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"Faith", 2002, mixed media collage on board

## the figure found

L.A. artist David Brady uses found objects to portray life through art

By Taura S. Mizrahi

*Does art imitate life or does life imitate art?*

*It's a problem similar to the chicken-or-the-egg question. Looking at the definition of art, they seem to be one in the same. Art used as a verb stems from "to be," as many of us who have ever studied Shakespeare know. It may then stand to reason that art is a form of being.*

Los Angeles artist David Brady makes art his life and life his art. With a focus on the figure, Brady transforms seemingly amorphous and meaningless everyday experiences into form.

It wasn't until his late-twenties that Brady made the conscious decision to devote himself to visual art. As a child, Brady was more involved with theater and music. Other than decorating his lunch bags, most of his creative talent went towards the performing arts. In high school he tried a few art classes, but quickly became frustrated with them. "I thought it should be much more liberal," Brady says about his one attempt at a formal art education. "I didn't want to learn how to draw a chair. I wanted to learn how to be creative."

Even in his teenage years, Brady recognized the key ingredient: creativity. Drawing a chair is just that, drawing a chair. Add creativity to it and an inanimate object is given a soul. The viewer can identify to the piece through emotion.

Paint stroked onto a canvas and then covered by a screen can conjure feelings of loneliness and isolation as they do in Brady's "The Refuge." Otherwise meaningless and discarded items when glued together by the artist's creative impulse evoke powerful images. The figure in "The Refuge" peers apprehensively from behind a screen—a dividing line, but a line between whom? Between the figure and the audience? Between the artist and the world? Between us all? That conclusion depends on the individual.

This is one of the reasons why assemblage art fascinates David Brady. Traditionally, an artist draws a bottle. Assemblage art allows the artist to incorporate a real bottle, an actual item with its own history, into the piece. That bottle can trigger a completely different response in each of us since we link our individual experiences to it. Brady does not want to dictate what his audience should feel. He wants the pieces "to trigger [the viewers'] own memories to generate their own responses. I think truly that's what art is."

Assemblage has not always been Brady's medium of choice. A self-taught artist, Brady has worked with a variety of styles ranging from photo-realism to abstract art. He looks to artists like Francis Bacon, Picasso, David Hockney, Rauschenberg and Miles Davis for his influences. Each of these artists constantly reinvented the type of work he did. Brady works in much the same way. He constantly challenges himself with new styles and tools. Brady's theory is to do "whatever gets you back into the studio and be creative."

Part of that challenge is finding new mediums with which he can work. Brady has worked with pretty much every traditional and non-traditional art tool. His preference may be "anything tactile," but he claims to have a "certain fondness" for oils because they will always challenge him.

Much of Brady's work develops from "trying to solve a problem." Part of his problem solving applies to combining tools, including the newest medium available, the computer. "I will generate things in the computer for the purpose of integrating them into traditional mediums," comments Brady. Just as we insert information into and then extrapolate information from the computer, Brady uses it in much the same way with his art. He'll scan something into it, pull it out, glue a piece of hair or part of a map on it, paint on it, scan it back in, pull it out and paint on it again. It's a never-ending, constantly changing, trial-and-error process.

There is one constant in Brady's work: the figure. "Interpreting people has always been something that I'm fascinated with," observes Brady of his interest in the figure. People surround us every day and consequently affect our moods. To understand the figure is to then understand what it is to be. Looking at the figure is a way for Brady to explore the human psyche. By including found objects in his pieces, Brady places the figure into an environment, enabling him to portray humans as we relate to our world.

Brady combines the sterile environment from the computer with the dirt and grit of objects found in alleyways, truly capturing the paradox of modern life. He feels that on one hand, we live and work in an age of technology where everything must be cleaner, faster, and cooler. On the other hand, the world still faces the same problems: hunger, war, and poverty. It's a world where on New Year's Eve Americans celebrate the dawning of a new millennium howling in front of a Gap ad and chugging Bud Light while Bosnian refugees sleep quietly wondering where they will find food the next day.

His latest work, to be featured at the Global Culture Center's (GCC) 5th Annual International Group Show in Osaka, Japan this summer, embodies that duality. This year's juried exhibit, "Human Evolution" shows "man at the millennium. Where we come from. Where we're going. Man stands at the shore of his future and what does he see?" Brady has decided to portray this year's theme, naturally with the figure. He is layering, literally tattooing, classical and primitive figures with symbols and images from modern society. "It's like taking a Greek statue and tattooing it with email," says Brady of his current project. "We still think of ourselves as Greek gods, but we're completely a slave to our society now. We have to have a phone. We have to have a car... We have to have all this stuff. We can't even be simple anymore."

### At this point, his cell phone rings.

This is one of the reasons Brady has accepted a residency in the late summer at an artists' refuge in Montana. Secluded in "God's country" for five weeks without the interruption of phones, faxes and other so-thought necessities, Brady anxiously looks forward to focusing solely on the creative process.

Brady combines the sterile environment from the computer with the dirt and grit of objects found in alleyways, truly capturing the paradox of modern life. Brady craves that type of solitude. It is one of the reasons why he turned to art in the first place. One of seven children, Brady never had much time to himself. Although he enjoyed growing up in a big family, privacy was a rarity. Art became a way for Brady to be alone and turn inward. It is one aspect of life that he can control completely. But Brady, like his work, is a paradox. Even though he enjoys the solitary lifestyle of an artist, he also cherishes the way art connects him to others.

Everything he is involved with, including the GCC, which operates on the belief that art should be the fundamental root for mankind, incorporates the universality of art. Art can bridge gaps and transcend differences. It allows people to co-exist; to be. Even Brady's work with children and his website involve exposing others to the creative process. They are ways for Brady to help make art and the artist's lifestyle available to others.

Art and life are mimetic reflections of one another. Not only do they exist together, they evolve together, challenging each other and constantly striving to better the other. Brady battles with that challenge every night when he enters his studio. He must find different ways for his art to translate the life around him.

For David Brady, art truly is a form of being.

Taura Mizrahi is a graduate of USC's Master of Professional Writing Program. She recently authored Shelby Marlo's New Art of Dog Training: Balancing of Love and Affection. Published by Contemp. INTC.