

# Five Objects and a Story



## Five Objects and a Story:

Object Lists

by Ivanka

Notes Written To Objects In My House

by Aren Aizura

Stuff: A Love Story

by Emily Phillips

this is an accompaniment. an accompaniment zine. this is my love for looking at attractive objects and creating a show about them. an artist object show. this is a cluster of writers who agreed to write about objects. an item and word combo. thank you.

—curated by Emmett Ramstad,  
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Photos

Dust Pan: Emmett Ramstad

Blushing Jug: Aren Aizura

Cheap Clocks: James Giotta

Prize Capsule: Justin Limoges

Design: Micah Bazant

# Object Lists, or Notes on Artists, Writers and Longing

by Ivanka

## 1. A List of Objects Observed on New York City Subway Tracks:

- loose change
- paper coffee cups
- single shoes (what happens to their mates?)
- broken umbrellas
- greasy paper fast food sacks (and other take-out containers)
- candy wrappers
- cell phones
- blood stains (does that count as an object? what about dead bodies?)

Actually, it was my best friend from high school (to be honest, my only friend from high school) who saw the blood stain. It looked like a bucket of dried paint, he tells me, only not splattered at all, just big and oval. This is going to be harder than I thought. Emmett is telling me about the object show in a cute organic cafe and we're drinking this beautiful goldengreen hot apple cider, but I'm crying and trying to catch the tears with a recycled paper napkin before the mascara runs all down my face. The tears just swell up because I'm listening to the old man in a motorized wheelchair and the little boy holding the door for him, and they're just about the same size and laughing about how they're both nervous. Nervous about what? And then they're already out the narrow door and into the street. Is a motorized wheelchair an object, or is it better if it's something you can hold in your hand? Hold it to your face and get a good look.

## 2. A List of Objects Kept in a Shoebox Under my Bed, Age 15:

- my mother's battered paperback edition of *Our Bodies, Our Selves*
- a tiny Catholic prayerbook with a mother-of-pearl cover, missing its back (I improvised by gluing in a piece of painted cardboard)
- a jeweled sweater clip inherited from my great-grandmother Sophia
- a letter from an older boy I had a crush on, written on gray newsprint and folded into a hard triangle
- a blue resin votive candle holder in the shape of a half sun rising out of nowhere
- a bundle of crumbling dried lavender, tied together with white polyester thread
- a handkerchief with a lace hem, won in Sunday School for memorizing the books of the Old Testament
- one half-burned birthday candle
- two prayer cards from a funeral I did not attend
- the disembodied hard rubber arm of a life-size baby doll

Artists are not like writers. I know this because when I ask my friends, who are mostly literary, if they dream about objects, or what objects they collect, their responses are all things like jewelry from dead family members, or scenic postcards from ex-lovers, or hair ribbons tied around real hair or devotional candles--basically, Deeply Symbolic Objects that they keep around because they remind them of Real Things That Happened In The Past. Or as the other Sophia put it quite succinctly, "I like objects that can hold the absence of something." When I go to the home of my artist friend, however, his walls and every little nook and cranny are filled up with Objects Rife With Pure Aesthetic Possibility: A Dented Dustpan! Two Antique Shoe Stretchers! Five Yellowed Cotton Gloves! I don't mean to make sweeping generalizations, and I can't imply any hierarchy of meaning where none exists, but -- it's different, right?

Okay, let me try again. Artists and writers are not entirely like each other. I know this because I am driving myself to distraction with deep longing for this boy in my art class, and it's not getting very far. Which is for a lot of reasons, not least of which is that neither of us is exactly the gender the other is used to getting it on with. (Though, as we all know by now, that doesn't ever really stop anybody.) But surely one of the reasons it's not going smoothly is because there's me, the writer, amoebic and permeable and blinking my third eye all over the place, just looking for something to meld into; and then there's the wonderfully formed, exquisite square cube of my beautiful friend the artist.

We're always longing for what's just out of reach. Push too hard and the whole thing topples over.

### 3. A List of Objects I've Been Warned Not to Touch:

- the spokes of an exercise bicycle in use
- the Third Rail
- my mother's vibrator
- the canvas of Monet's Water Lilies (the guard warned me in perfect English that my nose was too close)
- half-full cans of oil paint, turpentine and gasoline
- door handles in public restrooms

"Touch me," said Stanley Kunitz, and he was ninety-one years old in his garden lusting after the memory of lust while all the little crickets were cranking out fuck me fuck me fuck me and then he died.

"Touch me, remind me who I am."

Don't touch that. Touch me.

#### 4. A List of Objects That Frequently Appear in Dreams:

- disembodied teeth (often crumbling, falling into the palm)
- maps to nowhere
- telephones (both the old-fashioned and the new, cellular ones)
- paintbrushes
- balls of yarn

Notice that Freud's pipe is conspicuously absent. When I want to dream about dicks, I dream about dicks. Once, in fact, I wanted to dream about dicks so hard that I dreamed both of my breasts turned into long, pendulous dicks swaying from my chest. I called my mother, and even she was impressed.

This one was hardest for me because in spite of the dick dream (and if it's attached to you, I'm not sure it qualifies) I don't really dream about objects. I dream about landscapes; about imaginary cities I've been to before but can't remember how or when; about apartments that expand and reveal hidden rooms that have always been there but never noticed. I dream about my Spiritual Mother appearing in the Brooklyn Public Library and telling me *She Will Take Care of Me and We'll Never Have Any Money but We'll Always Eat*; I dream about streets that melt into rivers and run out to the sea. Nothing was floating in the dream river except me in my boat, except all the other people in their own little boats. Does that count?

#### 5. A List of Objects That Are Frequently Kissed:

- bishops' rings
- rosary medals
- mirrors
- framed photographs of loved ones
- stuffed animals

- high heels
- doorposts (in the Iliad the Trojan women wept and rent their hair and kissed the city walls as the enemy poured in to slay their men and make them slaves)
- love letters

Proust wasted the best years of his life on a woman who wasn't even his style, but think of all the things touched trying to get to her. Odette's orchids. Letters copied twice. Darkly paneled walls and the backsides of a tiled bathroom with the water running into the tub. Telegrams and petits bleus sucked through the pneumatic tubes of a city at dusk. Carriages, cups of tea. Think of all the things that can never be touched – church steeples, the princess's pearls, the truth of your own childhood, my love for you. The object that carries the absence. Does it count?



## Notes Written To Objects In My House

by Aren Aizura

Dear Great Western Savings and Loan Association of California  
needle book,

When did banks sell or give away needle books?

Dear small brass box,

How tightly packed were the approximately 200 gramophone needles that arrived in you when you were new? What did “His Master’s Voice” sound like? By including a picture of fingernail-sized dog sitting with pricked up ears by a gramophone on the lid of the box, are you making a subtle Pavlov joke?

Dear old brass stationary box,

Who photographed the image of rubber bands on the piece of lining-paper that I found in your bottom? Was it the same person who decided on the font that would eventually be used to emboss the words RUBBER BANDS and CLIPS on the two hinged compartments?

Dear jug,

Why are you blushing?



## Stuff: A Love Story

by Emily Phillips

1. It's funny how much we own, how much we desire to own. We frequently say, "We just can't. We don't have the space." We frequently take stock, sort, and cull, making space for more to enter our lives. We think this is healthy; at least we're not hoarding. But when faced with deciding what to keep, we come face to face with not only our ugly materialness, but also our nagging guilt at throwing something away, the dread of the landfill. But like Neruda, we "have a crazy, crazy love of things", and this love we cannot stop. There is so much to appreciate in things. Think of the time, the material, and intellect it took to design or create it. Think of the hands that cared for it, the abuse it tolerated, the joy it brought, however fleeting. Think of that and no matter how junky, the thing becomes almost human, the world sublime.

2. In another life, this is how we met: on the shag carpeted stairs of an estate sale amidst the vultures, recyclers, scavengers, and collectors. Surrounded by things. Teacups listing on the shelf, old metal wind-up toys collecting dust, toy blocks peeling and faded, antique dice, clear and colorful as jellies in a jar, dented and rusted boxes which once held bread, saltines, cream crackers, pretzels, lard, a lunch.

Many years ago, before I met you, I packed up all my things in boxes and put together a small bag. I went out exploring on my own for three months. When I returned, I was surprised that I hadn't thought of a single item in those boxes the entire time I was gone. I couldn't even remember what they contained, so I never bothered to unpack

them. I met you soon after and found the need to unpack them then, to show you all what meant something to me.

3. Plastic: the destroyer of quality. We went on holiday and witnessed it everywhere. The malleable, short-lived, one-time use that vacations at powdery white beaches, mulching the palm trees with broken forks and slag-filled bottles, a kaleidoscope of plastic chips and pieces replacing the shells that beachcombers collect. You hunted a pair of plastic sandals, but among the hundreds strewn along the tide line, you only found lefts, many broken, some with holes and barnacles.

(The tragic comedy of junk filling up our lives and trickling out as trash. The insidious convenience of cheap, which everyone wants, but no one wants to live with. Many of our needs are thoughtless, contrived. I could carry around a fork. In the 1890s, a lady needed a breast pin to hold her handkerchief.)

We walked five miles into the wind. Out our left eye the wide-open blue possibility, out our right the why or how of all that trash, the if, tempting us to pick through it for something, anything, (*there must be something worth saving*). I found an old coin and you found your pair, the right in sky blue, the left in gray. After we'd stopped looking, we stumbled across a baby sea turtle the size of my palm, its mouth pink and croaking, its eyes weepy and sand-itched, its shell and flippers dry and weak in the blasting sun. We wanted to save it, but there was nothing to do except crouch and explain it away, but the memory never moved.

