



Photo: Raymond Graf - Insect Collection Case

Photo Credit: Laura Arrot Hartford

ReSOURCE

Artists who collect to create or inspire their work

Cressman Center for Visual Arts Gallery

Hite



Acknowledgements:

The artist-lenders to this exhibition are owed a profound level of gratitude. They include Don Baum, Raymond Graf, Niels Köhler, Kathleen Lolley, Rennie Sparks, Caroline Waite, and Chris Ware.

Roger Brown died in 1997, and Don Baum, now in his mid-eighties, is no longer active as an artist. For these reasons, we owe deep appreciation to those responsible in lending materials on their behalf. They include Lisa Stone, Director of the Roger Brown Study Collection (School of the Art Institute of Chicago); Carl Hammer, Owner, and Yolanda Jones, Gallery Manager, of the Carl Hammer Gallery (Chicago), who lent Baum's Art; Dan Cochrane, who purchased the remaining paint-by-numbers paintings Don Baum had collected; and Maria Baum, who helped facilitate the loans on behalf of her father.

I owe special thanks to Erin Fletcher, my curatorial assistant for the project, Dan Merrick, our preparatorial assistant, and Claudia Arzeno, Project Curator for the Roger Brown Study Collection—great work, everyone!!! All of them brought fresh perspectives and ideas to the project and tied together “loose ends” that

saved valuable time. Much thanks is also owed to Laura Arrot Hartford, who photographed key materials from some of the artists' collections for this catalog (you can look for her photo credit or for the highest-quality images). Finally, Jonathan Ratliff, Cressman Gallery Assistant, and Brad Meredith contributed at some very critical moments.

As always, institutions like the Hite Art Institute and the University of Louisville, represent the efforts of numerous people, past and present, staff, faculty, administration, and donors. I cannot mention them all. But, I would like to thank John P. Begley, Gallery Director; James Grubola, Department Chair; Ché Rhodes, Assistant Professor in Glass; and all the donors to The Cressman Center for the Visual Arts, most notably, Elizabeth and Frederick Cressman. Without them, the infrastructure needed to organize an exhibition like this would not exist.

Bruce Linn, Curator

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Cressman Center for Visual Arts Gallery
January 18 - February 16, 2008

Don Baum
Roger Brown
Raymond Graf
Niels Köhler
Kathleen Lolley
Rennie Sparks
Caroline Waite
Chris Ware

Curated by Bruce Linn
Erin Fletcher, Curatorial Assistant

Claudia Arzeno, Project Curator
Roger Brown Study Collection



Photo Credit: Laura Arnot Hartford

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Exhibition Checklist

ReSOURCE

Writers must read. Musicians listen. And artists must look. Yes, artists visit museums and galleries and leaf through exhibition catalogs and other art publications, but many also collect.

All of the works in this exhibition would be difficult to imagine without the artists first being informed by their habits of collecting, whether consciously or unconsciously. Sometimes, when handling items from the artists' collections in my role as the exhibition's curator, an uncanny feeling strikes me: I am suddenly "in the artist's shoes." Removing the images Niels Köhler clips from magazines and other sources for his photo collages from their package, for example, reveals more than a random group of images—I now have some of the "special ingredients" needed for his work.

Artists who collect to create or inspire their work

Examine the relationship these artists have with their collections and three themes emerge:

Collecting as a Rorschach Test:

Exploring the external world, by collecting, is, paradoxically, an act of self-discovery. Sifting and selecting from the external world of visual material becomes something like a Rorschach test and a vision quest. It is also a clear example of what all artists do: [They] take the "stuff" of the world and transform it into evidence, the "fingerprints," the expression, of a person.

Collecting as a "License to Look":

Collecting gives artists an opening to consider visual material beyond the cannon of art history and outside of the orthodoxies of the Art World or, even, of good taste. Other types of visual heritage and visual phenomena prompt these artists to see

possibilities that they may not be able to find in an art museum or gallery setting.

Exploring Variety within Parameters:

Owl figurines. Pet-food cans. Colored clothes buttons. Collecting these types of items, based on limited parameters, allows for an exploration of variation and for discoveries of patterns. Finding unifying visual elements, qualities, content, or themes that can then be expressed in a near endless variety of forms, is also pivotal in forming an artistic style or vision.

*Bruce Linn, Curator
January 2008*



Detail of Rennie Spark's pet-food-can collection

Photo Credit: Laura Arnot Hartford

Rennie Sparks

Initially, Rennie Sparks took great pleasure in building her collection of pet-food cans, which includes nearly 70 examples from around the world.

"I used to really have this obsessive can fetish and would stare at them all day long," she explains. Best known for her role as lyricist and performer in the gothic country band the Handsome Family, she would collect the cans during the band's concert tours across the United States, Europe, and points beyond.

More recently, Sparks has begun painting portraits of pets and other animals. She seeks to create in her portraits what she had seen in the cans: deliriously “happy” animals, images of naive animal bliss.

Currently, her obsession with her painting has eclipsed the original source of her passion: the cans. As she puts it, “Now that I’ve been painting, I don’t care all that much about the cans anymore, because I can make my own images.” Collecting and creation are often distinct paths to the same aesthetic destination.



Photo Credit: Rennie Sparks

Below is the direct “source” for the portrait of “Red,” a Polaroid photograph of the artist in childhood with her pet dog “Red,” circa 1973. She does not use the pet-food cans as direct sources for her paintings. But, both her collection and her paintings seem to satisfy the same aesthetic desire.



Red, 2007,
acrylic on canvas, 20 x 10 in.



Presidential Portrait, 1986, oil on canvas, 48 x 72" Courtesy of The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Brown family Photo Credit: William Bengtson

Roger Brown

When Roger Brown painted “Presidential Portrait” in 1986, the artist had already perceived a growing near-canonization of the then sitting president by his supporters. Born in Alabama and working in Chicago, Brown took a personal interest in the cultural landscape of the “fly-over states,” as the parts of the country not considered part of the East or West Coast establishment have been called.

One way he kept informed about American vernacular culture was by collecting a wide variety of objects it either produced or embraced. In this case, the campaign buttons and other patriotic paraphernalia Brown collected gave him ample models and a “visual vocabulary” to both choose and portray his subject.



By the time of his death in 1997, Roger Brown had enjoyed numerous achievements as an artist, including major retrospectives of his work mounted at the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts in 1980, and at The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., in 1987. But, he was also a prominent and influential collector. He acquired an extensive collection of “outsider art,” the work of untrained artists.

In his will, Brown left his collection to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The resulting organization, the Roger Brown Study Collection, is responsible for the Roger Brown section of this exhibition.

Inspired by comic books, folk art, and other forms of popular and vernacular culture, Brown approached these sources not with complete ironic detachment, but to help align his vision as an artist with more democratic cultural currents.



Roger Brown Study Collection, living room detail,
Reagan bedroom slippers pictured on the couch
Photo Credit: William Bengtson

Rhino Flyer, 1997
bronze, 24 x 23 x 18 in.



Photo Credit: John Lair

Raymond Graf

Raymond Graf is best known for his commissioned public works in bronze, which include life-size figures of Pee Wee Reese at Louisville's Slugger Field and Pat Day at Churchill Downs. But his personal work stands in remarkable contrast to the public commissions.

These smaller scale bronzes fuse a variety of forms together -animal, technological, and cultural -the culmination of an inspired romp through an encyclopedia of forms and imagery.

Detail of Raymond Graf's insect collection



Photo Credit: Laura Arrot Hartford

When he was a college student, Graf was torn between becoming a biologist or a sculptor.

He chose sculptor. But, his extensive collection, which features numerous biological specimens, including butterflies, beetles, animal trophies, and fossils, reveals that his interest in biology never really disappeared. Evolution has produced a vast and startling variety of life forms on the planet, which Graf uses as an indispensable visual resource.



Graf's studio with collected animal trophies and vintage prints

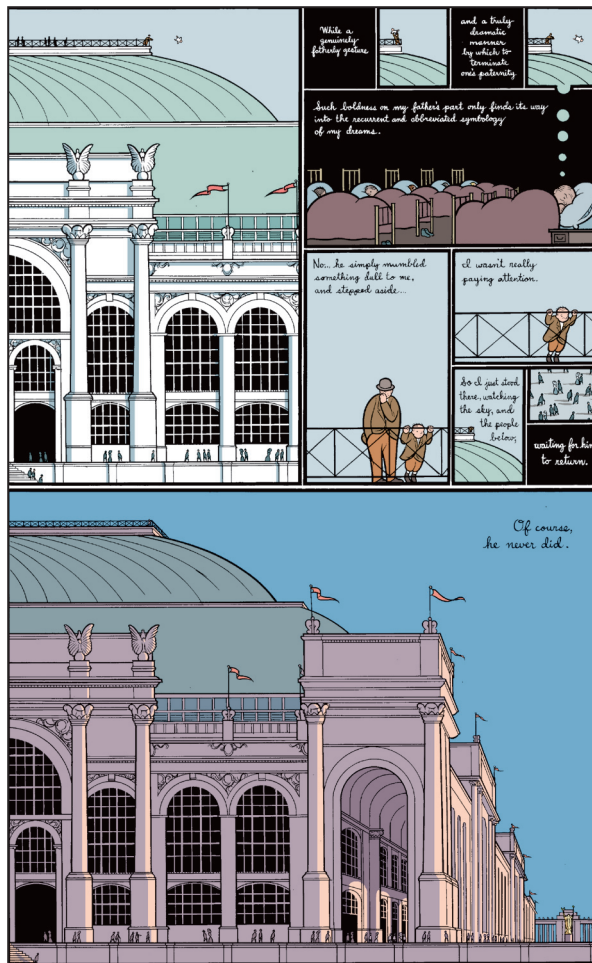
Photo Credit: Laura Arrot Hartford

Jimmy Corrigan World's Columbian Exposition, 1999,
page from the graphic novel Jimmy Corrigan: The
Smartest Kid on Earth (Pantheon, 2000)



**Manufacturer's Building (World's
Columbian Exposition) model from
Chris Ware's collection**

Photo Credit:
Laura Arrot Hartford



Chris Ware

In his collecting habits, Chris Ware is essentially a historian. The sole author, illustrator, and designer of the Acme Novelty Library, a visually rich and compelling series of comic books and a graphic novel, Ware is obsessed with much of the history and material culture of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This obsession led him to create, and publish, the "Ragtime Ephemeralist," a serious periodical about the material culture associated with Ragtime music.

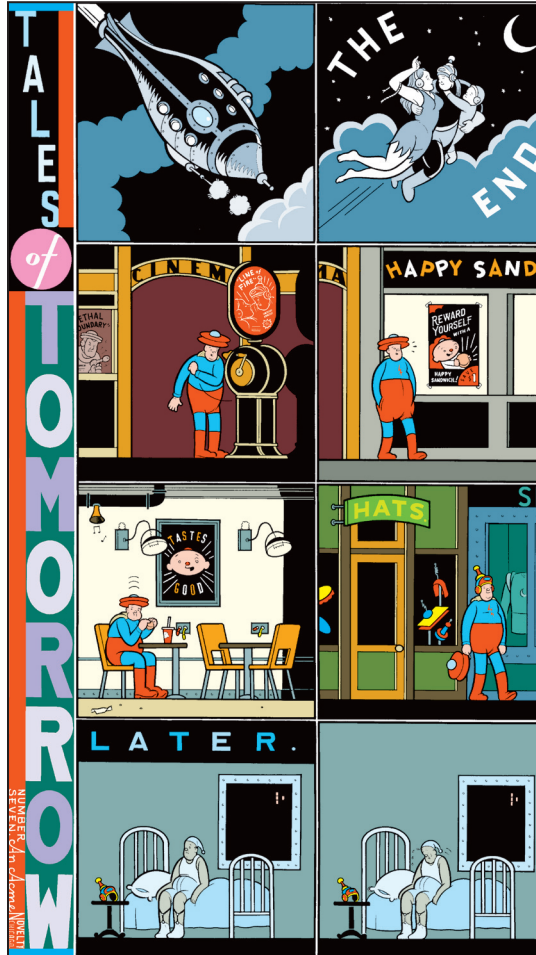
It also informs the central plotline in his critically acclaimed graphic novel, "Jimmy Corrigan: Smartest Kid on Earth," which takes place during the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (materials associated with the Exposition are part of Ware's collection).

His interest in the music, illustration, architecture, and design of this period is extensive and infused with admiration.

Ware is also curious about the antiquated visions of the future he finds in the science fiction materials he collects.

Not only does he satirize these grandiose and mistaken predictions of the past in his work, he seems to mock the state of contemporary life as a failure, since it falls far short of the utopian promise it once held.

Along with the “superhero,” the over-promising of “the future” is an element in many of Ware’s narratives that, by contrast, dwarfs his characters and defines them by their limitations.



Tales of Tomorrow, 1997,
page from the Acme Novelty Library, Book of Jokes –
Winter 2001-2 (Fantagraphics, 2001)



Buck Rogers toys from Ware’s collection
Photo Credit: Laura Arrot Hartford

Kathleen Lolley

Painter, animator, and graphic artist, Kathleen Lolley says she collects “things a grandmother would have”- mainly, owl, deer, and other figurines. But, she credits her library of books for the most direct inspirations in the studio. Her books include children’s books, illustrated folk-tales, and other mythic subjects.

She routinely collects tree branches and twigs, and their forms echo in the images of trees that often appear in her art.



Twigs, bottles displayed in the artist's home
Photo Credit: Laura Arrot Hartford



Books and owl figurines from Lolley's collection
Photo Credit: Laura Arrot Hartford

Lolley is interested in the rich, fantastic, and highly metaphoric imagery of children's literature, animated films, folk tales, etc. But, in her artwork, the devices they employ are used to explore the psychological dimensions of a complex world, viewed with maturity and few illusions.

It is fascinating that her collection of owl figurines with its whimsical and absurd character inspires artworks that place us in deeper, darker, and more powerful, creative waters.



Center of Attention, 2007, Acrylic on paper on board, 26 x 29 in.

Photo Credit: Kathleen Lolley



A wall display installed by the artist
(a collection of approximately
100 items-toys, prints etc.)
Photo Credit: Laura Arrot Hartford

Caroline Waite

Like an archeologist, Caroline Waite sifts through the remnants of material culture hoping to find the evidence of past life.

"I love the element of mystery surrounding old objects—the questions as to their meaning, their origin and age—in other words, their 'secret lives,'" she says.

But, she also seems to have an instinctive sense of how we use material culture, collectively, in a way that mirrors a significant artistic impulse, the desire we have to use objects as lasting reminders of ourselves.

For Waite, collecting and arranging a vast amount of small and ephemeral objects is central to her work as an artist. Some items are selected for color or pattern (buttons, cigarette lighters,

plastic parts, etc.). Others are collected more for their evocative and poetic qualities (doll heads, antique or exotic packages, etc.).



Bottle and jars with colored clothes buttons, doll hands, and toys

Photo Credit: Laura Arrot Hartford

Inspired by a long tradition of Victorian scrapbooks and grottos, the line between Waite's collection and her artwork is often blurred.



Cordelia's Shell Grotto, 2002

Matte-board construction with battery-powered lights, antique doll head, shells, sea glass, and beach debris, 18 1/2 x 15 1/2 x 3 3/4 in.

Photo Credit: Geoffery Carr

Don Baum

For his "Domus" series, Don Baum focused on the "house" as the basic sculptural form for his mixed media constructions. After using game-boards, driftwood, linoleum, and a variety of other materials, the artist, curator, and long-time fixture of the Chicago art scene, began extensively using second-hand, previously painted, paint-by-number paintings as his preferred building material. He cut them with a band saw and skillfully rearranged them.

Playing off of the patterns like an accomplished quilt-maker and juxtaposing the images with a knack for surreal visual-puns, Baum establishes a unique vision while employing a cultural artifact synonymous with a lack of creative expression (paint by numbers).



Art, 1986, mixed media, 24 x 19 x 26 in.

Courtesy of the Carl Hammer Gallery (Chicago)



Assorted paint-by-numbers paintings, formerly owned by Don Baum - Courtesy of Dan Cochrane Photo Credit: Laura Arrot Hartford

Niels Köhler

Niels Köhler collects the images we know well, the iconic photographs from news magazines, etc., that help us create the narrative of history.

He collects them, files them, and then recombines them in startling ways in his photo collages.

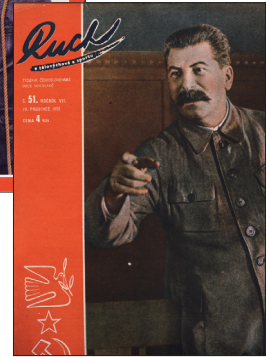
As a German who studied political science and now lives in the Czech Republic, Köhler's perspective on history is viewed in light of the authoritarian catastrophes of the Hitler's Third Reich and Communist oppression.

It is expressed with biting satire and with the belief that human hubris and folly are perennial and not just elements of the failures of the past.



On a Visit in the Gas Chamber: Arizona State Prison, 1999,
photo collage, 9 1/2 x 5 1/8 in.

Martin Luther Explains the Concept of Irreducible Complexity at the Creationist Congress at Worms: "Could all that have been Possible without His Fine-Tuning?!",
2007, photo collage, 6 1/4 x 16 1/4 in.



Magazine Images from the artist's collection
All images courtesy of the artist



Exhibition Checklist

Works by Don Baum

1. **Art**, 1986
mixed media, 24 x 19 x 26 in.
Courtesy of the Carl Hammer Gallery (Chicago)

Collection Items:

15 assorted paint-by-numbers paintings, formerly owned by Don Baum
Courtesy of Dan Cochrane

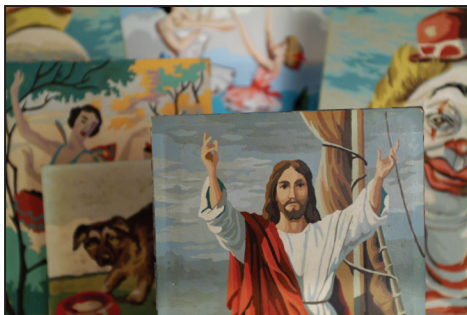


Photo Credit: Laura Arrot Hartford

Works by Roger Brown

1. **Presidential Portrait**, 1986
oil on canvas, 48 x 72 in.

Collection Items:



Ronald & Nancy Reagan bedroom slippers, campaign buttons, assorted patriotic & campaign memorabilia, toys, & models.

Work & collection items courtesy of the Roger Brown Study Collection, School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Selections made by Claudia Arzeno, Project Curator, Roger Brown Study Collection

Photo Credit: Claudia Arzeno

Works by Raymond Graf

1. **Rhino Flyer**, 1997
bronze, 24 x 23 x 18 in.



Photo Credit: John Lair

2. **Candy Dish**, 1997
bronze, 36 x 38 1/2 x 8 in.
3. **Hand of God**, 1997
bronze, 24 1/4 x 15 x 10 in.

Collection Items:

Five insect-collection boxes (beetles, butterflies, etc.), six trophy heads (Longhorn Steer, Caribou, Impala, White Tale Doe, Lichtenstein's Hartebeest, Fallow Deer), four sets of antlers (Ibex, Red Deer, Oryx), two animal skulls (Cape Buffalo, Kudu), a human skeleton ("Rosalie"), four fish trophies (Hammerhead Shark, Dolphin Fish, Sailfish, Barracuda), a trophy duck, & a framed Masonic print

Work & collection items courtesy of the artist

Works by Niels Köhler

1. **On a Visit in the Gas Chamber: Arizona State Prison**, 1999
photo collage, 9 1/2 x 5 1/8 in.
2. **Ecce Homo**, 2000
photo collage, 6 3/4 x 4 1/2 in.

3. **Martin Luther Explains the Concept of Irreducible Complexity at the Creationist Congress at Worms: "Could all that have been Possible without His Fine-Tuning?!"**, 2007, photo collage, 6 1/4 x 16 1/4 in.

Collection Items:

Assorted clippings from news magazines, calendars, & other printed material

Work, collection items and photos courtesy of the artist



Works by Kathleen Lolley

1. **Center of Attention**, 2007
acrylic on paper on board, 26 x 29 in.

Collection Items:

21 books (children's books, illustrated folk-tales, etc.), 28 owl figurines, a model of a sailing ship, a lamp with leaf-pattern decoration, a yard gnome, plaques & framed crafts with deer or woodland animal imagery, a "Care Bears" lunchbox, "Care Bears" figurines, assorted branches, miscellaneous figurines, bottles, & wooden boxes

Work & collection items courtesy of the artist



Photo Credit: Laura Arrot Hartford

Works by Rennie Sparks

1. **Red**, 2007
acrylic on canvas,
20 x 10 in.

Collection Items:
63 pet-food cans,
collected from
around the world

*Work & collection
items courtesy of the
artist.*
Photo Credit:
Laura Arrot Hartford



Works by Caroline Waite:

1. **Where White Once Was**, 2005
matte-board construction, paper, gouache paint, antique/
vintage items including leather glove, 1800s paper
advertisements, 1940s British cigarette cards, sand dollars,
buttons, 31 1/4" x 38 1/4" x 1 3/4"



"Where White Once Was," [Detail] Photo Credit: Geoffrey Carr

2. **Cordelia's Shell Grotto**, 2002
matte-board construction with battery-powered lights, antique
doll head, shells, sea glass, beach debris,
18 1/2 x 15 1/2 x 3 3/4 in.

Collection Items:

Eight jars & one bottle filled with assorted items (1., plastic toys, 2., doll
hands, 3., plastic & rubber item, 4., warm-colored buttons, 5., plastic
toy people, 6., small doll heads with large doll head on top, 7., neutral-
colored buttons, 8., cigarette lighters, 9., rubber toys), & a wall display
(a collection of approximately 100 items—toys, prints etc.)

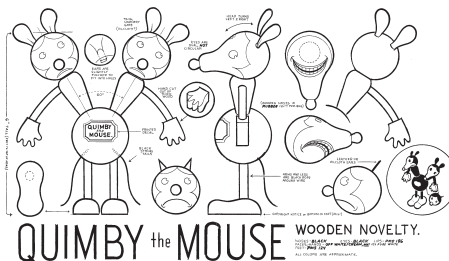
Work & collection items courtesy of the artist

Works by Chris Ware

1. **Tales of Tomorrow**, 1997
ink on illustration board, 26 5/8 x 16 in.
2. **Jimmy Corrigan World's Columbian Exposition**, 1999,
ink on illustration board, 23 3/4 x 15 in.
3. **Rocket Sam Boxing Robot**, 1996
ink on illustration board, 23 3/8 x 15 in.
4. **Quimby the Mouse**, 2003
ink on illustration board, 20 x 29 1/8 in.
5. **The ACME Novelty Library #15 (Cover)**, 2001,
ink on illustration board, 28 3/4 x 35 3/4 in.
6. **Plan for "Quimby the Mouse" wooden doll**, 2003
ink on illustration board, 9 x 13 3/4 in.
7. **Plan for "Jimmy Corrigan" tin toy (unproduced)**, 2002
ink on illustration board, 10 1/4 x 14 in.

Published & other Works Designed by the Artist:

A complete set of the **"ACME Novelty Library"** comic books, a **"Quimby the
Mouse" wooden doll**, & various promotional items for the **"Acme Novelty
Library"**



Collection Objects:

Toy Buck Rogers tin rocket ship, Buck Rogers cereal premium,
various Buck Rogers punch-out play pieces, 1950s "Trip to Mars"
pop-up book, three "Science Wonder Stories" magazines, two
World's Columbian Exposition folio books, a Manufacturer's Build-
ing (World's Columbian Exposition) model,



Photo Credit: Laura Arrot Hartford

a Mirroscope, a Cinematograph & slides, an Ignatz wooden doll,
a Felix Praxinoscope card, an 1880s paper
diorama book, an 1880s magnetic glass & cardboard monkey
fortune teller, & a cardboard clown face fortune teller.

Work & collection items courtesy of the artist.



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