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February 5, 2013

DOUGLAS WEATHERSBY / ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES: WHAT IS YOURS IS MINE
by Jeff Perrott for New American Paintings

For over 15 years, Douglas Weathersby's Environmental Services (ES) project has effectively blurred, conjoined, confused and conflated the dual senses of the word work that we comfortably manage in daily life: there's the prosaic sense of making a *living*, and then there's the inflated artworld sense of the *oeuvre*, with its freight of value and meaning.

Weathersby hires himself out for the former, and the results are the objects presented as the latter. ES objects don't pretend otherwise – they carry the imprint of their former life, and so also the network of relations that caused them: chance encounters with clients' needs, the resultant stuff and experiences acquired, the negotiations required, and the time and opportunity for transformation. ES objects bear all of this, and more, for in the most effective ES installations, the work of art and the work of daily life are so thoroughly intermixed that expectations and sensibilities of value get realigned, and a wholly new type of object appears, bound neither by the abstractions 'art' nor 'life', but inhabiting a thingness-in-itself which we can't quite categorize. - *Jeff Perrott, Boston Contributor*



Environmental Services, *What is Yours is Mine*, 2013, installation view.
Photo: Carly Gaebe, Courtesy Dodge Gallery

Immersion, then, is key for ES: at its best an ES installation attacks the white-walled neutrality of 'art' venues, weakening their power of persuasion and elevation, and turning the objects there into just another set of things in the world – but compelling things, things that demand a real encounter. The ES installation at Dodge Gallery (15 Rivington St. New York) crowds the narrow upper gallery with a litter of stuff – some worked and honed carefully, others slapped together, and some just left to be. The show's title (*What's Yours Is Mine*) teases at an organizing thought, but (thankfully) nothing gets stated. The backstory (gallery assistants and press releases are notorious for spoiling such potential discoveries) is this: Weathersby has invaded the studios of fellow Dodge artists and employed their unused stuff in the fabrication of his own objects. This is a neat idea, and one that doesn't need to get overstated, for this is what ES does all the time: taking from one worksite to create another worksite, and burying the artist's possessive signature in a thick yours-and-mine soup.

One work in the show renders the specific practice evident: *ES Art Storage* (2012-13), a full-scale and accurate remake, using all of his finds, of a dumpster located outside of one studio. On its fabricated surface, and as 'refuse' inside, are obvious scraps of other artists' brands, those of Eddie Martinez, Sheila Pepe, and Darren Foote, for example. This may be Weathersby's *Erased deKooning* moment, but without Rauschenburg's aggressive wish to eclipse, devour, or kill the other: the ES brand and modus operandi, after all, is service and client satisfaction. Weathersby metabolizes the other artists' work, then, well-garnished with humor, irony, humility—even love.

Setting aside the obvious conceptual ironies of art and trash, value and meaninglessness, *ES Art Storage* does its best to reformulate our experience of objects themselves. Stripped of our suppositions of value, we find in our encounter with the previously valued and non-valued parts of the dumpster (variously, 'art', 'scrap', 'material', 'trash') an uncanny experience of things returned to themselves, restored to the power and simplicity of what they really are—but not detached either from those signifiers we brought with us. This can leave us a bit dazed and confused in the plain here and now that remains, but it's a here and now that ultimately also restores something in us, perhaps a removal of our own pretensions for being there, looking and figuring, and an allowance to simply be with the object in view now, with all that it is and can be.

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In a gallery setting, which depends for its status and livelihood on the distinctions of value and exclusivity that ES unflinchingly erases, the attack finds its mark. And, while the Dodge installation doesn't achieve the total transformation of place found in past works (the gallery seems to reassert its pretensions in the handsome hanging of 'paintings' and framed poster-sized versions of Weathersby's ongoing 'logs' project [just contrast these with the 8 1/2" x 11" stack of loose log pages placed inside a carved, real log placed opposite and you have the distinction]) it develops its experiential critique through the awkward, a-composed, often haphazard arrangement of things: the bulky bulbous dumpster is set at the narrowest passage point in the gallery, and ES' cranky cylindrical wood-scrap-and-glue sculptures, placed centrally make further passage a virtual obstacle course.

This crush of material made for much gratuitous bumping and grinding among objects and people at the opening – but this crowded flash point seems ideal for ES: its objects, after all, emerge from and return to art and life continually, always happily caught in the slipstream of human-object networks that made and continue to make them new. Contemplation of and tripping over a thing, therefore, are equally valid and honored and meaningful experiences here, all part of the things', and our, continuation and persistence in the world. Kudos to Dodge Gallery for engaging an art so fully whose anti-artness and brazen object-hood not only resist the gallery pretensions to and need for value, but frankly and easily turn them upside down.

What Is Yours Is Mine will be at the Dodge Gallery through February 17th.

Jeff Perrott is an artist living in Boston. This past year, Jeff Perrott's work was exhibited in the Museum of Fine Arts Boston's Linde Wing as part of its contemporary collection, and was featured at New York's Volta 2012 contemporary art show. The work is also included in the collections of the deCordova Museum and the Wadsworth Atheneum, and is featured in numerous corporate and private collections. He is represented by LaMontagne Gallery.



Environmental Services, *Enough with the Scrap*, 2012, archival ink jet print, 31 x 24 inches