a 'type' of electronic object, or rather is an essential element in what allows an electronic object to identify as such – it is a non-negotiable tether between an object and its ability to function. I have perceived electronic objects, each rendered visible by their malfunction, to be disorientated, untethered and removed from their predetermined essential functions. I consider some of these objects to be technological relics; perhaps bygones of an age I have not encountered except through its residue. I consider these as consisting primarily of things long abandoned, unworking, derelict, on the bottom shelf of a small charity shop. Each of these objects was in possession of functions I did not fully comprehend, but I desired to own the object and to transform it.

I also collected a dot matrix printer, the lettering of countless words impressed upon the surface of its rubber and aluminium rollers, a statement of use and of age and of an unyielding mechanistic pursuit of function. This object has become provocative and curious and otherworldly as a consequence of its age. It, and other electronic objects of its type, represents a functionality considered obsolete in relation to more recent innovations of each type – they represent a functionality that is relative to the efficiency of their time. The printer is a simple but apt example when considering what the rollers have secured on paper. But where paper may age and fade, the printer has endured, outliving the products of its primary function. I have tinkered and cobbled with the printer many times over the course of this project, and I have yet to come to a satisfactory resolution of its intended new function.

Object Materiality

Many varieties of materials are present in the objects I have collected; most pre-tinkered objects are made from a multitude of material combinations. As an example, the toaster's ability to function as intended is achieved through a combination of mica board, copper, plastics and aluminium. In combination, these materials manifest the toaster's ability to generate heat and function effectively. An object's type is inherently linked to a particular function (Newman, 1999: 207), which in turn signals what the object is able to afford (Gibson, 1979: 138).

In terms of function, objects may have multiple affordances. The term affordance, used by Gibson in *The Theory of Affordances* (1979) includes those objects that 'afford' action by their users: chairs, stools, benches and couches, for example, invite us to sit on them (Gibson, 1979: 128). However, this interpretation is subjective, as logs, boulders, beds, countertops and stairs are also sit-on-able (Gibson, 1979: 128) and indicate how function and type intersect. Newspapers afford multiple uses, at first to read, then potentially to wrap fish, swat at flies, lay at the bottom of bird cages or shine windows (Connor, 2013: 123); all potential affordances of a newspaper. Objects and their affordances are centred in how they invite a person to use them (Gibson, 1979: 138).

Materials offer various opportunities for manufacture, so metals can be welded, plastics can be cut or melted, wood can be sawn and carved. Tinkering with an object disassembles its affordances, which are essentially the guidelines by which the object is anticipated to perform a function. In the process of cobbling, the characteristics of a thing's affordances are rearranged and begin to resemble and invite alternative interactions. I have collected objects of many different types, with a multitude of differentiating functions and material characteristics. These accumulated things all have varying opportunities for what they might afford a user, and by way of this collection I am able to explore the opportunities presented by each object in order to set in motion a renewed series of affordances and functionality.

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I am motivated to collect objects by what James Putnam (2001) refers to as an instinctive, mysterious and partial love of things that have no other relationship to one another. Things that I find mysterious or alluring are often collected in addition to generic objects or are uncovered by taking generic objects apart. I am interested in the hidden components typically found in each object in the collection, and in how they become unrecognisable parts when separated from their original context. These bits and pieces become objects in their own right, open for interpretation and stored with other objects of their type. For example, I have acquired many springs over the course of this project, each once a component in a series of components within an object, and while they are recognisable as springs, the form and function of the objects from which they are derived are lost. In their singular state, these springs afford a host of alternate applications to be explored through their current state and previously intended uses.

My collection does not simply act as a store of objects, but is an essential part of making new objects out of old ones. For example, *Pipe* (Figure 2.5) is a heavy object, a descriptive assertion I base subjectively on my own upper body strength. As a cylindrical object, it also has a tendency to roll onto what I consider to be its side. To address this, I placed the pipe on an object that could withstand its weight while also holding it upright. The protective cushion of an earmuff is durable enough to withstand the pipe's weight and is the ideal size to hold it steady. The pipe and the earmuff are complementary and their functions are enmeshed – I do not present one without the other, as I perceive them to be two parts of the one object: the pipe. Despite the materiality of these objects being unrelated, they afforded the alteration of their previous functions to transform into this new version of the pipe. 'Creation is a patient search', says Sorkin (2018: 99),[5] and patience was instrumental in helping me observe the material surfaces of my objects, from the moment they were collected and throughout their lifespan in the studio. I have had the opportunity to comprehend the sum of their parts by considering how they could be altered or afforded a new set of functions when paired and stored with other specific objects.

During the seven months I was separated from my collection, I had the opportunity to work with a piano that was taken apart at the request of its owners (figure 2.6). I was presented with a crate filled with the piano's core components: hammers, wire, brass screws, wool felt and a singular cast-iron shard from the sound board that had been ground into pieces and discarded. Other than my small collection of sounds, these were the only objects that I could gather and utilise to generate progress during this time. While I had almost forgotten about my collection back at Michaelis, I developed an unusual attachment to these objects, and in time these pieces of piano, essential for the piano's performance as an instrument – a generator of sound – became the catalyst for many of the objects I refer to as objects-in-response.

5 In *What Goes Up*, Michael Sorkin (2018) lists 250 things every architect should know. As a maker of things, I related to many of the items listed as types of instruction: 'What rusts' (200), 'Where materials come from' (95) and 'How to sit in a corner' (25).

Figure 2.5 - Pipe

Figure 2.6 - Piano parts

Tinker

Things I do not have names for:

The sound of tearing plastic.

The audible vibration of a screw hitting the floor.

The ache of sitting still.

The wanting of a discarded piece of tape, a chair, a small pile of sawdust, a chipped tile, pebbles.

The small, detached piece of washer in front of me.

Eating avocado for the pip.

Drilling into my finger.

Grampa's slippers in a bio-hazard taped box.

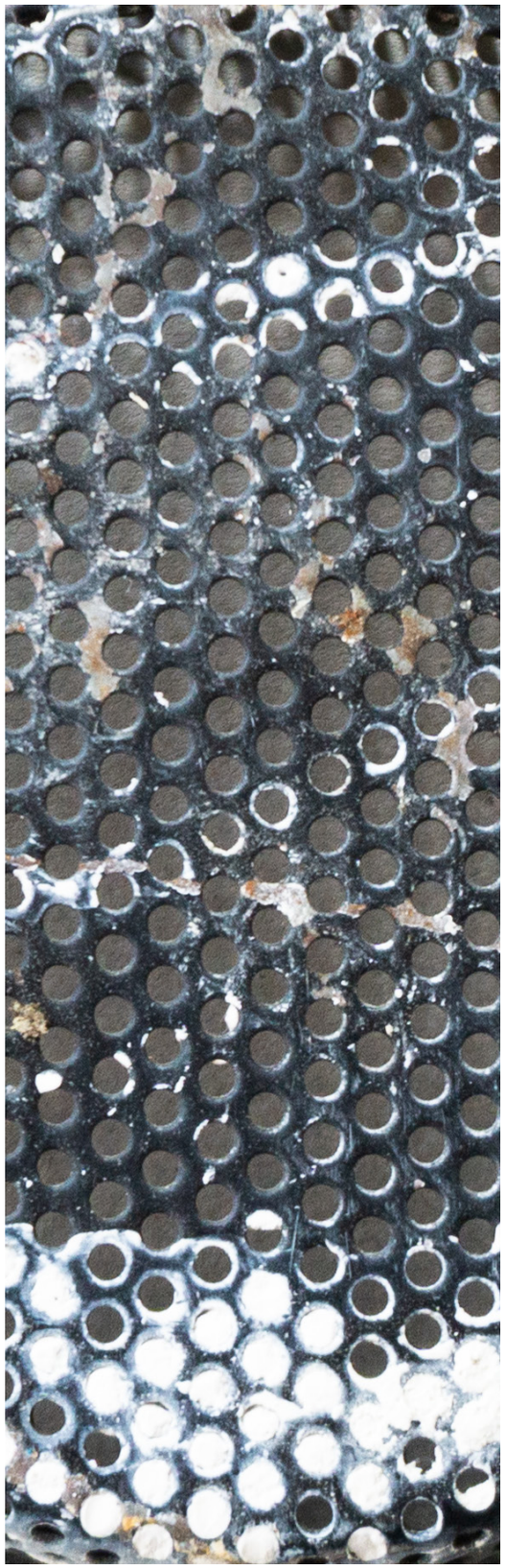
Scrupulous acts of looking, wandering through barriers – de-articulation and removed filters – design, machines, dust and sunned plastic.

Tinkers are commonly known as menders of metal ware and tin, and the *Cambridge Online Dictionary* defines tinkering as an attempt to make small changes to something for the sake of improving or repairing it ('Tinker', 2021). The 'Travelling People', were a nomadic minority ethnic group in Ireland, known for travelling the countryside on foot and later in horse-drawn carts (Gmelch & Gmelch, 1976: 226). Traveller families performed a variety of trades, including tinsmithing, horse dealing, peddling and chimney sweeping (Gmelch & Gmelch, 1976: 226). The Travelling People were also referred to as 'tinkers', a word derived from the sound of a hammer hitting an anvil (Rock, 2012). In the context of the Travelling People, 'tinker 'is a derogatory reference.

The definition of 'tinker' that I use during this project is not strictly linked to the definition described above, nor is it specific to a material such as tin or metal. My interpretation of the tinker is one who struggles to sit still with a thing, and is able to mould this restlessness into an act of tinkering – which, for me, is usually realised by taking a thing apart. I am a self-conscious tinker, as the process is often difficult to explain to others. I relate best to tinkers who extend the lifespan of objects through the binary processes of salvage and repair. I am always in search of that one peculiar component that sets itself apart from generic mass-produced things, like the pipe in the warehouse I described earlier. I also experiment and gain appreciation by fixing things, though I am less concerned with mending than with stripping an object of its manufactured casings and screws and distributing its components amongst my collection.

Tinkering seems to absorb the previous incarnations of an object's functionality and reveal potential new opportunities in its component parts. I attempt to persuade an object, by way of a screwdriver or pliers or the like, to abandon its identity – the element of itself that has rendered it redundant – in favour of renewal. In so doing, I effectively undo the work of the manufacturer and strip away its previously attributed functions. In this way, 'generic' objects may evolve, morph and flex to accommodate newfound modes of function and identity.

By removing the characteristics of an object that would encourage its generic usage, I undo the expectation of the object to 'work' – in some instances the illusion of function or motion is sufficient to understand the use of the object. Dunne uses the example of a camcorder, a dated piece of technology by today's standards, with a warning light that 'flashes whenever there is a risk of "spoiling" a picture, as if to remind the user that' it is 'about



to become creative and should return to the norm' (Dunne, 2005: 22). The manufacturer's preferences are present in the camcorder (pre-dating our inextricable contemporary link to technology and the documenting of our lives), but I do not feel beholden to these preferences when the camcorder is discarded or broken. While tinkering with an object, I am acutely aware of its materiality, in the form of grease on my fingers or in small piles of components (the majority of which are screws and pieces of plastic in various sizes).

Edmund de Waal (2010) writes about a collection of objects that is his inheritance, passed down through a number of generations in his family, a set of pre-chosen netsuke figurines that he has been tasked with caring for. This, I would argue, is a passive sort of care in which the objects themselves are preserved, even as their meaning may change. In my case, tinkering is both a form of care and a means by which to create new functions and, by extension, renewed associations of value. In contrast, De Waal's collection is made up of objects that are inherently valuable as personal, cultural and material things. He describes a shared moment with his great uncle Iggy (the previous owner of the collection), in which they carefully removed the objects from their protective cabinet, held them in their hands, considered them, and then returned them to their place (De Waal, 2010: 5).

De Waal's collection achieves prominence by virtue of its preservation, remaining physically the same, and as a point of access by which he can navigate his family's past (2010: 13). I attempt to make almost entirely new things out of pre-existing things, and tinkering with an object interferes with the kind of continuity inherent in a collection such as De Waal's. Where De Waal attempts to forge connections to his family history through the collection (2010: 17), I seek to forge alternate functions.

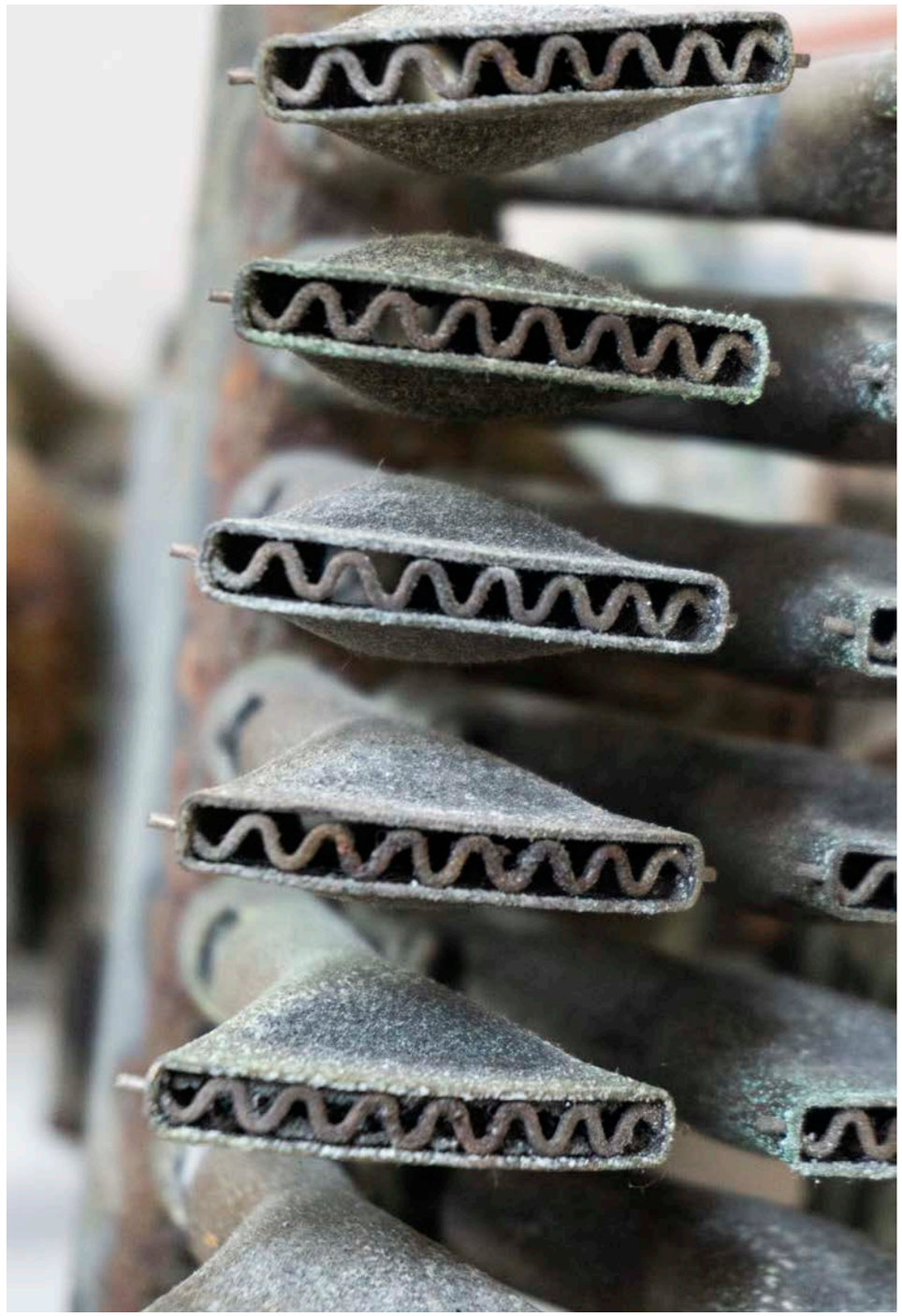
Flight, by Polish artist Roman Stanczak, was exhibited in the Polish pavilion of the Venice Biennale in 2019. *Flight* offers various commentaries and meanings about Poland's societal reconstruction after communism, as well as the fatal plane crash that killed Polish president Lech Kaczynski and various other government officials in 2010 (Artlike, 2019). I was not aware of the background of the work when I viewed it, so I perceived it simply as an object – and was enamoured with it. The large wings of a small plane curled into its body, which had been turned inside out to reveal wiring, gauges, bent metal and scuffed painted surfaces. From my perspective, the plane was a complex object of many parts, but its primary function of flight had been removed, only suggested in the title. In retrospect I perceive the exposure of the plane's various components as akin to the aftermath of tinkering – all the components required for flight were available but were stripped of their capacity to perform. The object's size emphasised my felt need to lean inside the small gaps in its body to examine the wings or kneel down onto the communal floor to see its underbelly. The object had a dimensionality and an exposed materiality that excited me, and while my work occurs on a much smaller scale, I am certain the cobbled identities of my objects are reflections of my experiences in the presence of *Flight*.

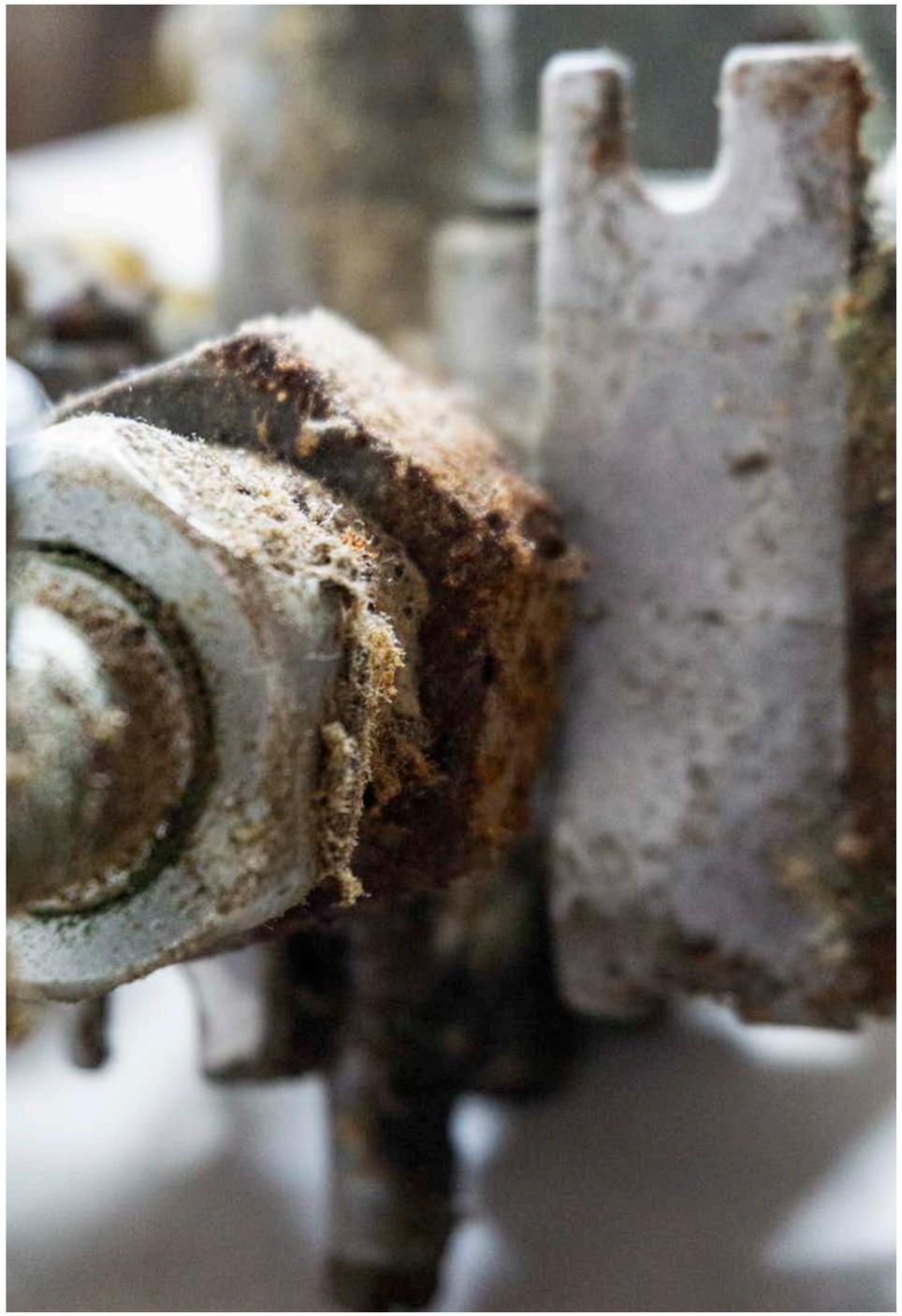
Prior to being separated from my collection, I received an old gas geyser from a friend. Delighted by its white aluminium box, I peeled it apart to reveal a smaller rectangular shell inside – presumably the vessel that had held the water as it heated. The patina of its pipes and the pitted feel of its various surfaces were all statements of success – the object had performed its intended function many times, the evidence writ large over every component. The bolts holding the geyser together had fused, and the effort required to remove them covered my hands in grease and, to my dismay, rubbed away some of the patina coating the coiling pipes (Figure 2.7).

Schaffer states that 'There are a hundred worlds in each thing' (Imperial College London, 2013), and my own engagement with the geyser and its subsequent transformation proves the validity of this statement. I dissembled the geyser, revealing its component parts, thereby also stripping away the identity of 'geyser' and replacing it with a pending alternative. To forge alternative identities for an object, I distribute its components around the studio, intermingling them with other objects in the collection to develop new associations.

Collecting embodies some form of automatic transformation: the 'generic' object I collect ceases to be 'generic' when I reach for it, as it shifts from invisible to visible. I interpret this shift as another form of transformation, the precursor to scattering an object's parts across a studio table or confining it in a box for storage. The tinker's role in transformation is in the disarticulation of an object and in coming into close contact with a singular part of that object – a piece of red wire or a miniature bearing, for example. However, my interventions with an object have sometimes had other consequences. As Connor suggests: 'Sometimes, the action of taking an object to its limits will result in its being tested to destruction. Eventually, the paper clip snaps' (Connor, 2013: 5). I have tinkered with things and unintentionally broken them – plastic is torn, a screw is stripped, a piece of a typewriter is snapped in two). These broken parts are not discarded, I attempt to integrate them back into the collection in order to make new connections with them.

Figure 2.7

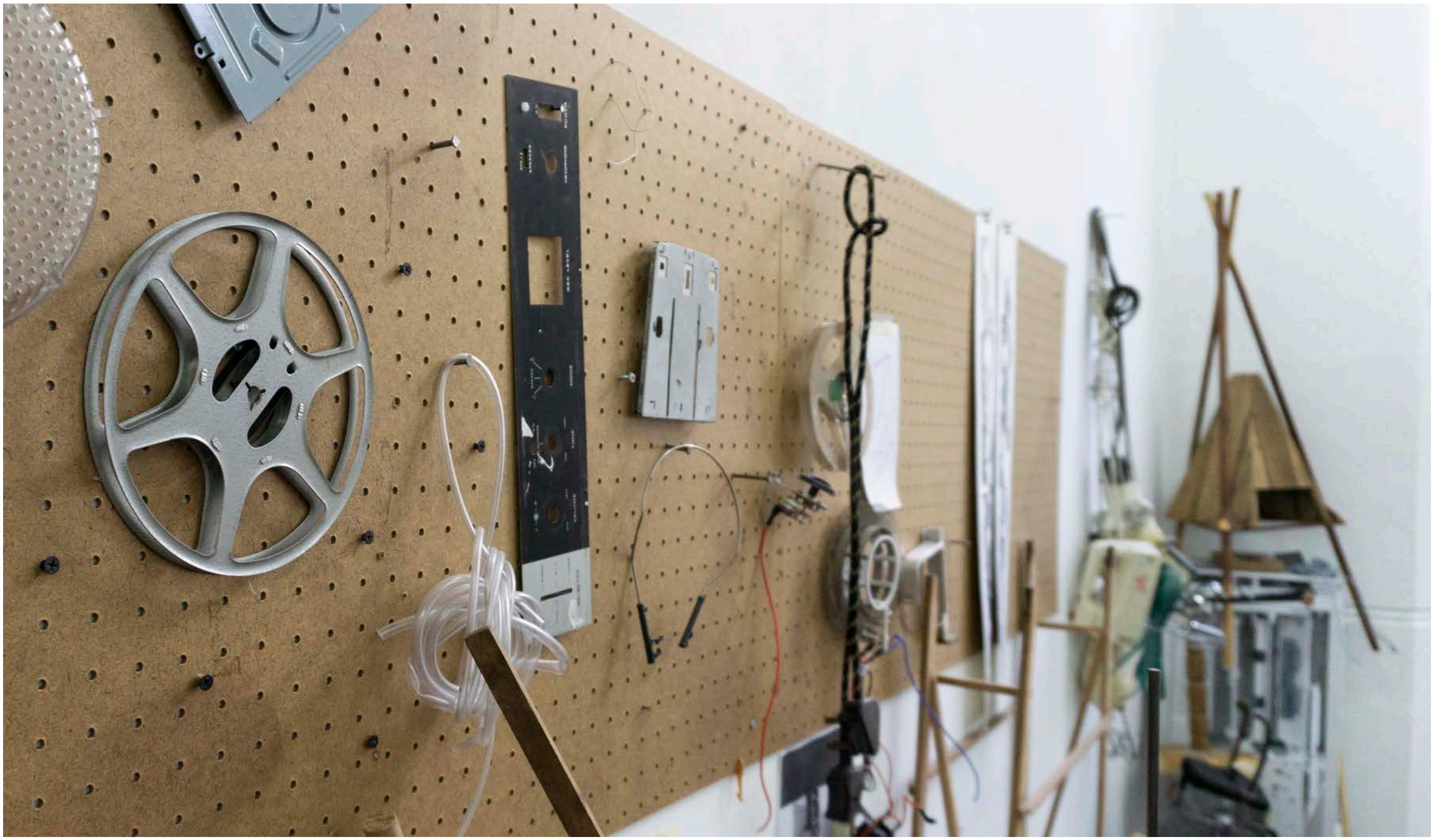




Objects Hibernate

When objects are first brought into my studio, they require a period to settle into their as yet ambiguous identities. The dormancy of these hibernating objects may be brief or may span the duration of the project, but experiencing the volume of objects in my collection can feel like walking through heavy mud: it is a slog, with muck sticking to your hands and feet and contaminating whatever else you interact with. Hibernation may also isolate an object or limit its associations.

Hibernation is a gestation period for an object, one that relieves me of the pressures of having to attend to it. The pipe hibernated in company with the earmuff, and as a result I was able to utilise the unanticipated benefits of their proximity to resolve their future identity. The pipe, cushioned in the protective oval of an earmuff, bore down on the softer surface, indicating its mass on a visual scale. As a consequence of convenience and proximity, it was balanced on two milk crates at some stage, resulting in an interpretation of a pipe now made visible. The pipe is easily observed in its current form, attracting other possible interpretations or interactions, such as a passer-by rapping her knuckles against its surface to hear it ring.



Cobbler

Intuitively reaching for things:

the curve of a splintering chrome handle,

the pores of a cork,

a red speckled screwdriver,

an unusable toaster, indiscriminate wires,

a postcard,

because of the box,

an edible shell,

three apple pips,

the chewing on a pencil,

a rolled sliver of masking tape,

blue thread,

a bearing smaller than a fingernail.

cobbler

To cobble is to mend ('Cobble', 1928: 23), and a cobbler is most commonly a mender of shoes[6]. 'Cobbling' is a rough or hasty assemblage of things, a production of something from available parts, or something put together as a temporary solution ('Cobbling', 2021). Cobbled things are defined as scribbled, rough, put-together, improvised, patched or whipped up ('Cobbling', 2021). My definition of a cobbled object is of a thing assembled from an array of parts; I have made things that are rough and patched, but this transformative process is not temporary. I cobble my objects to find and assign renewed functions and identities.

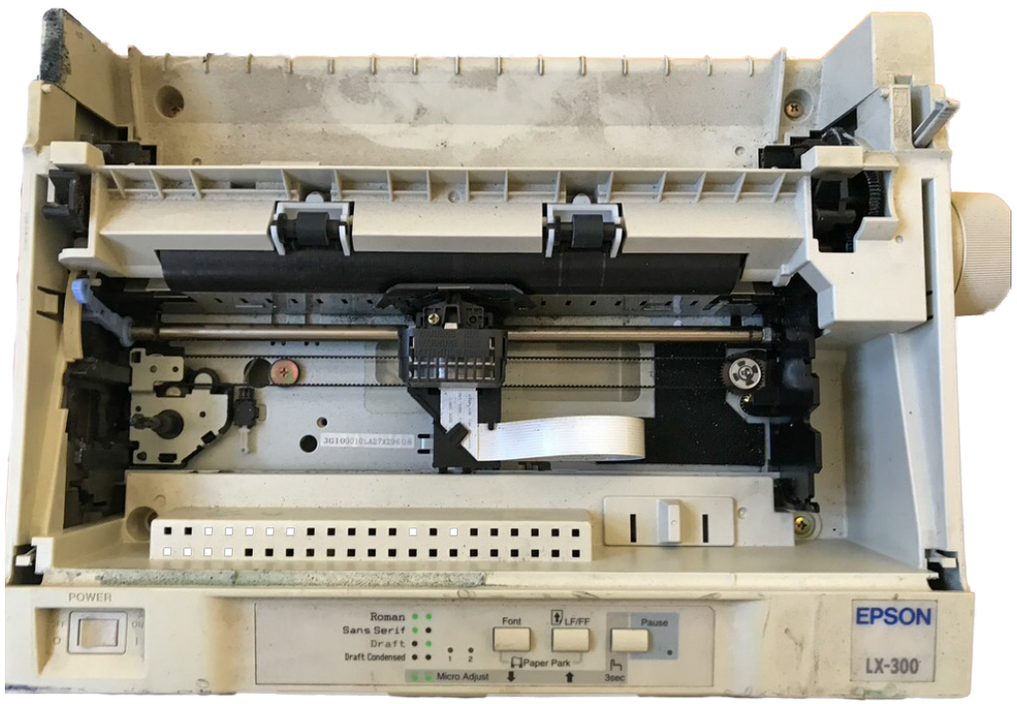
My collection represents what Felicity Bodenstein describes in Emotional Museum as caressed, held, used, smelt, contemplated or eaten (2011: 3); things immediate, concrete and fundamentally sensual in nature. Every new encounter with an object presents numerous opportunities to learn something new. The object exists as an object in itself, and the story of its lifespan is evident by its contact with humans. I create this narrative anew, inventing an object's history and identity. I shift a low-value generic object to one of higher value through its place in the collection and my interactions with it.

Having tinkered with many of the objects I have collected, I am aware of their varying shapes and densities, just as I know some of the functions their components have performed. As a cobbler, I attempt to utilise this knowledge to make new things fit, with the exception of those few stubborn objects that refuse to come apart, the screws overly worn or plastics melted into a weld. I understand cobbling less as the mending of things than as the reassembly of things into new forms. Cobbling for me is a form of bricolage: a cobbling together of varying, collected and tinkered things to form something new.

6 In America, a cobbler is a baked pudding typically filled with fruit (peaches, berries) and covered in a buttered crust (iFood, n.d.).

Objects are often scarred by the environments and circumstances in which they are used. An object can embody the small human idiosyncrasies of its user, carrying these through the various stages of its lifespan, affording the next user the benefit of the unspoken rules of its use. Old electronics, sunned to yellowness, have a specific kind of smell, as though all their years of use have given them a permanent aroma of 'singed', such as my radio telephone (Figure 2.8). This olfactory experience compels me to switch the machine off for fear of damage. Similarly, dot matrix printers are, as artist Ralph Borland describes, incredibly busy objects (2007:1), so much so that their component parts often appear battered by years of circulating reams of paper, insistent on fulfilling their pre-designated function. In cobbling the printer I am alert to the function of objects that are heard, seen, held, their knobs turned and their gears swapped.

Figure 2.8



In my studio, the rules of what things can, should and should not do are seldom adhered to. Objects take on a new state of being, one I conjure solely for myself. I think of this process as objects in orbit, as I am the central point around which they pivot and encounter other objects in my orbit. It made sense, to me at least, that the objects were orbiting the room: levitating above the floor and swirling around each other until they settled. A fantasy of some kind, but perhaps my solution to the objects' propensity to overwhelm me. Objects did not orbit during my time away from them, but remained still in the places I had left them.

Objects orbit until they settle – either as cobbled-together entities with newfound purpose and materiality, or hibernating approximately 1.4 metres off the floor[7] until a resolution of their potential purpose could be conceived. Unlike the hibernating object, objects in orbit are less passive – to me, they actively pursue alternatives to their current state of being. For instance, a typewriter was in orbit for a good few months before I realised that the elements drawing my attention were its miniature parts – specifically the screws. These were, for the most part, short and stubby, about 2 – 3mm at the thread and impressively stubborn to remove.

The orbiting object, not unlike the hibernating object, is an illusion that gave me an opportunity to track the trajectory of their potential becoming. I attempted to put together scenarios in which objects might be seen as I had seen them – not as orbiting objects, but as newly cobbled objects with revitalised identities and functionality. It was as though they became acquainted with each other first and only later invited me to do the same… and in so doing, became amenable to some form of transformation.

An orbit can be a device for understanding, and can help to imagine inanimate things as animate (Bloch, 2016: 33). A similar effect occurs when considering automata and their ability to imitate life (Schaffer, 1999: 150). As a mechanism, the success of an automaton is dependent on the effectiveness of its summative parts and its ability to beguile a viewer. It is the joyfully theatrical and mechanical imitation that enraptures and delights audiences (Schaffer, 1999: 126), but at their core they are objects that perform, that shift in and out of their material confines to become animated – alive. However, in terms of the intentions of their makers and their functionality as performative objects (Fleishman, 2014: 68), automata are not specifically comparable to my objects.

7 Orbiting objects were observable relative to the items in my studio that were stationary: my desk, or a thing hung on the wall. This made it a simple enough exercise to determine the height most objects seemed to remain at – not too high that I might have to crane my neck, but not too low that they would bump into other hibernating things.

In Object Relations, Mark Fleishman writes about a 'cheerful chorus of spoons' depicted in a print (2014: 68). The print acts as a placeholder for his personal reflections, specific to his family and the spoons owned by his grandmother, which are now scattered amongst the various cutlery drawers of his family members (2014: 68). There is a complex intersection between the actual objects (his grandmother's spoons) and the printed ones that evoke them (Fleishman, 2014: 68). The printed spoons reflect the sentimentality of the actual spoons, performing as stand-ins and in-place-of. Fleishman writes about these printed spoons as a precursor to performative objects, working with objects as opposed to on objects (2014: 68). This is an important distinction, and as a cobbler I engage with objects in both senses, making some thing out of another thing. Fleishman's performative object had me consider the dimensions of empathy that begin to take hold when considering an obsolete object.

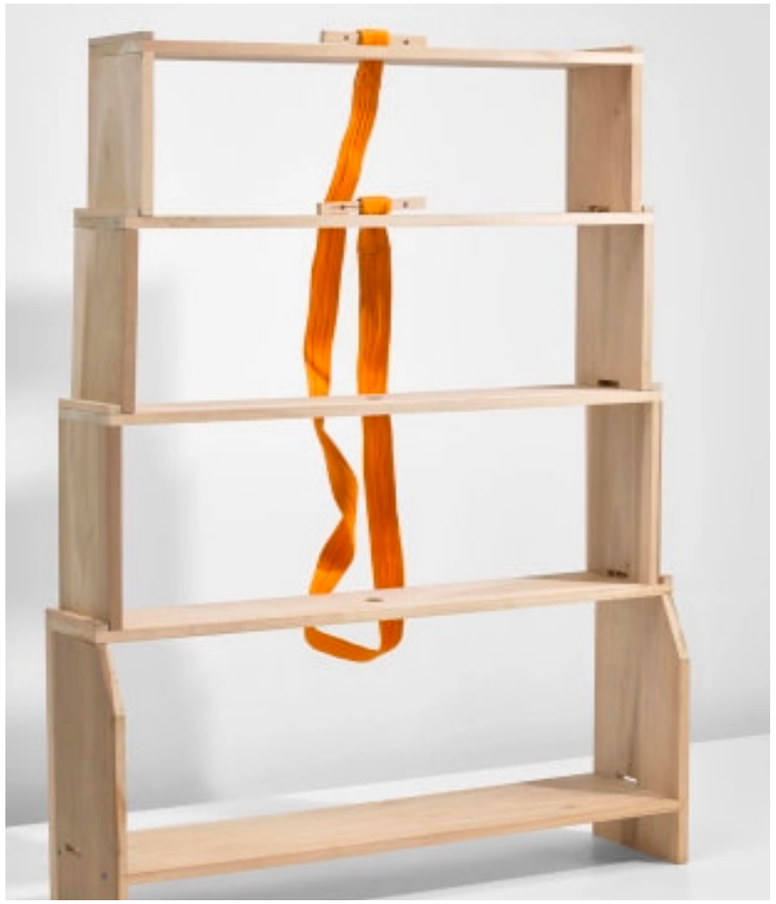
The extent of an object's potential functionality, specifically when cobbled together with others, is better perceived through orbit. My printer is still a printer, and holds the impressions of printing, just as it always has – but its technological redundancy is such that it is now performative, theatrical, more interesting to observe than to use.

Objects Are Types

An object's 'type' is akin to an object's categorical association (Newman, 1999: 211). The object that forces a 'nail' through a surface functions as a hammer, regardless of the function for which it is traditionally used – a book, a screwdriver, a pair of pliers… all may act in the capacity of the hammer with varying degrees of success (Adam Savage's Tested, 2019). This is an associated 'type' of object (Newman, 1999: 207), where another object performs the role of the hammer, and thus momentarily becomes one by way of function (interaction and use). We read a pair of pliers as a physical object used to pull and hold things – its design and mechanical capacity for movement and function tells us this (Gibson, 1979:6). Herein lie the cues of its capacity to perform, and it is clear that its function would be hindered if the pliers were unable to open and close. In this case, unable to open or close, it would be better applied as a hammer.

Joe Scanlan's work *Nesting Bookcase* is a useful example of an object fluxing between the invisibility of the generic object and the specificity of engagement associated with objects on display (Figure 1.9). Dependent upon the environment in which it is encountered, the *Nesting Bookcase* is either clearly identified as an artwork by the showroom or catalogue, or it appears as a bookcase, where the items it holds are perceived to be of more significance than the bookshelf itself. The work performs an almost impossible task, one in which the bookcase alternates between a sculptural object and an invisible, generic bookcase. The distinction is achieved in part through the context of the showroom, but the object itself has varying forms: designed to be portable, it is collapsible and can be transferred with a bracing strap, which is both part of the bookshelf's infrastructure and its handle (Newman, 1999: 213).

Figure 1.9



Categorical 'types' tend to withstand the temporal nature of things (Markosian, 2000: 377), as 'generic' objects perform their functions expertly and therefore need not be reconsidered or redesigned (Newman, 1999: 211). As described earlier, an object's functional identity is that which it is anticipated to afford. The stool is an object-in-response, which by way of its form and height affords sitting on (Gibson, 1979: 1); this is the stool's primary function. Common criteria for an object that looks 'sit-on-able' are that it be knee-high and above the ground (Gibson, 1979: 2). Removing these factors challenges the stool's suitability for sitting on and shifts the dynamic of how a person might interpret the function of the object now that it is no longer familiar or easily used. Within this context of affordances, the object may be considered broken.

As a tinker, I spent time with some of the small and essential components of a piano; they were silent but still held the traces of the years of valued labour that had played out on their various surfaces. Impressions of strings were pressed into their felt tips, and bits of wood had faded where screws had been tightened. I sought to make a stool by cobbling the identities of these objects – by understanding their initial function to generate sound and gathered materials specifically to complement this purpose.

The *Five Stools* (Figure 2.9) showcase materials gathered specifically to generate a new object that responds to an existing one – in this case to a German-made A. H. Francke, Hof-Pianoforte – Fabrik, Leipzig piano, circa 1900 – 1910. The stools were made to reflect the characteristics of the piano stool and echo the sounds I collected in lockdown, intermittently emphasising their relationship to the piano by playing a wayward piano note. The stools play sounds on a continuous loop, echoing some of the sound present in the *Piano Cabinet*. It is my desire for the work that a participant sit and observe the objects around them, as I have often had to do as the cobbler and the tinker.

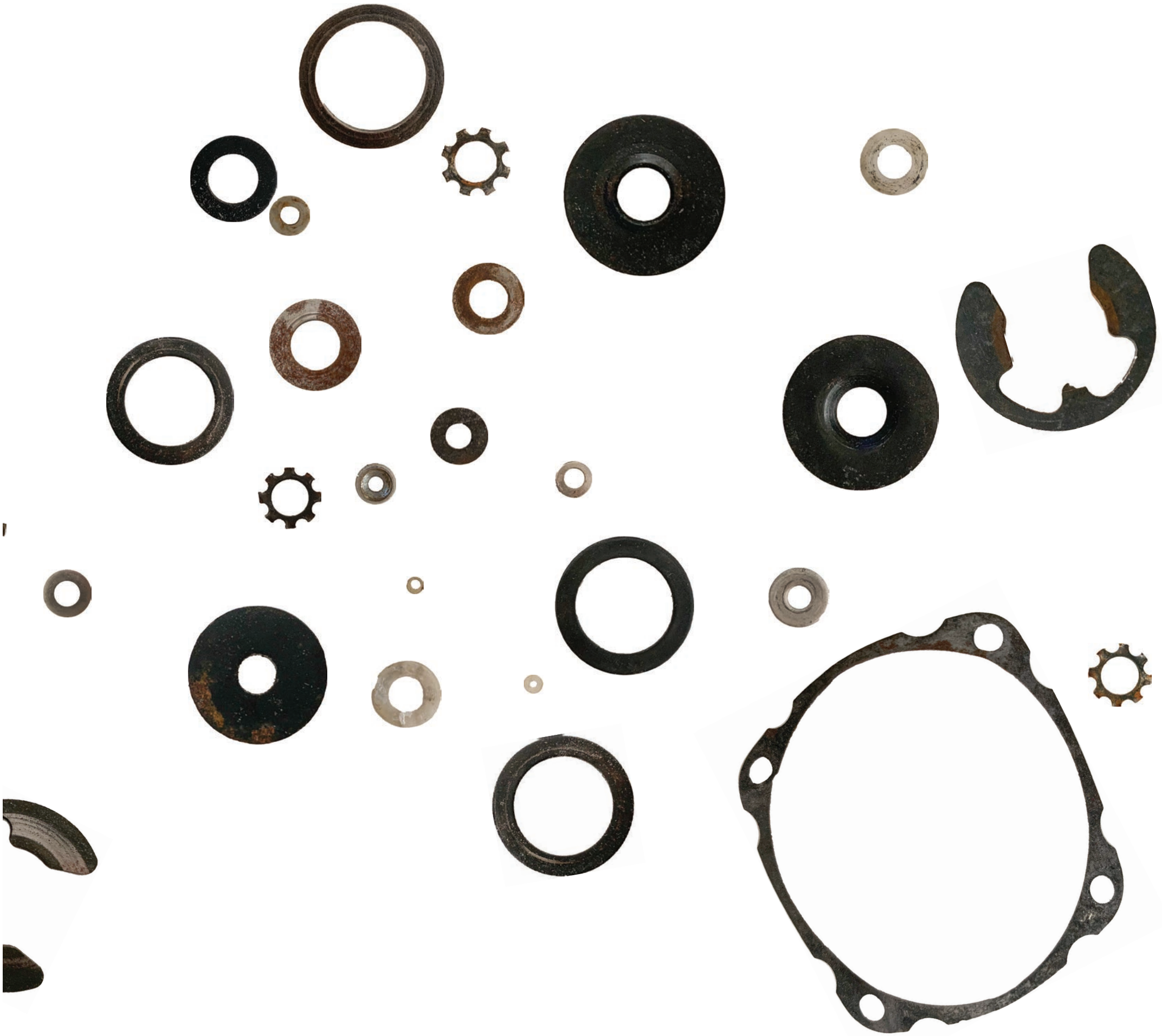
The stools are a palpable acknowledgement of the piano and its components' redundant functionality. Where the hammer mechanisms no longer fall rhythmically upon taut strings, the stool conveys the effort and sounds that might once have been. This transformation underlies the material rearrangement experienced by most of my objects. An object that is manufactured can be manipulated, and my objects frequently ended up as shards of components spread out across a studio table, where they were reassembled, cobbled together with glue, screws or wire or placed on four legs. Components were kept apart as individual elements or used in collaboration with other objects, resulting in a cobbled object that performs as a new iteration of their collective 'type', a 'generic' object accentuated to encourage active observation, an object that encourages looking.

Figure 2.9

Transforming

Over the course of this project my studio work yielded new and renewed objects in various forms. I perceive my work as an open statement of my intentions and, by exhibiting it as I have, I invite viewers to experience my objects in memorable and meaningful ways. The significance of these objects-in-response, cobbled and tinkered and presented as a whole in an exhibition, is in the narratives and material characteristics they now embody. The lighting in my exhibition, for example, is an essential curatorial tool: bulbs and power cords are cobbled into objects, a source of enjoyment as I conceived of some objects functioning to reveal and conceal others.

When buttoning a shirt, we interact with the buttons as a 'type' of object but may only definitively consider the action of buttoning when a button sticks or does not fit (Connor, 2013: 41). The experiences orchestrated by the objects in my collection – only some of which are presented here – require the active presence of a viewer or user. While tinkering or cobbling, I often sat with the objects in the collection in an inexplicable exchange of silence, disturbed only perhaps by the repetitive sound of some unguarded component hitting the floor and rolling away. My arrangement of things throughout an exhibition space, unlike the padded reserve of the work-in-progress studio, had to convey their newfound identities. Presentation within the artificial environment of the exhibition space is considered important, as what is lit and what is left in shadow affects what is intended for close observation.



Objects and Display: Post-cobbling

The exhibition space is a warmly lit room in which I have attempted to arrange and highlight my various iterations of tinkering, cobbling, collecting and transforming. The work is comprised mainly of the objects and displays that I regard as 'post-cobbling', a state that follows acts of cobbling and is the result of a bricolage type of making, manifesting in the space as objects in their own right. Work in the exhibition space is in various forms and places: on the floor, on the wall, as framed prints and as objects, things in cabinets and objects-in-response, singular objects, objects in small piles, objects strewn along surfaces and sound pieces embedded throughout.

My intention for all the objects on display is that they be observed. In *Thames Dig*, Mark Dion places objects of little obvious value behind glass, inside drawers with polished handles and on shelves specifically made for them (1999). The objects Dion and his team pulled from the Thames River are similar to my own, discarded and generic. I have attempted to evoke some of the same characteristics of display that Dion achieved, the making of the *Piano Cabinet* as an object-in-response being one such attempt. In contrast to Dion's highly organised objects, the *Piano Cabinet's* things are in a considered form of disarray, with drawers ajar and objects spilling out. The apparent lack of order in the work is intentional, evoking the idea that objects may still orbit or drift away into other areas of the exhibition space. The chaos of my studio space is manifested in the cabinet's drawers, ideally prompting a viewer to imagine the places where my objects were collected, tinkered and transformed. Not unlike Dion's objects in the depths of the Thames, my objects hibernate in the partially illuminated recesses of the cabinet.

This project advocates that a stand-alone object may be worthy of 'active spectatorship' (Blacksell, 2013: 61), which is a characteristic and function of all my objects. The objects and objects-in-response on display are staged in such a way as to encourage observation and, post-cobbling, I want viewers to experience the lure that these objects are capable of. Hence the attempt to articulate various forms of display, of which the objects-in-response are key; the objects may be reached or heard or found. Objects-in-response are, in some cases, a solution to the problem of having to exhibit my objects. I had to make them accessible and observable and raise them, at the very least, slightly off the floor. The utility of display in the context of this research project is essentially what artist and author John Hunter (2018: 105) describes as handing it over 'to see what might come out of it. And that's the point of letting someone else have a go, isn't it?' Hunter is, in simple terms, making a point about handing over a set of guidelines (visual or textual), regardless of whether or not people adhere to them.

In a post-cobbled state, my objects and their renewed identities act as energy, fuelling the objects surrounding them, and are in turn energised with potential for the next iteration of their function and use. Fragments of a century-old piano can become animated by cobbling them together with the innards of a gramophone: as a pairing they make neither a piano nor a gramophone, but an entirely different 'type' – one in which they maintain the characteristics of their previous existences but embody the kinetics of their newfound performance. The arrangement of my objects clarifies the shift from object as idea to object as a thing that motivates viewers to look actively (Blacksell, 2013: 61).

The *Untitled Three (I, II, III)* are a series of objects-in-response initially made for the sake of displaying prints, but they have come to reflect some of the characteristics of Joseph Cornell's *Bird Boxes*. I have cobbled objects and light and shadow within the box-like recesses in each of the *Untitled Three,* not unlike Cornell's collected and assembled birds, carefully placed in the recess of a boxed frame. The *Untitled Three* series was made from purchased materials and repurposed 6 mm square glass with 'cut-off' corners. Post-cobbling, each of the three objects-in-response is illuminated with warm white LEDs, which accentuate shadows and emphasise the singular object presented with each work in the series. The series is an example of how an object-in-response acts as a display while simultaneously being a work in and of itself.

The stand-alone (and perhaps largest) object-in-response on display is the Piano Cabinet, made entirely out of purchased materials. The cabinet acts as a focal point, standing in place of the piano. At first, I shied away from constructing a central focus for the exhibition, but I came to understand that, in keeping with the ideals of this project, the objects required an environment for preservation and safety that might encourage interaction. Unlike the *Nesting Bookcase*, the *Piano Cabinet* cannot fold, nor is it easily handled (Newman, 1999: 218). Even in this unmoving state, however, it has the capacity to reveal and conceal – to open and close. A sequence of drawers mimic the core interactive areas of the piano, and the 'back' of the piano is left open so that drawers appear as slots that can be peered into, revealing objects in different shades of light and dark.

The Work

Examples of Transformed Objects

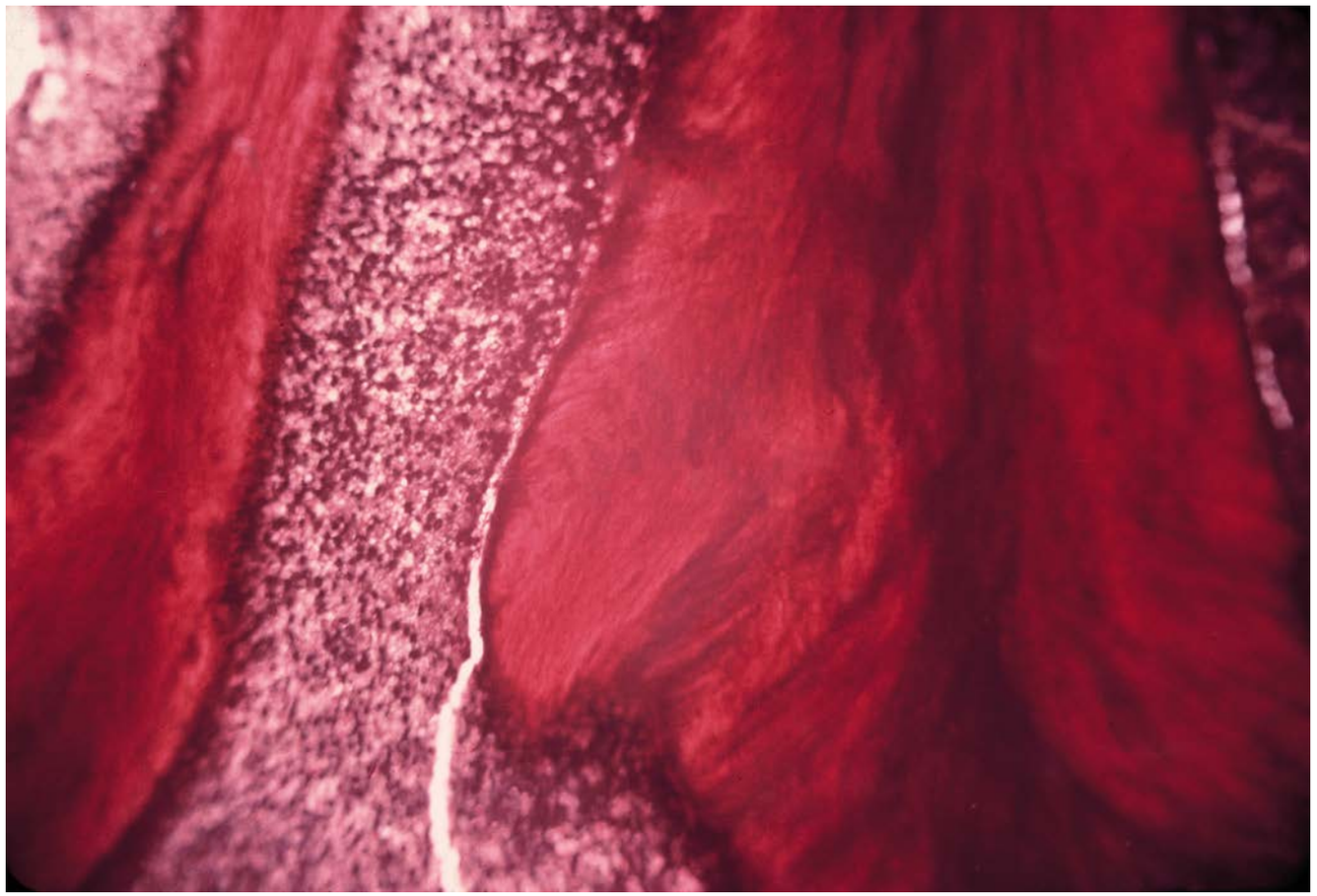
Shell of Butternut

Kodachrome slides are 35 mm film slides, typically used to project images, first developed in 1935 and discontinued in 2004 (Ithaca College, n.d.). Kodachrome slide projectors were the successor to the 1800s magic lantern (Ithaca College, n.d.). The *Shell of Butternut* slide was collected in 2019 at the Milnerton Market in Cape Town. I found it in a box full of unknown slides, which I later discovered to be various views of the Vatican City, including an image of the Sistine Chapel's famous ceiling. I found the contrast of the butternut shell with the various other slides' imagery compelling, and so singled out the butternut for presentation as a printed object (Figure 2.10). It is displayed as part of the *Untitled Three* series.

Size: 30 x 30 mm

Materials: cardboard, 35 mm film.

Figure 2.10



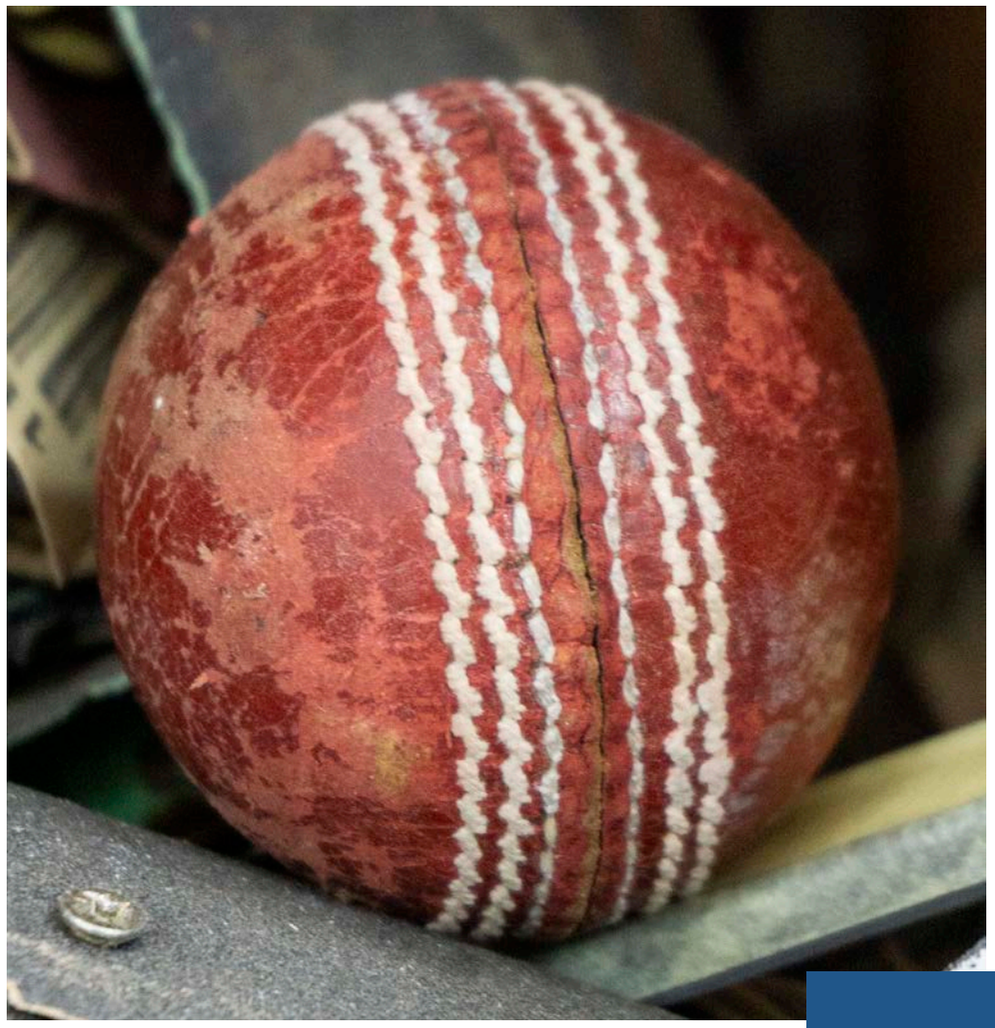
Cricket Ball

I purchased this cricket ball from a vendor at the Milnerton Market for R10 on a Saturday in early 2018. It was put out for purchase in a box filled with other haggard-looking sports balls, the red, green and white types used for tennis and hockey, brittle and peeling from use. I was told they had come from one of the local boys' schools, presumably to be replaced by others in better condition. I cannot account for why I reached for this particular ball, as I had held and tossed a few of the others before I chose this one. The torn weathering of the ball's surface felt comfortable in my hands, and its appearance did not put me off as I had no intention of using it for cricket. Since acquiring it, I have counted and recounted the stitches that divide the ball's surface innumerable times, as a nervous consequence of repetitively running my thumb along its surface. This ritual use of the ball manifested on a long flight, and though I cannot recall why I had it in my bag, it was a soothing point of focus. I still do not know how many stitches it has, though. It is unusual in my collection in that my interactions with it are older and methodical and are more specifically linked to particular places and time – planes and airports, for example. The ball was transformed from the moment I purchased it, as the knowledge that I would never play a game of cricket with it eradicated any assumptions about its functionality and performance. This, and an acknowledgment of my repetitive use of it when anxious, has shifted my perception of it as an object so that I barely regard it as a ball any more (Figure 2.11).

Size: 71 x 72 mm

Materials: cork, string and leather.

Figure 2.11



Untitled Three (I, II, III)

I collected three panes of 6mm-thick glass at some stage in 2019, which completed the works that house printed interpretations of three collected objects. The objects stand 900 mm from the floor (the standard height of a table) and are easy to peer into. An object placed on top of a square signals the dual functionality of display (Figure 2.12).

Size: 525 x 525 x 900 mm

Materials: prime maple, oil and shellac finish, screws, glue, paper.

Figure 2.12

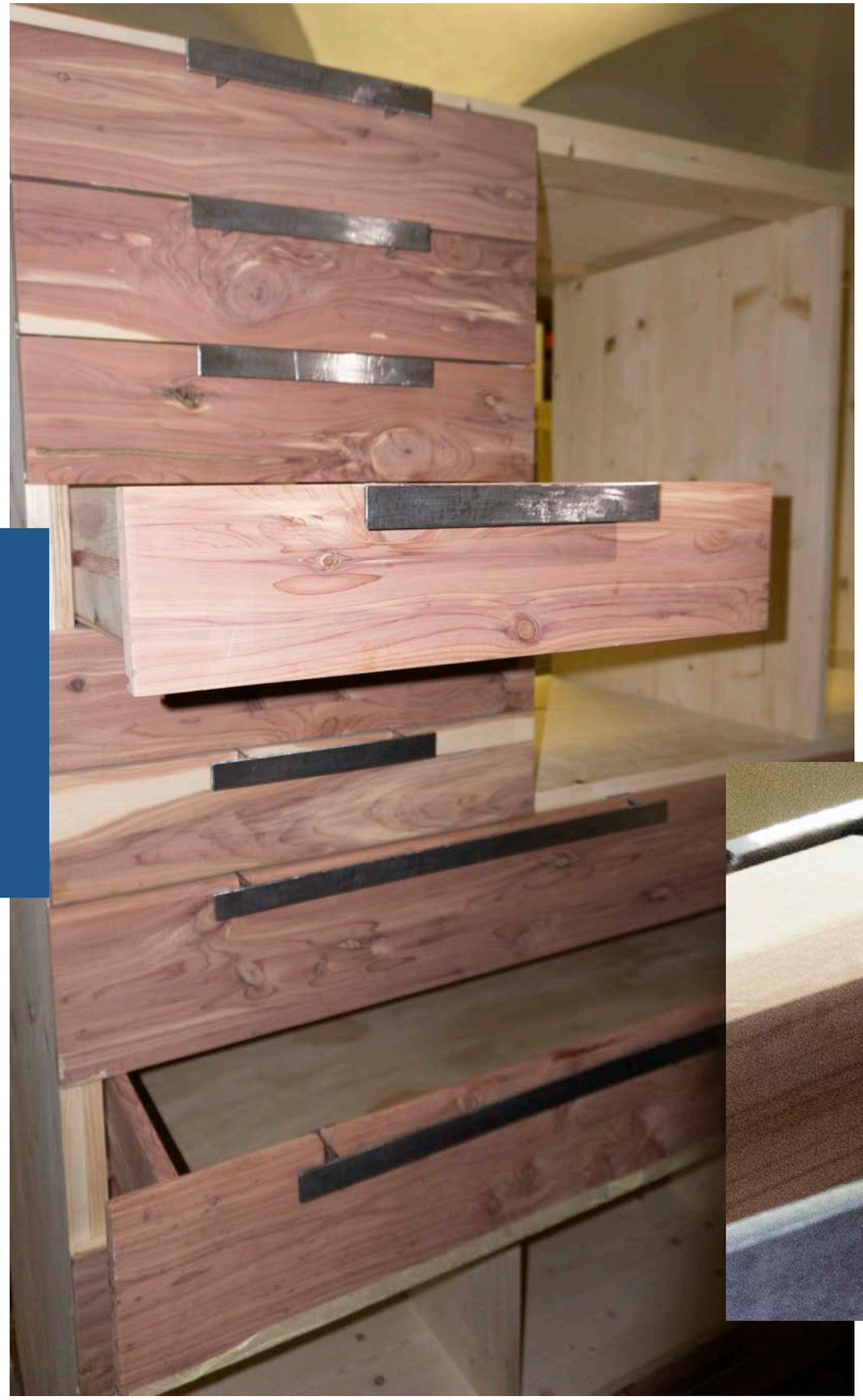
Piano Cabinet

Made in response to a piano encountered in lockdown, the *Piano Cabinet* evokes some of the qualities inherent in an upright piano. Three compartments signal the 'upright' and three drawers at the bottom suggest pedals and bring a symmetry to the work; various open cavities in the front and back suggest the traditional gaps in pianos through which sound can escape. Three long drawers signify the area most interacted with and easily reached, the piano's keys and lid. The Piano Cabinet is created from materials specifically chosen to mimic the qualities of the instrument, as well as to identify the cabinet as a place of preservation.

For example, spruce is commonly used in pianos for its ability to resonate sound, and aromatic cedar is used for its preservative characteristics, which are similar to those of camphor. While on display, the cabinet contains various objects of a variety of material qualities (Figure 2.13).

Size: 1905 x 1630 x 674 mm

Materials: spruce, aromatic cedar, brass-coated mild steel, 6 mm plywood, screws, glue and shellac with oiled finish.



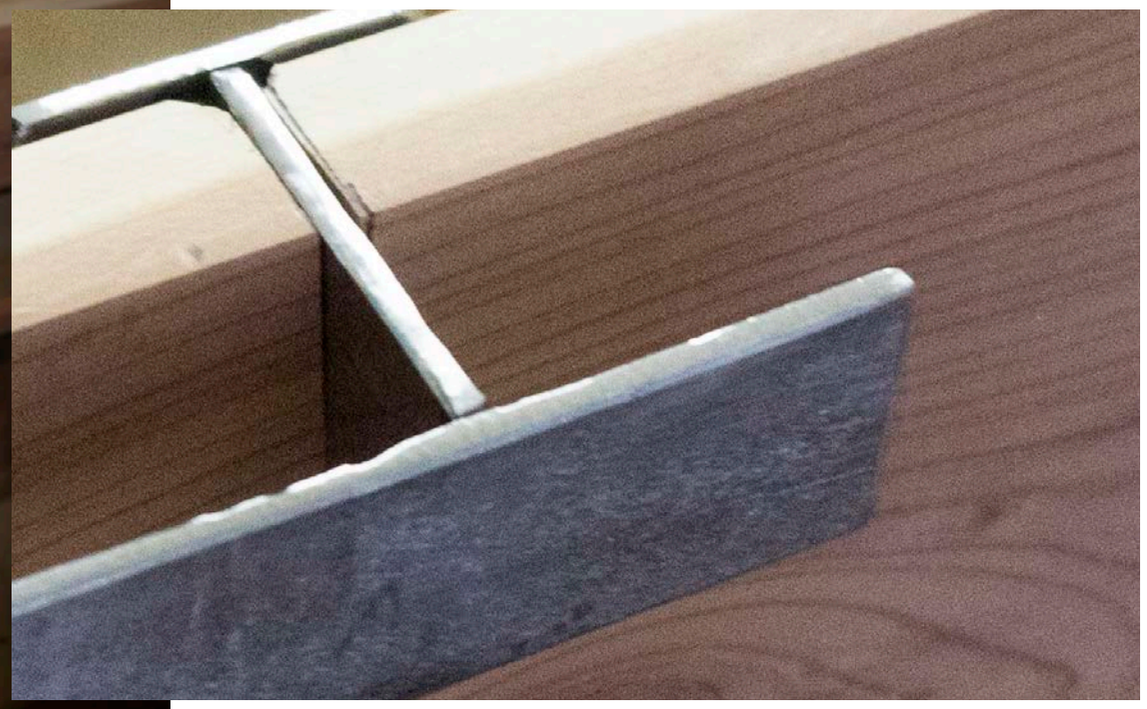


Figure 2.13

Five Stools

These objects play fragments of the sounds I collected when separated from my collection and embody the hidden potential of unused or overlooked objects to resonate in a sensory experience. The stools also play piano notes I recorded during lockdown as a homage to the piano that is now silent but that acted as a catalyst for many of my objects-in-response. I made the stools with a specific function in mind, which at its core is that they should appear sit-on-able (Figure 2.9).

Size: 360 x 360 x 500 mm

Materials: maple, cotton wood, Spanish cedar, blackwood, cedar, bull denim, mp3 decoders, wires, amplifiers, speakers, springs, glue, 22 mm plywood, glue, oiled shellac finish and sounds.

Figure 2.14

Metronome

Rotating on a gramophone's mechanism and teetering on three flexing legs, the work is a series of piano hammers secured to a central shaft. The piano hammers are made of beech, pine and Oregon pine and varying colours and consistencies of wool felt and shaved leather. Lit in a concentrated warm light, the work casts its shadow across a wall, turning animatedly until the energy manually cranked into the mechanism runs out (Figure 2.14). When still, the work looms like a machine and is reminiscent of Simon Schaffer's Victorian-era mechanical monsters (Educate Learning, 2018).

Size: 1482 x 830 x 400 mm

Materials: curly maple, maple, imbuia, pine, shellac and oil finish, gramophone mechanism, 5 mm threaded rod, epoxy, glue, screws and piano hammers with piano wire.

Figure 2.14

Walking

With tilting legs and heads frozen in motion, these objects light up in response to sounds above the conversational level of 60 db. The light fixtures are cobbled from parts of a gas geyser and are paired with wooden legs. My intention for the work is that they should appear to be roaming the exhibition space, observing objects, peering into drawers and reacting to sounds made by visitors and objects alike (Figure 2.15).

Size: 1105 x 210 x 200 mm

Materials: Oregon pine, walnut, cottonwood, shellac and oil finish, cable, light bulb and fitting, aluminium, varnished mild steel, nuts and bolts.

Figure 2.15

General Electric Horn

Derived from the same gramophone as *Metronome*, this work is a cobbled blend of a bootleg His Master's Voice brass horn, a General Electric lathe motor and a carved wooden form held upright by a geared shaft, wire and a champagne cork. I found satisfaction in joining materials that represented differentiating densities, functions and weights. The horn produces the sound of a lone cricket creaking, as though it were generated from or stuck somewhere in the internal mechanisms of the motor (Figure 2.16).

Size: approximately 920 x 440 x 500 mm

Materials: steel, electric motor, brass, maple, shellac and oil finish, screws, speaker, sound, amplifier, champagne cork, brass wire, piano wire.

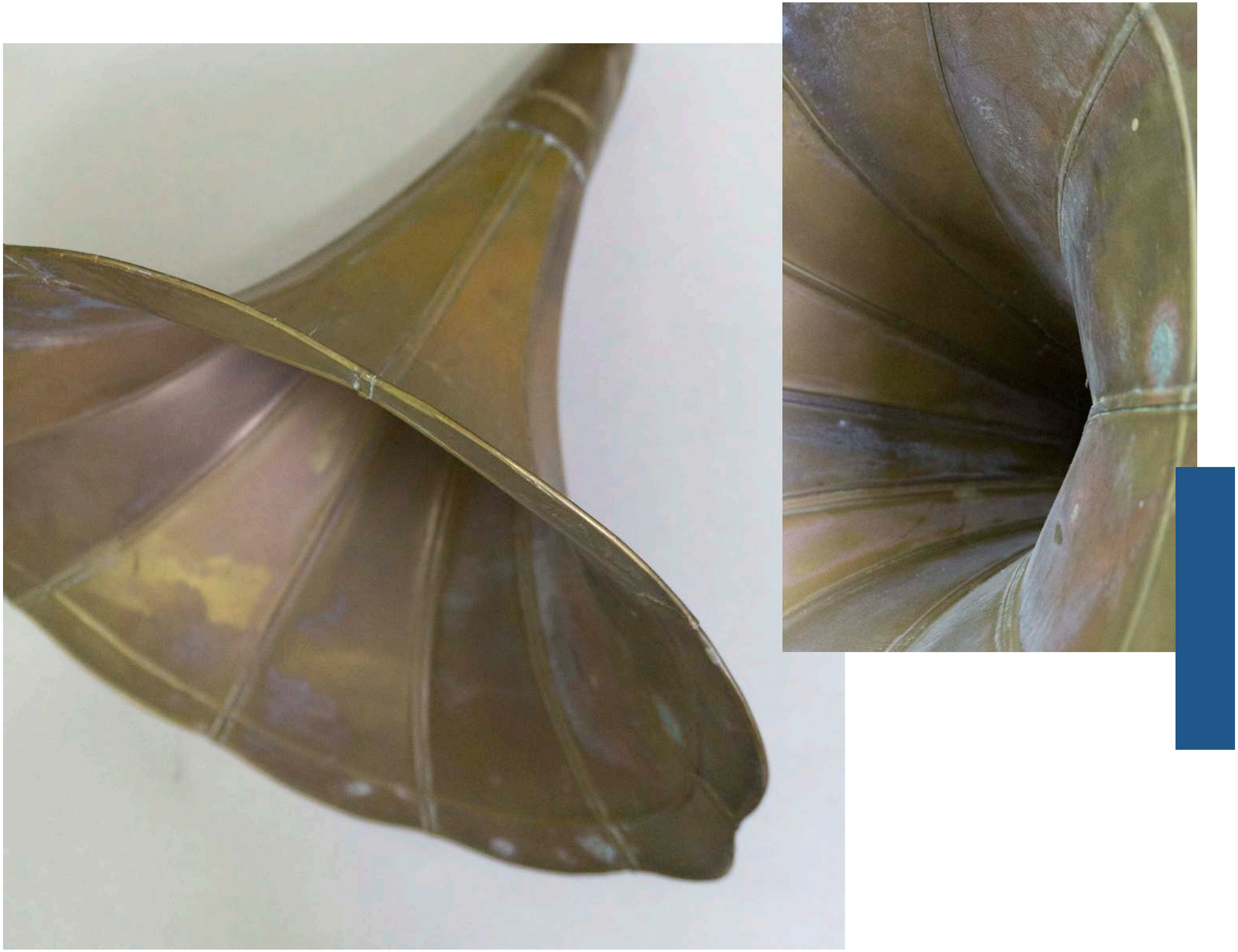
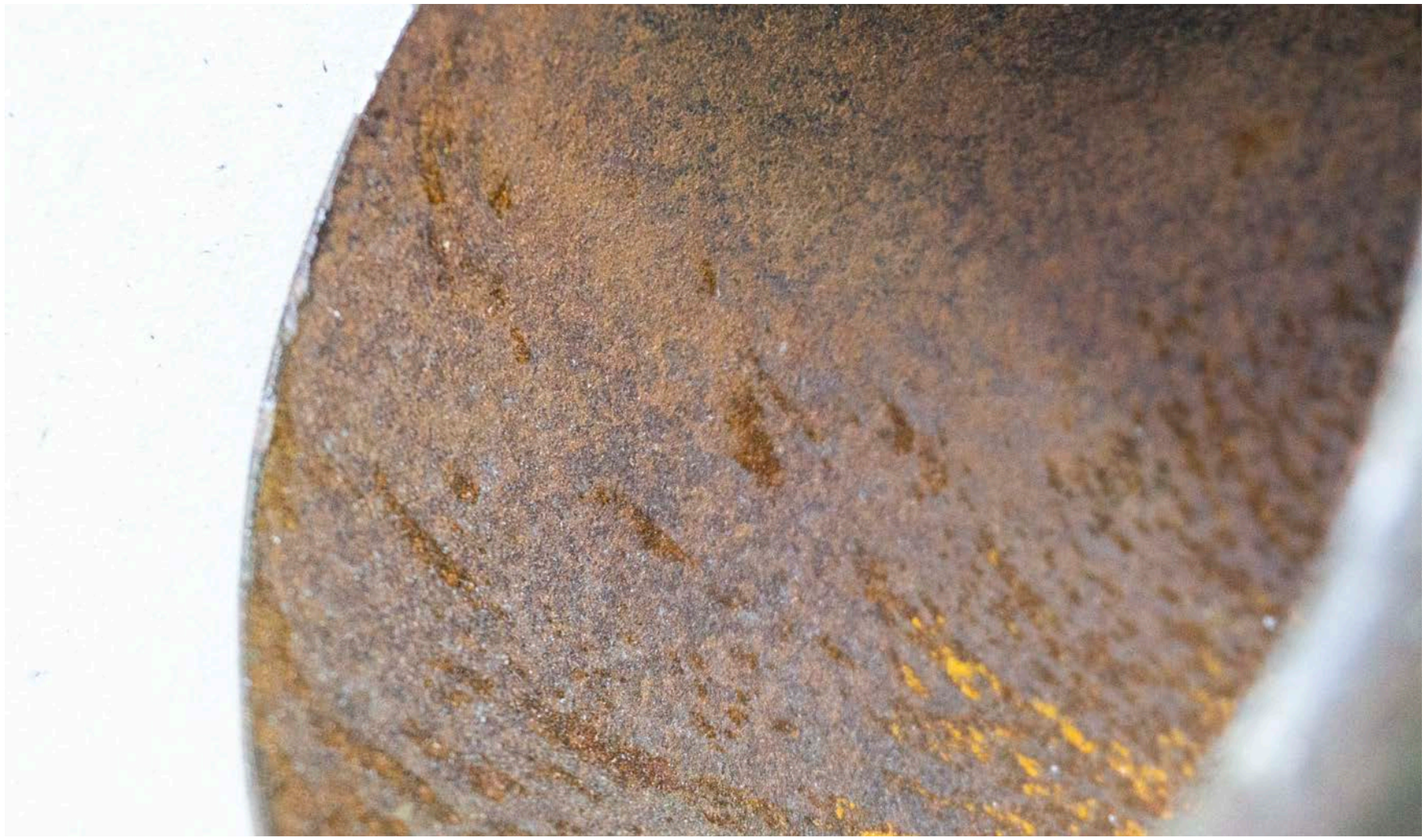


Figure 2.16



Pipe

Pipe arose from interactions between materials in the studio, specifically an unintentional and convenient integration of objects at the beginning of this project. The final object is focussed on the steel pipe but is comprised of a number of cobbled-together objects that complement each other on display. The steel pipe is cushioned in the soft circular recess of a single earmuff, the faux leather compressed under its weight and ideally shaped to hold the pipe aloft and upright. Placed on two plastic milk crates, the work is a culmination of materials and demonstrates how functionality can shift in the studio and by display in the exhibition. When struck with a knuckle, the pipe on its own produces an approximate E note. The pipe reflects light as a consequence of my having sanded, polished and lacquered its outer metal surface while tinkering (Figure 2.5).

Size: 750 x 300 x 450 mm

Materials: steel, plastic, unknown liquid, faux leather, lacquer.

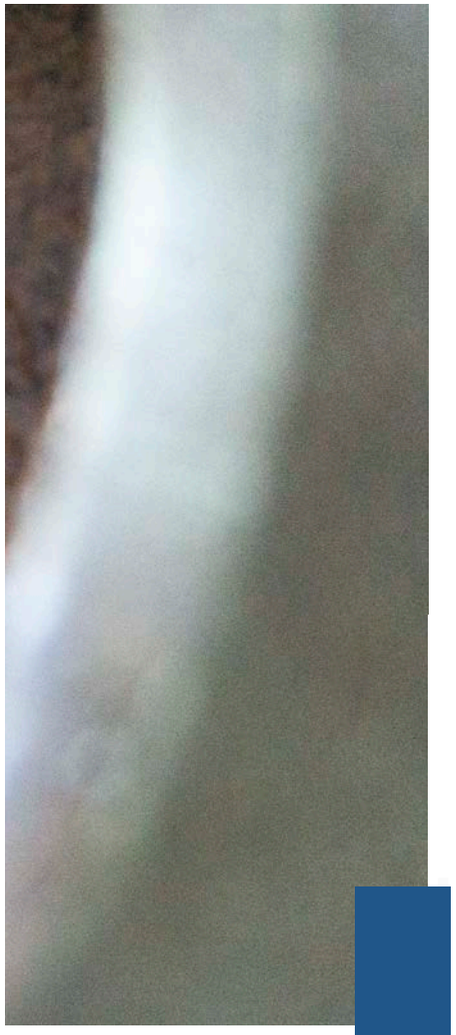


Figure 2.5

Closing

My intentions for this project were to generate work from my collection of discarded things, and to present them in an exhibition space having transformed them in various ways. As the transformer, my role and participation with the objects manifested new things in varying states of being. Objects-in-response, not initially planned, became an important response to my collection when separated over a long period of Covid isolation. The objects laid out in the exhibition indicate their function, just as they do the circumstances in which they were made. Cobbled objects have the benefit of reading as such, their contrasting materials fused together by screws or glue. Tinkered objects are singular examples of their type, distributed throughout the *Piano Cabinet* or along the floor or in *Untitled Three*. A tinkered object is a part, once an essential component of the function of a more component-dense object, now represented alone or as part of a cobbled thing.

At the close of this project, the collection was no longer simply a collection of discarded objects. Parallel to my new objects, it transformed into a collection of tinkered, cobbled, and transformed things. Physical objects in the exhibition space are accompanied by representations in paint or shadow, wraithlike and tinkered to the point of being only the impression of a thing. I have attempted to create a space in which the visitor feels invited to observe the objects and consider how they themselves might have tinkered or cobbled, and to consider the possibilities still present within in the object.

This project began with spirited intentions of generating things that might evoke delight, so that a viewer would not 'shun' the generic object but approach and dwell upon it. My objects-in-response are, in their most ideal form, imaginative and perhaps a little foreboding. They signify a necessary shift, however, and put the objects of my collection within reach of a viewer for whom they are, hopefully, new and unexplored.

My studio became an essential component in the course of this project, and my separation from the collection in the studio – a forced hibernation of sorts – propelled into being many of the objects presented in this project. Objects-in-response would not exist if not for the clarity occasioned by being away from the uninhibited freedoms of the campus studio and the distinct contrast of working from a home-based space. When working from home, I felt observed, akin to how I myself observed my objects, and I felt that my private, studio-based habits and the roles I had taken to playing had become compromised. I could not tinker, as it would have made a mess, and I could not cobble from the collection, as it was locked away in a different city.

In the exhibition space, objects are afforded opportunities to orbit in a way that invites a visitor to imagine things doing so for themselves. It is an activity I enacted on my own in the studio, then brought into the exhibition space and put on display. Objects distributed throughout the cabinet, partially illuminated

in some cases, are hibernating – a little more effort is required with hibernating things, as a visitor must peer inside or shift their line of sight by bending down to observe them.

This project has contended with a multitude of uncontrollable circumstances, and in retrospect I can see that this has been beneficial. My collection is a summation of all its parts and speaks to the effectiveness of the studio as a site of production, and to the potential of any one object to transform into something else entirely. Function and identity are cornerstones of the work, and it is my hope that this project will function as an indication of the value in *seeing* ordinary things and the opportunities we lose when we habitually discard them.

Things I now know:

That things managed to infiltrate the wells of memory most individuals carry with them.

Things may take up residence in unexpected places.

Things are subject to the laws of entropy.

The one unstoppable force in this universe is decay.

It has no reach in drawers.

Things are packed away, recycled, stored, gifted or lost.

These few things may linger in the realms all lost things go to.

The place of left-footed socks and 3 mm screws.

Figures and References

Figures

1.1 Karsten Bott's *One of Each*, 1998.
MoMa, PS1 Archives II.

1.2 Mark Dion's *Tate Thames Dig*, 1999.
Private collection.

1.3 Joseph Cornell's Bird Boxes, 1949. *Untitled (Cockatoo with Watch Faces).*
The Lindy and Edwin Bergman Collection.

1.4 Roman Stanczak's *Flight*, 2019.
Polish Pavilion, Venice Biennale: *May You Live in Interesting Times.*

1.5 Joseph Kosuth's *The Play of the Unmentionable,* 1990.
Brooklyn Museum of Art.

1.6 Nuria Fuster's *Esculpidoras II (Sculptresses II)*, 2012.
From the series "Accidentes" (Accidents), 2011 – . Galeria Marta Cervera.

1.7 Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *No. 1, Robots,* 2007.
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1.8 Phillipe Parreno, *Untitled Solo Exhibition*, 2019.
Gropius Bau.

1.9 Joe Scanlan's *Nesting Bookcase*, 1994 and 1995.
Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

2.1 Washers: shapely and round

2.2 Bio-hazard tape

2.3 *Untitled I: Shell of Butternut*, 2020 - 2021

2.4 Kitemaster plug

2.5 *Pipe* , 2020

2.6 Piano pieces

2.7 Patinaed geyser pipes

2.8 Yellowed electronics

2.9 *Five Stools*, 2021

2.10 *Shell of Butternut*, 2021

2.11 *Cricket Ball*, 2019 -

2.12 *Untiltled Three: I, II, III*, 2021

2.13 *Piano Cabinet*, 2021

2.14 *Metronome*, 2020 - 2021

2.15 Walking, 2020 - 2021

2.16 *General Electric Horn*, 2021

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