

Jordan Tierney

Evidence of the Invisible

By Cara Ober
Photos by Laudree Diamond

Q: Like your artwork, your studio is intricate, stuffed with detail, and rich in layered information.

A: In a sense, your studio is a work of art. Can you explain this relationship between your studio and your artwork? How has this relationship evolved over time? What is essential for you in a studio?

A: I feel like the world is my studio. I try to pay attention all the time. Then, as I come from the street into the heart of the studio, there is an editing process going on where once I reach the center, everything should be highly concentrated and potent inspiration and tools for what I find important. The things I drag back to my lair help me work. I surround myself with inspiring music, writing, and detritus from the world's continuous, disinterested, scheming and grinding. A studio is like the inside of an artist's head. As an obsessive collector, making art is an excuse for keeping the stuff I accumulate—like brashcombing in the city. The thing I find reveals secrets about life, just as the tide reveals information from the sea. What do people throw out of their car windows? Where? How long does it stay there? A home full of abandoned broken chairs on eviction day, elegant old machine parts, broken glass—all of it is a tactile memory adjuvant. Over time, I learned which objects are parts of my language. Removed from their original context, I can deploy them with their alternative meanings even as they glow with their original connotations.

Q: How long have you been an exhibiting artist? Where and when were your favorite exhibits? Why have those exhibitions and places been significant for you?

A: About 20 years. By far, the best experience I had showing my work was in 1995. I had made a series of twelve paintings on hollow-core doors, 84" x 36" called the Lurax cycle. It needed to be exhibited in the round since it was about the never-ending

cycle of birth and death. The only place that I could think of was DuPont Circle itself. I attached the paintings to the park benches facing the fountain for an entire day on both a Friday and a Saturday in June. Thousands of people walked through them on their way to office, shops and the Metro. That circle is an eddy in the river of Connecticut Avenue. People scurry, perform, pose, people-watch, and meet there. It is art about life right in daily life. The art changed their pace and perception those days. They would stop and be very open about major life issues with total strangers. Art opened a dialogue in an egalitarian public space in a way that it can't in the removed space of a gallery setting. My next public art will be to wear a shirt saying, "I have no time for your short attention span."

Q: Your latest project is collaboration with an international selection of artists you chose specifically for this project. What is this project and how did it come about? Who is involved and what is the goal? What have you learned or gained from doing it?

A: "The Periodic Table(s)" is a collaboration, hand-built, book-like object in an edition of 100. It is a series of 112 experiences, mysterious, yet self-evident. It is the result of over 20 years of being involved in all manner of creating, exhibiting and marketing art. It is a solution to the knotty mess of the studio, being jealous of jazz musicians and wanting to go late to learn to play piano at the level I make art. It is an outlet for my need to nurture the untapped passion and ideas in people I respect and care about. These are journalists and photographers of national papers, musicians, printers and radio producers. I maintain a curiosity in the small relationship with most of them and wanted to share this with others. It is all based on giving. I provide the opportunity and production—they provide the creation of their choice. They receive six copies and give five away. Several sponsors receive three copies and give two

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away. Each issue will have activities for the recipient to complete and mail back. These responses will be seeds for the next issue. There is no compromising due to advertisers or politics. There is no interaction with the hype machine since it is all spread by invitation and gift.

It will be out in a month, so I don't yet know the full effect. It was far more complicated and time-consuming than I realized. The geographic separation (such as the one from Berlin to Chicago) was sometimes a hurdle. Each person's definition of collaboration is as individual as their fingerprints. I hope for it to become a biennial process.

Q: Your work blends the boundaries of painting, sculpture and installation. What materials and techniques are most meaningful for you in your artistic practice? How do you bridge the gap between media?

A: I try to build a three-dimensional surface where light and imagery can play, similar to the way when facades collect graffiti, historical connotations and time erosion or how people are screens for our projections, memories, fantasies

and their own hardships. My surfaces are built from pieces of architectural salvage and furniture parts or things I carve: a found object like a piano leg might be playing the role of itself, or of a symbol, or just of an abstract design element. There are weathered plywood fields that are also walls, eyes that are the viewer and the viewed, containers that both protect and inspire. The surreal(s) technique of juxtaposing two unrelated things elicits previously unnoticed connections. I also like to go from the large scale, physically overpowering, to tiny detail—everything from a chainaw to a 400 tooth has a place. I prefer for the viewer not to be aware of my "hand" so marks should seem like they just happened.

Q: Who are the artists who have been most influential or inspirational for you?

A: As a former European writer, experimental jazz musician, artists who remind us we have some evidence but few if any answers, they are a balance of complex yet spare, chaos and control, strength and vulnerability. I never want to feel like I know a work. Also, they are people who

make fear(s) into the unknown as opposed to commodities.

Q: What is the importance of the narrative, especially an invented one, in your work? What stories are currently playing out in the work you are doing? Are they autobiographical or any level?

A: I never think about narrative, maybe because I try to depict past, present and future all at the same time. In fact, I usually don't verbalize what I'm doing until I title it about three quarters of the way through. I find that labels limit things, but at some point I do need to stay on track of what the piece seems to be about or it could go on forever. They are only autobiographical in that they are issues that are important to me, and in the world as seen through my lens. We are all shaped by our surroundings, and it is important to be an active participant to not process rather than a victim. I attempt to create universal things so they remain us of our common humanity.

There is one long-term scenario I am working on about language. It involves an imaginary woman collecting words from street trash after the apocalypse. She is saving the words from

signs, packaging and junk mail. In dechaining their meaning, she hopes to rebel against and thereby civilization. Of course, the words available from those types of communication are ridiculous and I think in some way our world has been reduced to "free boxes," "new and improved!" and "extra-thing." She is also searching for some meaning in the state of the world. Hum, that sounds somewhat autobiographical.

Q: You are very selective about your choices in color. Most of your work consists of black, white, and a few neutral colors. What is the significance of color for you? How do you make your color choices?

A: I have always enjoyed the black and white leveling of the newspaper—the least boring next to the \$2000 Tiffany trinket presented with the same black and white slip showing the paper. For 20 years I lived in economically challenged parts of Washington, DC. This meant opportunity and choice for me—public buildings, the people, and public policy skeletons in the desert bleached of life. So there is a lot of choices of color, and words with flowers in these places. That is my palette. :JAC

