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## Galleries

### No Dada's Girl

By Ferdinand Protzman  
Special to The Washington Post

Maureen Jordan Tierney was wandering through the flea market on Wisconsin Avenue in Georgetown one Sunday when she saw a piano keyboard for sale. The ivory was badly worn and yellowed with age. Stripped from the instrument, the keys seemed singularly useless, the sort of junk no one in his right mind would buy, just musical detritus destined for the dump.

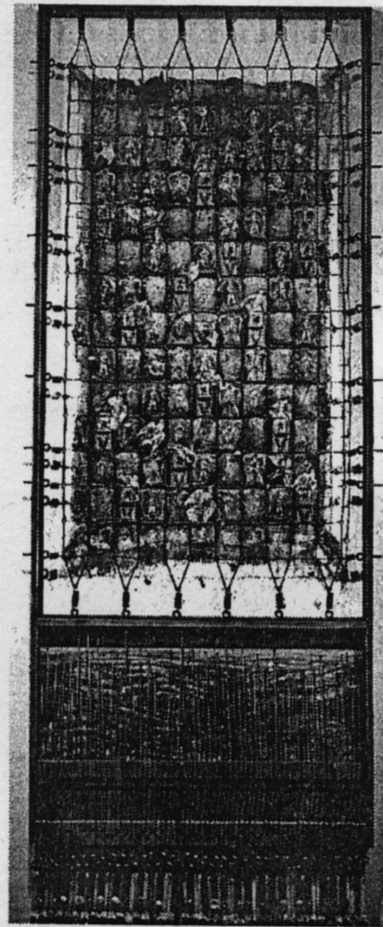
Tierney, clearly a person in touch with the left side of her brain, not only bought it but made it part of a remarkable piece of art.

"When I saw the keyboard, it immediately suggested to me a giant structure for making choices," says Tierney, a 33-year-old Washington-based artist whose new paintings and assemblages are on display in a visually arresting and intellectually stimulating exhibition at Touchstone Gallery. "I don't know when I decided to connect the keys to fishing rods. That came later. In painting, you have an idea, pick up a brush and make a composition. With assemblages, the object comes first. It suggests the idea and tells you what to do."

The paintings are impressive. The assemblages are stunning. The result of Tierney's flea-market vision is "Casting Altarpiece," a large, wall-mounted assemblage that combines the keyboard and fishing tackle with mousetraps, buttons, bed-springs, collage and mixed-media additions. Somehow, these disparate parts come together in what looks from a distance like a cross between a carnival game, a stained-glass window and a prototype personal computer.

Which, in a sense it is, since the piece deals with themes that recur in all of Tierney's work: the individual's struggle for personal freedom and fulfillment in a mass society; the varying and sometimes confusing levels on which human beings relate to one another; the difference between appearance and reality; the risk-filled search for love, sex, intimacy, security and spiritual transcendence.

Much of the work contains elements of kinetic art—a term that has been used to describe everything from 1960s-style "happenings" to sculpture incorporating mechanical devices. Some of Tierney's assemblages, such as "Pedanticus," a stickling Yankee grammarian made from table legs, a clock, an hourglass and piano works, have feet and look to be on the verge of ambulation. And it is almost impossible to look at the assemblages without thinking of Marcel Duchamp, the French artist and art theorist and leader of the dada movement. In 1913, Duchamp invented what he called "the ready-made" by mounting a



BY TOM ALLEN—THE WASHINGTON POST

Tierney's assemblage "Casting Altarpiece."

bicycle wheel on a kitchen stool. He later displayed a bottle rack purchased in a store and a urinal, which he titled "Fountain" and signed R. Mutt.

But Tierney is not a latter-day dadaist. Duchamp was trying to show that life is absurd, meaningless and without aesthetic values. Tierney's "Icarus Cycle," a 12-panel painting that was displayed twice last year in the middle of Dupont Circle as well as at Borders Books & Music on L Street, effectively summarized her view of life as a cyclical struggle to find meaning through personal growth and renewal.

"One of the reasons I create complex structures is to mirror the complexity of life, the choices we have to make and the risks we take in just trying to get to know someone," Tierney says. She will discuss her work in an artist's talk at Touchstone at 4:30 p.m. today.

Maureen Jordan Tierney, at Touchstone Gallery, 406 Seventh St. NW, through Oct. 13. Wednesday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-6 p.m.; call 202-347-2787.