

## *The Lyric Cranium*

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## David Morrish

### *The Lyric Cranium*

I am near the end of a multi-year SSHRC insight development grant, on which I am collaborating with Marlene MacCallum (primary investigator, Memorial University, Grenfell) and co-applicants Pierre LeBlanc (Memorial University, Grenfell) and Clifton Meador (Columbia College, Chicago). The project examines *Artists' Publishing: An Investigation into Digital Media as a Means to Integrate Dissemination into the Creative Cycle*. In this context, I have been building/assembling/augmenting/filling a *Wunderkammer*-like space with my personal collections of natural history items, thanatos-related ephemera, miscellaneous detritus, and memorabilia, which I had been saving for decades until I devised a purpose for their use and display.

The museum is called *The Lyric Cranium* and is fictionally described as the *G. Hornan Postmortem Portrait Archive &*

*Brunion Collection*, an assemblage of documents and objects originally belonging to archivist and collector Homer C. Brunion and others, and organized by Griff Hornan before his mysterious disappearance in 1949. The current curator, as the story goes, took over the Hornan collections and set them up in their current form.

I built this installation in my studio to act as a resource for the creation of new artworks: works on paper (photographs and photogravures), published ephemera, bookworks, texts, paintings, videos, and sculptures. In *The Lyric Cranium*, my practice of scouring the world for visual inspiration can be distilled and personalized within an immersive still life, complete with the biographical fiction of faux provenance. This personal archive provides a similar experience to that of many public installations and museum collections. In this way, it can act as a catalyst



ABOVE: Post Mortem wall, *The Lyric Cranium*, 2013

TOP: Ephemera being printed at Columbia College of Art (Chicago) by Brad Freeman, for inclusion in *Journal of Art Books (JAB)*. *The Lyric Cranium*, 2013. Photo credit: Clifton Meador



Wunderkammer space with skulls. *The Lyric Cranium*, 2013



Details: taxidermy and preserved animal specimens.

for the production of more traditional artworks, whether multiples or singular works.

My main goal is to create publications that are portable means by which the public can access my museum. I print documents using various media that are at once mundane (using mass production technologies) and semi-precious (hand-made or period processes). The use of print-on-demand web-resources also provides ways to create publications for use within a more complex bookwork or for stockpiling multiples for broader dissemination. I experiment with a range of methods to create paper ephemera such as broadsides, wallpaper, paperwork, postcards, artists' stamps, and other documents, blending such extremes as photogravure, inkjet, photo-polymer letterpress and lead-type letterpress, Xerox, offset litho, and video. By continuing to explore the hybridization of digital technologies and traditional processes that was begun in an earlier SSHRC-funded project, I create paper objects that function in the space between the artifact/document and the art-object.

The images of *The Lyric Cranium* reproduced here attest to its current incomplete state, as artifact-objects are continually accumulated, organized, and re-positioned in an ongoing process of affective recombination. Half the physical space is organized as a testament to the *Wunderkammer* tradition, while the other half is inspired by Claes Oldenburg's *Mouse Museum* on display at the MoMA in 2013. Creative fabrications and other artists' works appear within the installation as well. Artists have been invited to experience the space, and some have created work in response. Some of these objects have been incorporated into the collection and display, attesting

to the matryoshka-like self-referential development of the museum content.

For a traditional photo-based visual artist like I am, this new conduit and focus for my interests is an exciting departure from print and paper. It illustrates how one's studio practice can evolve and drastically change the form of one's art production, allowing for unexpected departures and discoveries along the way.



*Regurgitata*, 2013. Example of letterpress display tag, customized with laser printing for various artifacts on display. Printed at Columbia College of Art, Chicago.