

Mara Hoberman, « Matt Mullican », *In Artforum on line* (500 words), 20 September 2013.



View of “Collecting for the studio – collecting 1959–2013,” 2013.

Matt Mullican’s “Collecting for the studio – collecting 1959–2013,” at Galerie Nelson-Freeman in Paris, brings his early and recent works together with items from his personal collection of art and objects. Ranging from prehistoric tools to twentieth-century machinery and from Piranesi etchings to 1950s comic books, Mullican’s collection has never before been presented within the context of an exhibition. Here the artist highlights a few favorite objects and discusses the relationship of the collection and his work. The show is on view until November 9, 2013.

I’VE DISCUSSED THE IDEA of showing my collection many times, but I’ve never actually done it until now. Both my mother and my father were collectors as well as artists, and we traveled a lot as a family. I grew up in a house in Santa Monica filled with all kinds of objects from all over the world, so it was very natural for me to begin collecting myself. It’s interesting because in my own art I can put whatever I want together on a bulletin board, say, and that becomes mine—it’s my work. The collected objects on view here are not things I ever wanted to include as part of an artwork, but they do provide a background in terms of what interests me.

For example, a little Ramses figure here is the first purchase I made for my collection. I got it in 1959 when I was eight, during a trip to Paris with my parents. There was an antiques shop along the Seine, opposite the Louvre, and my parents told me I could buy something for thirty dollars. I talked to the shop owner until she wanted me out—I must have been in there an hour. Finally she started pointing at objects saying, “This one’s a fake, this one’s real, fake, real,” etc., and then told me, “Choose!” I ended up getting the Ramses for half price because she wanted me out of there so badly.

The second earliest pieces from my collection are the comic books. I bought these in the early ’60s from a fantastic shop on Hollywood Boulevard. I was only interested in the first issues—the origin story of Hulk, the X-Men, Spiderman, the Avengers, and

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so on. Of course the thing that most interested me with these was the idea of who creates the creator. Two of my new paintings included in this show—*Overall Chart with Comics and Detail of the Moon* and *Overall Chart*—relate very directly to the comic books.

“Collecting for the studio” is the title of the show because these objects I own are all resources for me. What led me to collect certain machinery is my interest in the transference of energy and how this relates to the transference of information. I’ve been using generators and steam engines in my work since the early 1980s, but I’ve never shown any of the actual objects from my collection. I did a rubbing in 1983 or 1984 of a steam engine belonging to my father-in-law. In the work you can see the circle above and the fire below—the energy above and the elements below. He wouldn’t give me his, so I had to buy my own steam engine.

All collectors—no matter whether they collect coins, stamps, salt and pepper shakers, or whatever—are essentially curators. There’s a different way of doing this show, of course—and that’s the Mike Kelley model, where the artist becomes the curator, as he did for his “Uncanny” exhibition. Or there’s even the reverse—the curator as the artist—which is all the rage now. But neither of those is what this show is about. That’s not what I do. If there’s confusion here about what is my work and what is my collection, that’s fine with me. I think that’s a healthy confusion.

— As told to Mara Hoberman