

Artist Profile: Robin Hewlett
by Fereshteh Toosi

One of my first encounters with Robin's work was when she purged her childhood bedroom and filled the Ellis Gallery with old belongings. Visitors could stake a claim on one or more items and pick them up at a later date. The experience was similar to finding entire photo albums or other sentimental collections that have been discarded at the thrift store. Could we really indulge in taking once-loved Cabbage Patch Kid dolls or grade school portraits? We could and we did, each person ruthless in their perusal, eagerly snatching up the cast-offs of Robin's life.

The piece was an ascetic act, a letting go of material culture. But more importantly, the work reveals some of Robin's artistic interest in material objects as holders of evidence, as markers of human actions. Participants in the project were forced to contemplate the objects not in the way we might find them at a store, but as the actual residue of someone else's life. I learned a lot about Robin that day, and I created a narrative for her life as well: that she used to take dance lessons, that she used to be a cheerleader and play softball, that she once dressed up as Rainbow Brite for Halloween.

Robin's work is an archaeology of everyday life. In the way that archaeologists search for evidence of past societies, Robin creates her own evidence so that we may appreciate the intricacies of our present material worlds. Simultaneously, this evidence of the present also reveals our past. For Robin, the way we shape our living, working, and leisure spaces is a reflection of our culture. There is no mystery to the dent made in a futon, or the shape of the light switch from a wall cast in latex. But she documents them in a way that asks us to take note of the poetry of our everyday lives and actions. Accelerating the act of fossilization, the molds she makes are not meant for a time capsule or as information for future societies, but rather as a snapshot of a particular moment in time.

Robin uses sculpture and performance to create 3-dimensional monoprints. Instead of the groove of the etching plate or the resist of a grease pencil, Robin makes prints of the spaces we inhabit. These molds capture fine details and demand intense scrutiny from the viewer. They cannot be replicated because these molds pick up the dust and memories that have accumulated on the objects up until the moment when the print is made.