

THE WEIRD SHOW

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INTERVIEWS SELECTED · 2021-11-22

COMPULSIVELY, OBSESSIVELY, COLLECTIVELY (PART 1/3)

TODD BARTEL INTERVIEWS D. DOMINICK LOMBARDI

In honor of the traveling exhibition, *D. Dominick Lombardi—High+Low, A Forty-Five Year Retrospective*, I reached out to Max-o-matic about interviewing Dominick and was promptly invited to run with the possibility. We are grateful to The Weird Show for this opportunity to dive deep into the artist's work.

Throughout his artistic career, D. Dominick Lombardi has widely explored a collage aesthetic. He paints, draws, prints, repurposes, sculpts, installs, combines, mixes, and fuses. Despite the material or process, the idea or intuition, he always embraces some form of combination in his work. D. Dominick Lombardi is a collage artist's collage artist. He is one of a handful of creatives who dedicates their studio practice to the infinite potential of transforming anew by gluing material & immaterial things into composite unison. Conglomerate construction is so thoroughly enmeshed in the physiognomy of his studio practice that even the word "collage" is sometimes conspicuously absent from his image information because it's entirely subsumed. Even his art career is a fusion of others — teacher, writer, curator. At the center of his overall societal engagement, D. Dominick Lombardi is a devout humanist who is always searching for ways to inform, inspire and question his audience. Moreover, he is dedicated to dissolving the boundaries within the art world, working to make it a much more open and welcoming experience for those he works with.

D. Dominick Lombardi's art is as sobering as it is inspiring. On the one hand, he unflinchingly tips the mirror toward all of us to expose humanity's shortcomings and horrors. On the other, his reflections exude exalted existentialist potential. Contradictions permeate his work. Dichotomies like absence/presence, distortion/perfection, attraction/repulsion, and apocalypse/salvation characterize his subject matter. The artist sees each of his actions as a single unified endeavor. His combined contributions, with his impressive and vast body of accomplishments, in the end, plumbs human possibility with great anticipation.

TB: TWS is a perfect host for our interview; your work *often shows us weird things!* So let's begin with an unusual question. Do you collect *Wacky Packs*?



CCWS 92, 2020, acrylic, ink, charcoal, paper, canvas, 40 x 36 inches

DDL: Very funny question Todd, I can see why you would ask, especially with the recent *Cross Contamination + Stickers* series, where I have collaged several dozen hand-drawn and cut stickers onto a canvas — the whole process was very obsessive. If I remember correctly, I think *Wacky Packs* were the cards or stickers from *Mad* magazine, perhaps — maybe a tear-out sheet of stickers? I remember them as clever word wrangling images of common household products. I do not collect them, but I did take careful note of them when they first came out. I initially saw them as a not-so-indirect jab at Pop Art, which could have easily been a big target for satirical magazine artists found in *Mad* — it's all in that same approach to satire and humor that flourished in the 1950s and '60s.



Studio view, work area, 2020

In my youth, I was fascinated more by the *Mars Attacks* trading cards because of their Science Fiction component (I wish I still had those), or anything looking like or related to Big Daddy Roth's *Rat Fink* character; or those crazy characters from the 1965 *Weirdo-Ohs* cards, or anything by Basil Wolverton for that matter — more people abstractions than product distortions.

In 1968, when I was 13, *Zap comix* brought all that to a head in a very unfamiliar, counterculture, underground way. That's when I first saw the work of R. Crumb and others — potent imagery that has stuck with me for my entire career. My mother recognized that art came first for me very early on, and was

worried about the negative, scatological influence of *Zap comix* (she kept throwing them out), so she would drop my brother and me off at the Grinton Will Library in Yonkers, NY, where there was a pretty large collection of books on Modern and Contemporary Art. I was like a kid in a candy store.

I, of course, was aware of Dalí back then, but discovered by happenstance and juxtaposition other Surrealist artists such as Max Ernst, who would eventually have the most significant influence on me with his myriad of techniques such as grattage, frottage, oscillation, decalcomania and of course, collage. His collages hit me right in the gut — I was mesmerized. They were so perfectly executed, seamless and strange, that I had to figure out how they were done. Eventually, I would understand that they were book illustrations, cut out and reassembled to create those stunning narratives. What a revelation for me.

TB: I couldn't resist asking and had a feeling you would have had to have seen Wacky Pack stickers, if not collect them. Topps candy and chewing gum company produced them beginning in 1967, (along with the Mars Attacks cards) and yes, I made the connection because of your *Cross Contaminations + Stickers* series! I appreciate the part of your work that seems to have been ushered on by the likes of *Mad*, *Cracked*, and *Eerie* magazines, and of course Robert Crumb's *Zap Comics* — all of which are visible affinities in your oeuvre. I think the humor in your work often mitigates the harsh realities that you explore in the subjects you address.

I want to acknowledge another significant influence. About 1957, your parents purchased a set of encyclopedias, which you have vivid memories of randomly opening to a page that inspired dumbfounded and sustained contemplation. In your *High+Low, A Forty-Five Year Retrospective* exhibition catalog, you beautifully described finding a particular image as being a significant and galvanizing event in your life, which fuels you, even now, in your 5th decade, making images and objects.



The American Peoples Encyclopedia, Vol. 13, 1955, pages 861-821, top left: Picasso's *Guernica*, 1937

You recall being between 3-4 years-old, “mesmerized” and “puzzled” by Picasso’s *Guernica*. Presumably, you were disorientated by *Guernica*’s nontraditional, confrontational, and severe break-up of illusory forms and spaces into hard-edge geometric and biomorphic shapes. Those things and the painting’s apparent departure from classical narrative, along with its hideous portrayal of the realities of war, are indeed quite arresting qualities. In 1977, twenty years later, your first solo show — *Cyborgs* — evinced the lasting impact of that early visual experience. What strikes me about your *Cyborg* series is that it extols a sophisticated collage aesthetic, what I ascribe as being of the uncollage genre — a seamless unification of composite couplings and appropriations. Like West Coast, Jess (Burgess Franklin Collins), you appropriated your own work for that series.

At what point in your life did you consciously realize you were making collage-based paintings? Were you formally interested in collage in the early part of your career or did that occur when you were in college? Was the collage aesthetic an inclination for you before that first show? Did seeing *Guernica* unleash the desire to fracture and combine consciously? Or, was the collage impulse something you gravitated toward unconsciously and recognized later on in your studio practice? Could you share your inspiration for that early body of work and what it is about collage that makes you want to combine?

DDL: In those early days at the library, I stumbled upon Richard Hamilton’s collage *Just what is it that makes today’s homes so different, so appealing?*. I believe that that collage is Pop Art’s single greatest work, the same way I see Méret Oppenheim’s *Object* (1936) as being Surrealism’s most iconic work. Hamilton profoundly affected me, especially early on, as I would try to emulate that look, he achieved. Not so much the living room filled with Icons, but that pieced-together look that perfectly blends black and white images over a color field. An early work of mine, titled *Easter* (1974), was inspired by that juxtaposition of black and white and color, resembling The Hamilton collage. However, *Easter* has no resemblance in content; it only parallels the use of black and white and color. But that is often the way influences work; they become a prompt, but not a path.



Easter, 1974, graphite, crayon, paper, 28 x 22 inches

Soon, I would start collaging cut-out charcoal drawings over panels painted in acrylic for the *Cyborg* series. I also remember reading that the systematic pattern of dashes that comprised the horse's body in Picasso's *Guernica* was meant to suggest the newspaper articles he was reading about the Spanish Civil War, since Picasso was living in France at that time – a definite collage reference.

Five years later, the first solo exhibition I had in Manhattan were all paintings from the *Mixing Isms* series that were truly, of a collage mentality or approach. Each section of every canvas was different and set up as a patchwork of various styles, techniques, and philosophies. They were like a visual diary of a particular tendency or mood that drastically changed every day – a collage of intentions.

Collage is right in the wheelhouse of the Surrealist's belief. It combines thoughts and images that are not related and makes them connect – like the Dada collages of Max Ernst or Kurt Schwitters.



Listening to the Radio, 1978, oil, linen, 48 x 42 inches

TB: One thing that impresses me about your work is that while many collage artists inspire you, your work never feels derivative. You have expressed that you have high regard for Max Ernst and Kurt Schwitters, for example, who both pushed at what collage could be and evolved the genre well beyond papier collé. Think of Ernst's 1924 *Two Children are Threatened by a Nightingale*, and Schwitters starting *Merzbau* in 1923. In an early work, for example, you made use of trompe l'oeil as way of implying "things" attached to your work. But then there are works like *Current Status and Weather Conditions*, that seem to literally punch a hole into the picture plane. Could you discuss what brought you to begin experimenting with three-dimensional possibilities?



Untitled, 1992, acrylic, oil, canvas, 38 x 52 inches



Current Status and Weather Conditions, 1989, acrylic, Masonite, traffic signs, drawer pulls, 63 x 24 x 4 inches

DDL: The two early modern works you mention are incredibly mysterious, magical and powerful, and would easily inspire any young artist, as they certainly inspired me. I was so upset when I first discovered the first and greatest version of *Merzbau* (Hanover, Germany) was destroyed in a bombing raid in World War II. My personal connection to sculpture or 3-D began with two main sources. I was in a pretty bad car accident in 1986, and near the end of my rehab, I started carving found wood to build up my strength. That action was incredibly useful, of methodically and systematically hitting a chisel with a mallet, as it helped me to really focus on task. It also greatly increased my stamina, which was something I sorely needed. Additionally, the

creative process of sculpture brought me back to those early days working with my father and grandfather as their 'carpenter's helper,' when I learned how to use and care for hand tools properly. Still, to this day, I feel that connection whenever I pick up a hammer, chisel or hand saw, especially when it is one of those tools that was handed down to me. I even try to think like they did when I come across a structural issue to find the best, most solid way to construct my armatures and substrates. The added control I have in the aesthetic or creative realm in design and media is my side of the coin, which I know my father very much enjoyed seeing before his passing.

As far as *Current Status and Weather Conditions* goes, I was trying to find a sweet spot between collage and assemblage. If you look at the wooden, orange construction sign base, you will notice I cut away strips of the reflective material to suggest collage. The Masonite on top was carved and cut away to form abstract shapes to imply movement. I attached the two together using 1950's or 60's drawer pulls, so the further away the materials got from the base, the more the dimensionality would increase. The shaped wholes in the Masonite also added a rhythm that mimicked the bent arrow sign below, while the pulls added a suggestion of sound. I believe my sense of fluidity and humor was more directly inspired by the collages of Hannah Hoch.

With *Untitled* from 1992, which was a one-off work, I was experimenting with adhering small cut sections of paintings over larger painted canvases to see how the notion of collage could be applied to the painting process. You can see in that piece, where the frayed threads of the cut canvas edges added texture, and perhaps even emotional content to the work. After that was finished, I decided to abandon the process in favor of just repainting old cut up and sanded canvas that ended up looking like aesthetically tortured relics.



Varying Degrees of Length, 1992, acrylic, oil, canvas, 17 x 14 inches

Ernst, Hoch and Schwitters are also excellent examples of how medium and dimension can guide one's vision — knowing what has been done before and then taking that next one, two, or ten steps without fear. I also like to look at the work of Eva Hesse quite a bit because I employ a lot of plastic objects as they seem to dominate the debris I try to repurpose. Hesse had such an amazing way of challenging the preconceived, a most important characteristic for an artist.

As far as my art being derivative goes, I look at artists that I admire and think more about their thought process or approach to their materials than maybe their aesthetic or individual iconography — that's their visual vocabulary, not mine. Mine comes from whatever it is that attracts my attention or pops into my head, or what I stumble upon when I draw, etc. — that keeps the visual overlap to a minimum. However, it is impossible not to have some visual triggers that link my work to another artist because we are all inhabiting the same planet, exposed to life-changing experiences, social situations, politics, media, science — we're all in the same soup — I just need to find my own way out.



Vessel Assemblage #3, 1994, oil, canvas board, found wood, found ceramic figurine, metal stand, chrome-plated metal objects, carved bedpost, acrylic, *papier-mâché*, gesso, acrylic medium, toy pearl handled Colt 45 (hidden), 23 x 21 x 14 inches

This is part 1 of 3. More coming soon.

Learn more about D. Dominick Lombardi in his [website](#) or [instagram](#)



Todd Bartel

Todd Bartel is a collage-based artist. His work assumes assembled forms of painting, drawing and sculpture that examine the roles of landscape and nature in contemporary culture. Since 2002, Bartel has taught drawing, painting, sculpture, installation art and conceptual art at the Cambridge School of Weston, Weston, Massachusetts. He is the founder and the Director of the Cambridge School's Thompson Gallery, a teaching gallery dedicated to thematic inquiry, and "IS" (Installation Space), a proposal-based installation gallery. Bartel holds a BFA in painting from Rhode Island School of Design and an MFA in painting from Carnegie Mellon University