

## AN ART HISTORIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Richard Denner, aka Jampa Dorje, works with a variety of diverse media, yet traced throughout his oeuvre is the desire to identify a transcendent, harmonious experience underlying a fragmented, often brutal reality. Perhaps this is most present in his mixed media artworks that use appropriated materials taken from everyday surroundings. Beneath the literal associations of these found objects are subtle references to literary sources, art history, philosophical queries, and Buddhist teachings. These works contain unintentional and surprising connections that arise and are given form as the artist layers, alters, and manipulates the dense assemblages. Mixing disparate objects produces remarkable analogies. These materials, detached from their common purpose, are now free to signify on multiple levels. By employing a poetic language, Denner/Dorje creates compositions that establish a space in which one can be attuned to the present moment and the fluctuations of time and meaning. A spiritual world meets a stark reality in these works as past and present coalesce.

Dr. Lu Auz Memphis College of Art

Drawing inspiration from his experiences as a poet-monk, his travels zigzagging across the American landscape and the rich conversations that arose in each locale, Jampa Dorje created a body of work that ranges from the fragile and ephemeral to the rugged and enduring. These assemblage sculptures recall the Neo-Dada combines of Robert Rauschenberg as well as the funk art of Bruce Conner. Entering into each new environment, Dorje collects life's detritus and fragments of the site. These humble, broken objects are then later imaginatively reworked to draw the beautiful and brutal closer together in an improvised and spontaneous creative moment. These works are then left in the original environment – hung on a fence, leaned against a shack, lying in a field – and the elements of nature are allowed to leave their final signature.

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## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Richard Denner

I move objects around until things "fall into place." I like there to be a fit, and I try to interlock the shapes of the objects to give structure to the piece—an architecture of mind—keeping nails, glue, wire, staples, screws, welding to a minimum. I bring disparate objects together—eggshell Styrofoam, curtain lace, blurry photos and plastic water pipe—hoping for a most fortunate accident of composition. Look for nothing behind the junk.

Although there are examples of combining found objects and of pasting together paper images in the folk art of the 19th century, as well some mixed media in the early work of Picasso, it is Kurt Schwitters, a German artist of the 1920s who is considered the father of collage. He created what are known as "Mertz," after finding a scrap of newspaper torn from the word "commertz." The idea that this lowly fragment of commerce could be recycled into the economy intrigued him. That which is rejected, ignored, cast aside, is still a part of the system, and the artist threads it back into the fabric of society. This art was considered decadent, meaningless by the Third Reich, so Schwitters's work was burned, and he had to flee to America.

I am not a trained artist. I took printmaking and a class in drawing from Terrance Choy at the University of Alaska in the early 1970s. Mainly, I have hung out with artists that eat, drink and dream art, and I've watched them work and sat in cafes and walked the streets, talking with them. I go to museums and galleries and look at the pictures. I was 19 when I went to my first art show at the San Francisco Modern Museum of Art and saw Robert Motherwell's blue collages of Gualois cigarette wrappers mixed with paint. I saw an exhibit of Brancusi and Giacometti sculptures and a retrospective of Kandinsky paintings. All of these exhibits strongly affected me—the tearingness of collage in the work of Motherwell, the solid presence of the Brancusis, the organic economy of the Giacomettis, the ethereal precision of the Kandinskys.

Later, other famous and not so famous artists would influence me. Rauschenberg's combines reveal to me that materials are everywhere. Luis Garcia made me feel at home in the world of art, although I still strive to find the sense of alignment I feel in his work. Claude Smith manages to fuse music and painting. He thinks compositionally, and his intensity and passion are a continuing source of inspiration to me.

I have used the skills of a carpenter, a plumber, a printer, a painter—trades I work at and enjoy—to make my artworks. The best carpenter is the one who can disguise his errors. However, here I like to see the errors, the crustiness, the broken, bent, wrinkled, burnt, twisted materials, the wire, thread, nails, and the seams in the cut paper. I paint with junk, exploring space, positioning this "trash" to reveal hidden beauty.