

Michael C. McMillen's The Central Meridian, 1981

Imagine walking through a bright clean art museum. You are enjoying the pieces of work from the artists of yesteryear that sit idly on the wall. Before you know it, however, you just entered through some rusty old doors and now you are in the middle of a dusty and dark garage. How did you get here? What are you doing here? And most disturbingly, why is there a moose head staring down at you? You have just entered *The Central Meridian* by Michael C. McMillen. *The Central Meridian* was installed in 1981 and is an engaging example of both assemblage and installation art.

The garage and everything inside it is part of McMillen's art piece. It's "assemblage" art because McMillen "assembled" the work from found sources. It's a good example of "installation art," because the visitor walks *through* the art as apposed to viewing it.

Entering his art piece I felt as if I were to enter one of those sceneries that you stand in while waiting to ride, such as, "Mr. Toad's Wild Ride" or "Peter Pan's Flight." Although, I haven't considered those to be art yet, I enjoy the fact that someone else is doing it, somewhat more seriously and for non-commercial reasons. I am completely blown away by the concept. I mean, what's more powerful, seeing a painting of a garage or actually being in one? Once inside, however, you start noticing the details of this assemblage piece.

I am the type of person who always likes the small details and the little "did-you-knows" about art. I guess that is what appeals so much to me about this one particular piece. Entering into the piece one might notice the subtle hint that is the sign hanging on the wall with the inscription, "Quality Examination of the Eyes." The innumerable amount of items inside the garage adds to the atmosphere but also hint at the possibility that you are rummaging through someone's personal belongings. It's almost as if you were to stumble into a murder scene and you were to pick up the clues.

What can we tell about this person? Looking at his bookcase located in the back of the piece you see plenty of books. I think most of them were textbooks too, which shows that he was somewhat intelligent, especially if he can read books such as "Chemistry of Organic Compounds" or "Calculations of Analytical Chemistry" or "College Physics." He (or she), was a healthy person (there's a bottle of Escondido Carrot Juice"), outgoing (there's a pair of skis hanging above and a punching bag in the corner), and possibly lives in Ohio (the state indicated on the license plate of the car in the garage). Of course I like the slightly more eccentric items that were thrown, like the chandelier, the moose head and the board of what looks like a secret scientific cult (The Temple of Cosmic United Atoms).

Regarding the content of the art piece, I don't know what exactly it is saying. Is he making a social commentary or not? Reviewing the questions and feelings I had got me thinking. First off, what if this was a real person's garage? Would it be considered art? Well, no, because then it would be an actual person's garage, where as this garage is a reproduction and hence an art piece.

Secondly, I felt like I was being nosey, looking through this other person's garage (the "no trespassing" sign at the entrance might have added to that). Have the lines of entertainment and real life been blurred? Watching shows like, *The Real World*, or logging on to sites such as *Jennicam.org*, are we a society becoming more voyeuristic in our search for entertainment? Do

we actually empathize with these individual or are we just out to look for a cheap thrill? Do we actually read between the lines?

At first walk through, the junk filling the garage of Central Meridian seemed normal. But on closer examination, some of the other items, such as the hanging doll pieces, gets one questioning and wanting to know more about this person. What was their childhood like? It very much mirrors real life, in that with all the people you pass on the street, you make quick judgments about who they are on the outside and you forget that there's more than meets the eye. What strange things are going on beneath? Perhaps that is McMillen's message. Like the sign he has hung up, maybe we all need more "quality examination of the eyes." To what end though? I don't think to any particular end should we have to examine everything, but just to be more observant because as it was once quoted, "the unexamined life is not worth living."

Peter Vu
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