

The Boston Globe

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14, 2009

ARTS

One man's trash is another man's . . .

Exhibit discards become artifacts

By Cate McQuaid
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Everybody has stuff. Most of us have a lot of it — old love letters and school papers, gifts

GALLERIES from long ago that have more sentimental

value than aesthetic or functional value, toys children have long outgrown. It's what we ascribe to these things, rather than the objects themselves, that matters.

Douglas Weathersby puts meaning into stuff most people sweep away. The artist goes into homes and businesses under the umbrella of his company Environmental Services. You could say it's a janitorial outfit, because Weathersby cleans up. But then he makes installations out of the detritus. You may not find dust significant, but Weathersby makes it into art.

His installation at Judi Rotenberg Gallery takes a new tack. Rather than cleaning the space (which he has done to a degree — there's a dustpan full of sweepings), he has brought all the stuff of his artistic and business life into the gallery to create an object-laden memoir. This has the potential to look simply like a pile of someone else's junk, but Weathersby brings a keen conceptual approach to his work.

Weathersby ventures into obsession with his collecting; in this context, it demands that we make meaning from discards such as a ziplock bag of dust swept up from Kai Althoff's 2004 exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art, a bottle of murky water mopped from gallerist Barbara Krakow's floor several years ago, a shop vac, and documentary glossy photos the artist has made of his process. They become artifacts.



COURTESY OF DOUGLAS WEATHERSBY AND JUDI ROTENBERG GALLERY (ABOVE)

With "Storage Loft Installation" (above), Douglas Weathersby brings the stuff of his life into the gallery.

At the same time, Weathersby's business has become an extended conceptual performance, with witty branding, here exemplified by walls papered with a giant photo of his own studio wall covered with invoices. The whole installation is a wry conflation of the jazzy, surface gleam of packaging and salesmanship with the mournful accumulation of all that's been left behind. That it's on view in a commercial gallery, and therefore for sale, suggests that Weathersby has reached a pivotal point in his career; the hoarder is finally clearing the decks.

Rotenberg continues its "Paper Trail" series of smaller exhib-

its with Zach Storm's quirky, diaristic, text-driven drawings. There's a lot of pathos in this body of work, made mostly while the 25-year-old artist was recovering from a breakup. The back story is only indirect; mostly the scruffy protagonist stumbles through a series of comic, discursive fantasies that combine elements of sci-fi, celebrity worship, and mundane inner monologue. They're charming but youthfully narcissistic, following a recent trend of art that resembles something a high-school kid scribbled on the back of his notebook during a boring history class.

DOUGLAS WEATHERSBY:
The ES Inaugural Retrospective and Storage Loft and
ZACH STORM: Post-Post & the Apocalypse Somewhere
At: Judi Rotenberg Gallery,
130 Newbury St., through Feb. 1.
617-437-1518,
www.judirotenberg.com