THADDEUS DIXON PRESERVATION PROJECT

by

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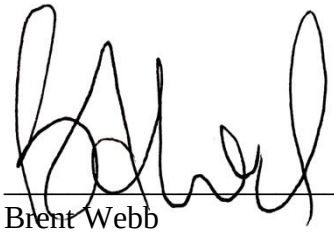

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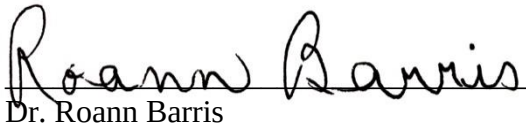

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ABSTRACT

The *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project* explores the ideas of roleplaying, curating, fabricating, and display. The persona created to embody this project was Thaddeus D. Dixon. The creation of this individual gave context and validity to the art created for the exhibition. As curator, I examine objects from Thaddeus D. Dixon's personal collection and the exhibition offers a select glimpse into his findings. Each object was fabricated to mimic a physical object that adds context to the concept of the project. The objects are displayed in an untraditional manner. They are displayed in a more domestic fashion as one would find in a home, not a gallery. This concept strengthens the idea that Dixon and his possessions are authentic.

As a composed display, the *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project* tells a story of Appalachia. The context of the objects suggests a larger story creating a critical commentary on the influence of the coal industry on the Appalachian region. Viewers can also observe the collection through the eyes of Thaddeus Dixon, giving them a period perspective. However, if viewers adopt a more contemporary perspective, they understand how the items in the collection connect to more current and critical, albeit subtle, views of the coal industry. The region and its art contain a rich history of local culture and tradition with a contemporary tilt toward social commentary and pursuit of social justice. All of this speaks to the varied cultures, hardships, stories, and traditions of Appalachia. Although celebrated for its natural beauty and defined by its regional boundaries, Appalachia is best described through the narratives of its inhabitants and the stories of its communities. The *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project* contributes to that narrative.

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INTRODUCTION

As a composed display, the *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project* tells a story of Appalachia. The context of the objects suggests a larger story creating a critical commentary on the influence of the coal industry on the Appalachian region. Viewers can also observe the collection through the eyes of Thaddeus Dixon, giving them a period perspective. For instance, if viewers adopt a more contemporary perspective, they understand how the items in the collection connect to more current and critical, albeit subtle, views of the coal industry

For the *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project*, I explored the ideas of roleplaying, curating, fabricating, and display. The persona created to embody this project was Thaddeus D. Dixon. The invention of this individual gave context and validity to the art I created. Roleplaying as curator, I examine objects from Thaddeus D. Dixon's personal collection and the exhibition offers a select glimpse into his findings. Each object was fabricated to mimic a physical object that adds context to the concept of the project. The objects are displayed in an untraditional manner. They are displayed in a more domestic fashion as one would find in a home, not a gallery. This concept strengthens the idea that Dixon and his possessions are authentic.

Appalachia itself remains an oddity. Outsiders are unfamiliar with the region's rich history and the perception of the area is usually tainted by cultural stereotypes. Similar sentiment applies to the region's art. Historically, Appalachian art has not been considered a distinctive genre of art or a subject of serious scholarship. Admittedly, "Appalachian art" itself is hard to define because it encompasses a broad range of art, both traditional and contemporary. At its core, Appalachian art includes many generational crafts, textiles, and visual art, much depicting the natural landscape. The *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project* includes many of those crafts in hopes of highlighting the history of Appalachian art in a more noble manner, defying outdated

stereotypes. The "hillbilly" stereotype is not conducive to serious art scholarship, past or present. However, I have also included more contemporary pieces. It is my intent that this project provides a bridge between traditional Appalachian crafts and contemporary, scholarly art. Thaddeus Dixon's life bridged a time period between pre-industrial Appalachia and the industrialization of the region. My contribution expands this perspective further with a view toward a future post-industrialized region.

ART AS ROLEPLAYING

Roleplaying, as a form of visual art, is a prominent theme in the *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project*. For this concept to have validity, I created a persona that formed the basis for this collection. In creating this persona, I wanted this person to be the physical incarnation of the project and to breathe life into the concept. The creation of "Thaddeus D. Dixon" accomplished this objective. The project's concept relies on the biography and livelihood of this invented individual. The creation of Thaddeus Dixon enhances my role of curator. In other words, it is not my objects that would be displayed; it would be objects created and collected by Dixon. The display is now intimately attached to a specific persona and Dixon commands the direction of the overall project. This created character must have a sense of authenticity for the project to be positively received by the audience. Accordingly, Dixon's biography was judiciously constructed to support the project's overall concept and themes.

His biography reads as follows:

> Thaddeus Delmore Dixon was born March 18, 1871, in West Virginia's Greenbrier Valley, six short years after the conclusion of the Civil War. The Dixon family operated a large farm in the Greenbrier Valley, with the main commodity being free-range livestock. At the tender age of ten, Thaddeus met Emmeline Mae Shepard, daughter of a local merchant. At the age of twenty-one, on June 14, 1892, Thaddeus would marry Emma Mae. Upon the death of

Thaddeus's father, Everett Cecil Dixon, Thaddeus inherited the family farm in November 1894.

Thaddeus and Emma Mae lived a peaceful life in the Greenbrier Valley, utilizing the land for most of their sustenance. After struggling to conceive for many years, Emma Mae gave birth to Ida June on June 2, 1899, and two years later, to Everett Arlo on January 14, 1901. The family planned to continue their peaceful lives on the family land for generations to come.

However, fate would change their lives. In 1906, the Meadow River Lumber Company chose the Greenbrier Valley as the base of operations for its timbering operations. The company sought public and private lands for its timber resources and soon became the largest landowner in the Greenbrier Valley. The Dixon family, feeling "squeezed" by this pervasive neighbor, eventually sold their farm and homestead to the Meadow River Lumber Company. Dixon realized that the changing landscape and economy were not conducive to traditional, family-operated agriculture.

After selling the Greenbrier Valley land, the Dixon family moved in 1912 to Hominy Falls, located in Nicholas County, West Virginia. The family purchased a small parcel of land and found life in Hominy Falls much like it was in pre-industrial Greenbrier Valley. Selling the land also gave the Dixon family a generous amount of money. This new affluence meant that Thaddeus no longer needed to work. Thaddeus then began spending his time exploring the Appalachian Mountains. He was constantly pulling his spectacles out of his shirt pocket to examine more closely natural objects. Appropriately, residents gave him his eventual nickname of "Specs."

Thaddeus's daughter, Ida June, married coal miner Clyde Judson Morgan, and later gave birth to Anna Mae Morgan and Zachariah Wade Morgan. Thaddeus's son, Everett, operated a successful general store in Hominy Falls and in due course married Hazel Josette Tucker. The couple had a son, Abbott Shepard Dixon. Thaddeus Dixon, when not exploring the mountains that he loved, spent the rest of his days telling his beloved grandchildren about the bygone days and life in Greenbrier Valley. Thaddeus lived a happy and peaceful life. He died on October 27, 1948, and was buried under a sugar maple tree on the family homestead in Hominy Falls. Emma Mae died shortly thereafter, on February 11, 1950, and was buried next to her husband.

Dixon's authenticity is buttressed by using actual events, providing a richer context to his life and contributing to the credibility of the project. For example, the Meadow River Lumber Company is an actual company that dominated West Virginia's Greenbrier Valley during the early twentieth century. The years spanning Dixon's life were strategically selected. Dixon's younger years were close to the turn of the twentieth century, a time when the Appalachian coal

industry was in its infancy; his later years occurred in a time when the regional coal industry was at its zenith. Dixon would have experienced, secondhand, the Coal Wars that notably occurred in Appalachia during the early years of the twentieth century. No doubt this labor strife may have skewed his view of the coal industry, perhaps spurring his collection of newspaper articles that depicted the numerous tragedies of the industry. This information strengthened my concept and gave Dixon a sense of authenticity over the project. However, for this project to succeed, I had to commit to the life of Thaddeus Dixon and assume the role of his curator. In other words, as stated previously, the objects on display are Dixon's. In essence, I became Thaddeus Dixon.

Other artists, notably German conceptual artist Joseph Beuys, have committed to the concept of roleplaying. Beuys is known for his performance piece, *I Like America and America Likes Me*, performed in 1974. The performance relies on a story Beuys constructed. The artist was flown to New York City, met by assistants who wrapped him in felt fabric, placed him in an ambulance, and transported him to an empty gallery space, his feet never "touching" American soil. In the gallery, there was a caged enclosure where Beuys lived with a wild coyote for three days.[1] Beuys's main objective was to isolate himself, cover himself in the felt for insulation and protection, and interact only with the coyote. This performance, flooded with symbolism, was designed to challenge the military actions of the Vietnam War and the hegemony of America.[2] Beuys committed to his performance, as seen in Figure 1, by performing the same actions every day, never breaking character. At the end of the performance, Beuys was carried out of the

1. Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys: Coyote* (Munich, Germany: Prestel Publishing, 2008), 21.

2. Tisdall, 25.

gallery and taken to the airport, in a similar fashion to the way he arrived: once again, his feet not "touching" American soil.

However, the most interesting aspect of Beuys's work is how he used his personal story to add validation to his art. Fat and felt are two elements that Beuys's work heavily relies on, which, according to Beuys, reflects his personal story. In 1944, while serving in the German military, Beuys's Stuka plane crashed in the Crimea Peninsula. Struggling to survive, he was rescued by a group of nomadic Tartars who wrapped him in fat and felt to keep him warm.[3] This story not only defined him as an artist, but also authenticated his concepts and material usage, making *I Like America and America Likes Me* a seemingly genuine analysis of American culture as seen from an outsider. He compared his personal history to that of America. The credibility of this backstory has remained somewhat of a mystery to art historians and is further complicated by Beuys's history of self-mythologizing. Beuys sticks to the role he has created, leaving his art open to questions. Essentially, Beuys uses roleplaying in tandem with his art, merging his character with his art. The character that he played in this scene became part of the art itself.

Like Beuys, I committed to the persona of another person: that of Thaddeus Dixon. To outsiders viewing this work, Dixon appears to be an actual physical person and his possessions seem realistic. Overall, this persona invites questioning by the audience, which is important to the discovery of the project's theme and concept. The audience is left to wonder, "Is Thaddeus Dixon real?" Dixon's collection of objects relies heavily on the believability of him as an actual person.

3. Francesco Bonami, "The Legacy of a Myth Maker: Joseph Beuys," *TATE ETC.*, 3 (Spring 2005).

ARTIST AS CURATOR

The *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project* mainly explores the artist as curator. By definition, a curator is responsible for assembling, cataloging, and presenting an artistic and cultural collection of objects. Prior to modern gallery practices, a curator used to have the role of caretaker or conservationist of historic relics; however, beginning in the 1990s, the role has become more significant with Post-postmodernist independent curatorship discourse.[4] This shift of discourse was primarily due to the change of art creation. Stylistic movements were no longer emphasized and there was a conceptual change, with focus directed to thematic development and not solely on the method of creation. Accordingly, there was a shift of curating based on conceptual meaning, and less on stylistic similarities.

With this in mind, for my thesis I assumed the role of curator. As curator, I am able to make unyielding decisions based on the merits of each object, ensuring that the concept is the foremost objective. The objects, standing alone, have individual contexts; but when viewed together, they construct a larger conversation. In choosing which objects to display, I am choosing items created and collected by Thaddeus Dixon, not ones I created. For instance, I prepared other items for possible inclusion in this project. Some of the rejected items were aesthetically and artistically more attractive to me personally than items chosen. However, the rejected items did not conform with the personae of Dixon. Viewing the objects as Dixon's and not my own made it easier for me to exclude those items from the display.

In this collection, Thaddeus Dixon's wide range of objects highlights his various interests and scholarship. As an artist, Dixon left behind several original works. He painted still life

4. Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 12.

portraits of coal surrounded by various objects. He created idealistic landscapes with mechanical overlays. Furthermore, he produced many charcoal sketches of his family members. However, Thaddeus was not the only Dixon with artistic ambitions. Emma Mae, Thaddeus's wife, left behind numerous canvas work projects including embroideries of mountain scenery, decorative doilies, ornate tea towels and handkerchiefs, and a family quilt. As an explorer and naturalist, Dixon collected assorted objects gathered from his natural surrounds, such as whitetail deer antlers, a monarch butterfly, black bear canine teeth, coal samples, and water specimens. In the summer of 1929, he also created the Field Journal of Appalachia, where he recorded visual observations found in nature. In addition to natural specimens, Dixon also gathered several manufactured objects, typically items with strong social contexts. He collected historic Native American arrowheads and a traditional, native herb basket. The collection also comprises a selection of objects associated with coal mining, including a miner's canary cage, a variety of canary skulls, and company-issued scrip. Scrip is a form of non-U.S. currency coal companies issued to workers to be used in company-operated stores. On a related note, Dixon collected newspaper clippings related to mine disasters, dating from 1890 until his death in 1948.

Fred Wilson's exhibition, *Mining the Museum: An Installation*, held at the Maryland Historical Society in 1993, explored the idea of an artist acting in the role of curator. Wilson examined the validity of museum displays and commented on the role of spectator and artist. By doing so, Wilson reworked the existing collection at the Maryland Historical Society and curated an exhibition with a new concept. This new work relied solely on the contextualization of objects as a group, not as individuals. Wilson stated that his aim was to illuminate "the power of objects to speak when the 'laws' governing museum practices are expanded, and the artificial boundaries

museums build are removed."[5] Wilson accomplished his goal by simply placing objects together to create new concepts. Through the deconstruction of common museum standards, Wilson created an open dialog between cultures without the intrusion of social hierarchy. An example of this concept is *Guarded View*, Figure 2, which examines ethnic minorities in museums. Wilson explains that most museum guards tend to be African American and indicates that many East Coast American museums pride themselves on diverse minority employment, often receiving subsidized funding for minority hiring. However, the hired minorities are typically lower-level employees, such as guards. Seldom are the hires upper-level employees who would exert control over the mission of the museum.[6] *Guarded View*, Figure 3, consists of black mannequins wearing guard uniforms and sits adjacent to a re-creation of Pablo Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, a painting widely critiqued for its use of cultural misappropriation of African tribal masks.[7] When viewed together, these works create cultural tension and directly address social hierarchy. Wilson bolsters this thought by projecting a video behind the re-creation of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, allowing the audience to peer through tribal masks to view a video of two Senegalese individuals answering questions about the usage of cultural objects in contemporary art. Like Wilson's exhibit, the *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project* is a conduit that I use to convey an overall message making a connection between objects.

Contemporary artists, such as Damien Hirst and Yugi Agemastsu, also use object-based art to project conceptual messages. In Hirst's "Medicine Cabinet" series, Figure 4, found

5. Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum: An Installation* (New York, NY: Folio, 1994), 8.

6. Wilson, 9.

7. Miles Unger, *Picasso and the Painting that Shocked the World* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2019)

medicine containers and vessels are displayed in clean white medicine cabinets, exploring the impact of drugs on everyday life. Each cabinet is fashioned to contain prescription drugs with similar effects and titled with a common synonymy that connects each cabinet's contents. For example, tranquilizers dominate the cabinet titled *No Feeling*.[8] With this exhibit, Hirst prudently selects the specific medicine bottles for each cabinet, acting more as a curator than as an artist.

Similarly, Agemastsu is renowned for taking found miniature objects and placing them in cellophane to create still life objects collected in everyday life. Debuting in 2017 at the Miguel Abreu Gallery in an exhibition called "Self-Portrait," installation photograph shown in Figure 5, viewers discover that each still life is named after the date when Agemastu found the objects. Particularly fascinating about the Agemastu exhibit is the self-definition of his work and the type of art he creates. Agemastu declares that he does not think of himself strictly as an artist by explaining, "[S]ometimes conservators decide what things or happening could be art, whether you are an artist or not. I'm always suspended between."[9] In essence, like Wilson and Hirst, Agematsu is a curator, prudently selecting the specific objects and arrangements he wants his audience to experience, focusing on how the objects are displayed and not how the objects are made.

Acting as curator for this thesis created a new realm of responsibilities for me. As with the artists mentioned above, for this project I needed to control how the overall concept of the project is supported by the individual objects chosen for display. Instead of simply considering

8. Arthur Danto, "Damien Hirst's Medicine Cabinets: Art, Death, Sex, Society and Drugs," in *Damien Hirst: The Complete Medicine Cabinets* (New York, NY: L&M Arts, 2010).

9. Kathering McMahon, "Search & Preserve: Yuju Agematsu Makes Monument to Travels Near and Dear," *ARTNEWS* (Summer Issue 2017): 100.

the individual artistic merit of the objects, I instead focused more on the integration of each object into the overall conceptual theme of the project.

ART AS FABRICATION

Along with his biography, Dixon's possessions, to be convincing, must possess a sense of authenticity. The *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project* replicates period pieces as closely as possible. When assembling the collection, original period pieces were examined and utilized as guides in this replication process. The objects are intended to appear to be period-specific and, accordingly, must be aged to accomplish an appropriate appearance. As an artist, this is particularly challenging for me. Not only must the objects be artistically fabricated to period standards, these objects must also appear to have suffered wear and tear through the years. Admittedly, aging techniques took time to control and were mastered only by re-creating some pieces multiple times, and then learning through repetition. The working method shifted from an initially creative process to a more mechanical process. Much of the aging process was then accomplished through trial and error techniques.

Contemporary artist Vija Celmins uses fabrication to deceive her audience. With *To Fix the Image in Memory,* created between 1977-82, shown in Figures 6 and 7, Celmins creates replicas of collected rocks, sits them side by side, and invites the audience to determine which one is real and which one is fabricated. Celmins accomplishes this by creating bronze casts of eleven rocks and then painting them to resemble the original stones.[10] The art of replicating is often perceived as a form of forgery, but Celmins challenges this notion. She explains her

10. MoMA Gallery Label, *Against the Grain: Contemporary Art from the Edward R. Broida Collection,* May 3-July 10, 2006.

rationale by stating that she is "sort of mocking art in a way, but it is also to affirm the act of making: the act of looking and making as a primal act of art."[11] Art, in its most basic, technical form, is recording visual observations and Celmins successfully achieves just that. While challenging the idea of art, Celmins is also stimulating the audience and the perception of visual fidelity.

One could also argue that popular art forgers like Tony Tetro and Wolfgang Beltracchi are masters of replication and fabrication. Both individuals closely study, and mimic, original works created by famous artists like Max Ernst, Marc Chagall, Salvador Dali, and Fernand Leger. Not only do these artists have to replicate stylistic techniques, they must also re-create realistic period materials and surfaces. Tetro explains that he will re-stretch canvas on antique wood and replace staples with nails. He went on to describe his use of resin, followed by baking works in the oven, to mimic the patina of varnish.[12] Art forgery depends on tips and tricks that fool a critical eye into thinking modern materials are antique, replicating not only technique but the aging process as well, just like Dixon's collection of objects.

The fabricated pieces in the *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project* likewise challenge the audience's perception of the real by creating objects as realistically as possible. For instance, I created the coal miner's canary cage using craft wood and dowel sticks, then "aging" with stain washes, and wearing using gouging and debris. Other techniques were utilized to replicate the aging process. The arrowheads, canary skulls, black bear canine teeth, and coal scrip were

11. MoMA, *Against the Grain*.

12. Scott Verchin, "An Interview with Genius Art Forger," *Art Market Magazine* 24 (July 30, 2016).

molded from clay and then painted with acrylic paint and washes. The coal and whitetail deer antler were carved out of Styrofoam, covered in gesso, and painted with acrylic paint. The monarch butterfly was created by painting tissue paper and the body was fabricated with artificial fur and an internal armature. The quilt was created using a modern sewing machine, but stitches were pulled out to replicate hand stitching. The quilt was then stained with tea to give it an antique patina. I created the watercolor journal of Appalachian wildlife by staining paper with a series of watercolor washes and the lettering was created using traditional ink and quill. Similarly, actual newspaper articles were fabricated by printing on newsprint paper with an inkjet printer, then aging them by tearing corners and edges, followed by staining them with coffee. This same process was used in fabricating the antique wall map. Lastly, old period law books, unused and discarded from a law library, were used to replicate period Appalachian literature by removing titles and replacing the titles with vinyl lettering.

When the objects are displayed together, as seen in Figure 11, they bolster and strengthen one another, and lend to the project's credibility. The use of multiple items allows the audience to bounce from one thing to the next, without focusing too extensively on a single item. When the attention is focused exclusively on a singular object, discrepancies and flaws are easier to discover. However, when displayed together in a more domestic setting, the objects appear to be more consistent, cohesive, and necessarily, more credible. With the *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project*, I took a multidisciplinary approach, not limited to a single discipline or medium. Additionally, different materials were utilized that best suited each replication, strengthening the overall concept. The use of nontraditional materials contrasts and complements the use of modern disciplines like still-life paintings and charcoal drawings.

ART AS DISPLAY

Likewise, the exhibition display of the *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project* takes a nontraditional approach. Traditional gallery displays hinge on an orderly process, with most two-dimensional art hung at eye level, pieces an equal distance apart, and each individual work accompanied by a label. However, the display of this project, as seen in Figures 8-16, is a replication of the study and studio of Thaddeus Dixon. Once again, Thaddeus Dixon, the persona, occupies the focus of the project, even the manner of display. The paintings and other works of art are hung in clusters, much as on the wall of a home. The "found" objects are organized in a glass-doored, period cabinet, and the quilt is draped on a period chair. While most of the work is hung at eye level, some images are intentionally hung slightly off center, detailing the imperfection and non-professionalism of the display.

The nontraditional display is merged with a subtle, slightly more traditional display of historic rooms. Even though it replicates a more domestic appearance, viewers still should note the historic importance of the collection. This historical significance is enhanced using custom-built platforms fashioned with period rugs, elevating the furniture off the ground as if a museum display, and advancing the project statement, title, and logo by using black vinyl wall lettering.

A similar display can be found in Tracey Emin's *My Bed,* as seen in Figure 17, created in 1998. After laying in her bed for days, depressed and consuming copious amounts of alcohol, Emin preserved all the belongings around her bed, including her actual bed, and displayed them as a gallery installation.[13] This self-portrait of vulnerability was a non-traditional display, but

13. Richard Cork, *Face to Face: Interviews with Artists* (London, UK: Tate Publishing House, 2015), 34.

pairing it with museum rails that separate the audience from the installation preserves the integrity of the collection.

The unconventional display that I used with the *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project* similarly uses platforms to separate the audience from the objects. However, this elevation also brings the collection closer to the audience, allowing the viewer to bend over and peer into the cabinet, making the viewing process more personal. The cabinet itself is a backbone of the installation, serving as the focal point of the exhibition. The cabinet is inspired by the historical concept of the curio cabinet, or the "cabinet of curiosities," Figure 18. The objects on display are oddities, things of value, artifacts, foreign objects, and antiques. As curator, I am enticing the audience to a view of objects that would otherwise be private, ensuring a more intimate and exposed reflection.

A website accompanies the project (as seen in Figure 19 and cited in the Appendix) and provides an orderly organization of the thesis. The online presence allows the audience to gain more access to information about Dixon and learn about the project's origins, inspiring greater scrutiny and conversation. This, once again, adds authenticity to the project, but also promotes the display as a historical mission to preserve the legacy of Dixon's collection and scholarship, once again inviting the audience to believe that Thaddeus Dixon is an actual person. The website also contains an archive displaying the eighty-seven news articles, cabinet contents, art collection, and installation photos. There are also supplementary resources listed so viewers may learn more about Appalachia and related social issues deftly proposed by the collection. Along with resources, viewers can discover whimsical details, like Emma Mae's blackberry pie recipe. The online portion of the project presents like the efforts of a local historical preservation society that seeks to preserve the legacy of Thaddeus Dixon and his eclectic collection.

Conclusion

As a composed display, the *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project* tells a story of Appalachia through the individual lens of Thaddeus Dixon, a constructed character. The nature and context of Dixon's objects suggest an even larger story, urging the viewer to investigate further the influence of the coal industry on the Appalachian region. Thaddeus Dixon, having lived during the early part of the twentieth century, provides a period perspective on the Appalachian region. Viewers of the exhibition are meant to question the context of Dixon's objects and make conclusions about Appalachia and the coal industry. This allows the viewer to have a historical context that connects to the current issues of Appalachia.

As stated previously, Appalachia as a region is misunderstood and part of my goal with this project was to educate others about the region. Outsiders are unfamiliar with the region's rich history and their perception of the area is usually tainted by cultural stereotypes. Much of the region's art has also been misunderstood. Historically, Appalachian art has not been considered a distinctive genre of art or a subject of serious scholarship. At its core, Appalachian art includes many generational crafts, textiles, and visual art, much depicting the natural beauty of its landscape. Part of my intent with this project was to combine traditional Appalachian crafts, such as the quilt and crocheted items, with more contemporary pieces, such as the coal still-life paintings. It is my hope that the *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project* highlights the history and story of Appalachian art in a more noble manner, defying outdated stereotypes. In this collection, I celebrate the natural beauty of the region while also telling the story of the industrialization brought about by the coal industry.

The only national exhibition of Appalachian art, held in 1981 at the National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C., was titled, *More Than Land or Sky: Art from Appalachia*.

The idea for this national exhibition came about due to a conversation about the region's art and heritage between Joshua C. Taylor, former director of the National Museum of American Art (NMAA), and Ann Bray, a Kentucky native and official with the Appalachian Regional Commission. Harry Lowe, then acting director of NMAA, writes in the opening statement of the exhibition catalog that Taylor had many misgivings about hosting a national exhibit of Appalachian art. Taylor's main concern was the perceived quality of the work included in the exhibit and the perceived quality of the artists represented. Taylor questioned whether the region's art could be described as "fine art," as to debunk the common myth that the region's art consisted of "time-honored crafts practiced in traditional ways by backwoods craftsmen."[14] To meet the quality standards required by the NMAA, the exhibition organizers focused their search on contemporary Appalachian artists whose artistic techniques fit into traditional "fine art" media, like painting, drawing, sculpture, and photography. The authors of the catalog for the exhibition conclude by stating:

> We hope that the exhibition will convince all visitors that Appalachian art is indeed more than the surface treatment of the beauty of land and sky. It is lyric power and quirky individuality rooted in the traditions of the region and in the traditions of American art in general.[15]

The question left unanswered by the exhibit is, why would the audience need assurance that the art of Appalachia is "serious" art? The "highbrow" approach of this exhibit eliminated traditional Appalachian craft and its artisans from serious consideration. As a result, not only did this exhibit do a disservice to the region's rich history of traditional arts and crafts, but it also did a

14. Barbara Nosanow, *More Than Land or Sky: Art from Appalachia* (National Museum of American Art: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), 7.

15. Nosanow, 8.

disservice to the national audience of the exhibition. The audience was deprived of an appreciation of the region's traditional craft and folk art. With my project, I attempt to bridge the gap between traditional and contemporary Appalachian art and craft in hopes of shining positive criticism on the region's history and cultures.

Traditional Appalachian crafts and folk art, important to the region's history and a testament to its ancestors, serve as a catalyst for a new generation of Appalachian artists. Contemporary Appalachian artists possess new subjects to explore and upon which to expand the artistic traditions of earlier generations. The contemporary political and environmental concerns of Appalachia encourage cultural examination and include natural distresses, such as the exploitation of the coal industry on the natural landscape through mountaintop removal. While traditional artists and artisans still exist in Appalachia, many of these artists, such as myself, focus on not only personal works and narratives, but also on social concerns by delivering commentary and promoting social justice through our works. While the coal industry has brought some wealth to the region, at what price? Sadly, the industry has also brought massive and pervasive physical destruction. One of the best attributes of the region has always been its natural beauty. Art is a natural avenue to deliver social commentary on these critical issues, while celebrating the natural beauty and cultural traditions of the region. Appalachian art has not been the subject of serious scholarship and this project hopes to contribute to much-needed expansion of this field.

In summary, the Appalachian region and its art contain a rich history of local cultures and traditions with a contemporary tilt toward social commentary and pursuit of social justice, all of which speaks for the varied cultures, hardships, stories, and traditions of Appalachia. Although celebrated for its natural beauty and defined by its regional boundaries, Appalachia is best

described through the narratives of its inhabitants and the stories of its communities and the *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project* contributes to that narrative.

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APPENDIX A

Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project, https://www.tdpp.org

APPENDIX B

FIGURE 1
Joseph Beuys, *I Like America and America Likes Me*, 1974, SFMoMA, San Francisco

FIGURE 2
Fred Wilson, *Guarded View*, 1993, Maryland Historical Society

FIGURE 3
Fred Wilson, *Guarded View*, Installation, 1993, Maryland Historical Society

FIGURE 4
Damien Hirst, "Medicine Cabniets", 2010, Institue of Contemporary Art, London, UK

FIGURE 5
Yugi Agematsu, "Self-Portrait",
2017, Miguel Abreu Gallery, NYC

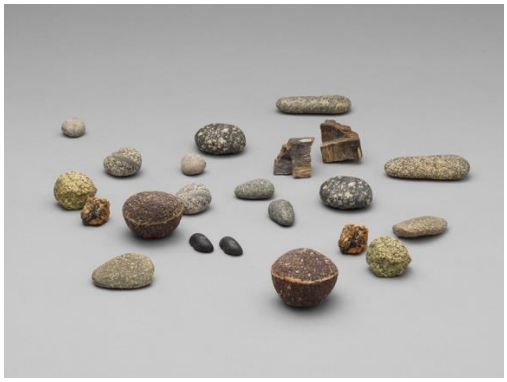

FIGURE 6
Vija Celmins, *To Fix the Image in Memory*, 1977-82, MoMA, NYC

FIGURE 7
Vija Celmins, *To Fix the Image in Memory*, 1977-82, MoMA, NYC

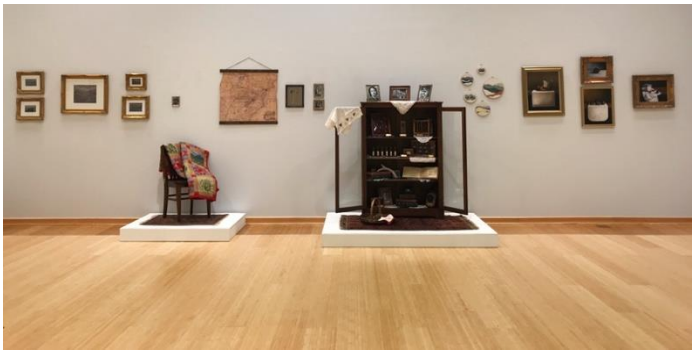

FIGURE 8
Kirsten Sadler, *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project*, Installation, 2019, Radford University Art Museum

FIGURE 9
Kirsten Sadler, *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project*, Installation, 2019, Radford University Art Museum

FIGURE 10
Kirsten Sadler, *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project*, Installation, 2019, Radford University Art Museum

FIGURE 11
Kirsten Sadler, *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project*, Installation, 2019, Radford University Art Museum

FIGURE 12
Kirsten Sadler, *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project*, Installation, 2019, Radford University Art Museum

FIGURE 13
Kirsten Sadler, *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project*, Installation, 2019, Radford University Art Museum

FIGURE 14
Kirsten Sadler, *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project*, Installation, 2019, Radford University Art Museum

FIGURE 15
Kirsten Sadler, *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project*, Installation, 2019, Radford University Art Museum

FIGURE 16
Kirsten Sadler, *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project*, Installation, 2019, Radford University Art Museum

FIGURE 17
Tracy Emin, *My Bed*, 1998, Tate Gallery, London

FIGURE 18
Domenico Remps, *Cabinet of Curiosities*, 1690s, Opificio della Pietre Dure, Florence

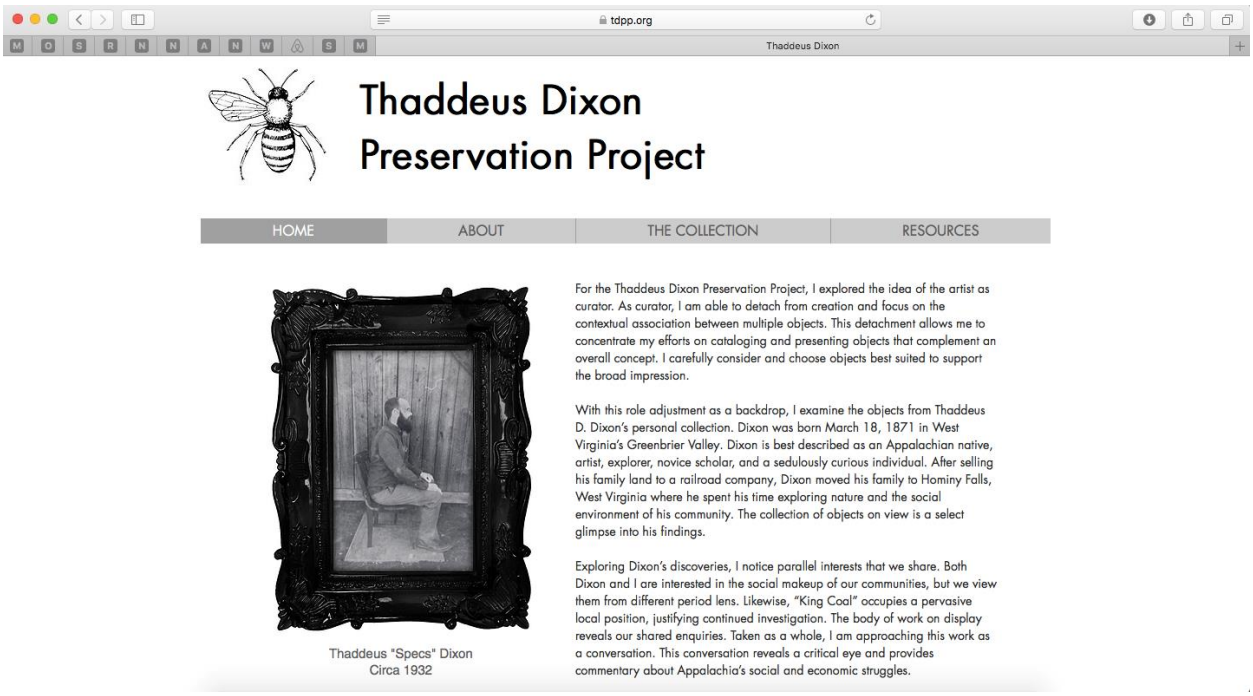

FIGURE 19
Kirsten Sadler, *Thaddeus Dixon Preservation Project*, Website, 2019