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# THE ACCIDENTAL ARTIST

Sculptor David Colman found his artistic practice while rearranging his apartment, uncovering a microcosm of his own culture, and a compulsion to create assemblage art.

BY SARA ROFFINO

PORTRAIT BY FRANÇOIS DISCHINGER

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hen Joseph Beuys declared that, “Every man is an artist,” David Colman—though barely a teenager at the time—must have been listening. The New York-based multi-hyphenate took that idea and dissected it to its core, deducing that participating in life itself is an act of creating culture—what he has termed “cultiplicating.”

“The idea of ‘cultiplicity’ is essentially that we are animals that need to create our own environments with such a compulsion because it’s part of what we need to survive,” he explains over Cobb salads and homemade ginger ale in the Modernist Downtown apartment where his artistic practice was unwittingly born. Tall, fair and described by his old friend Ugo Rondinone, as “a present-day flâneur,” Colman makes his work in a studio, but his practice—and entire understanding of culture—is ever-present. “Culture itself is a medium,” he says. “And it’s not like we’re just consuming it or just creating it. That’s a false dichotomy.”

Having a column in the *New York Times* Style section for a decade, Colman spent plenty of time thinking about the difference between want and need—i.e., “Do I quote that person saying they need a new pair of Louboutins?”—and fighting his own shame at the amount of things he owned. “I had been squirreling stuff away and so part of my question was, ‘Why do I need so much stuff, so much culture?’”

Uninspired and thinking a new coat of paint in his apartment might lift his spirits, Colman began moving all his possessions around, realizing that he quite enjoyed figuring out how, precisely, to arrange his myriad belongings, all of which he acquires with the utmost attention—no “found objects” here—from flea markets, eBay and the like. “I realized I was creating a culture for myself. That’s what my apartment is. It’s more meaningful than taste, and it serves a greater purpose than that.” Whereas Beuys moved away from an object-based practice, for Colman the object is what imbues the work with meaning—the visceral

drive behind designing one’s surroundings or selecting one’s clothing is a definitive element of humanity.

In 2011, never before having had a studio, Colman rented a space in Downtown Brooklyn and began making large-scale multi-media assemblages composed of ashtrays, mid-century European ceramics, coins, athletic gear and photos of attractive men, to cite just a few examples, of materials he has used. These eclectic bits come together through Colman’s meticulous aesthetic, which is inspired as much by Robert Rauschenberg’s *Combines* as it is by his self-described “romantic idea of Modernism” and his fascination with “gay taste.”

As Rondinone, who hosted an exhibition of Colman’s assemblages this past winter in his private Harlem gallery, describes it: “David Colman’s biographical sculptural works are thick with the feel of life, with lyrical and briny atmospheres. The result is an elusive and lustrous landscape fully inhabited, fully haunted.”



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