

CARAND BURNET

## Tom Paiement: Entropy's Garden

Up a three-story fire escape in historic Bath, Maine, artist Tom Paiement revives debris into collages that address some of the most elusive topics concerning human life. Miniature hills of tarnished metal, beaten wood, and torn paper bury his studio floor. Paiement modifies these scraps into radiant mixed-media floral arrangements. Through the backroom's dull light appears thin metal, once dusty, now beaming in bright hues. Paiement's flowers, rendered inside collaged and painted interiors, are in persistent growth, as the artist continuously alters the surfaces. Once an aerospace engineer, Paiement works with complete focus as he removes a cut wood leaf from the flower's layers, rotates it, and inserts the piece beneath the embedded petals. As both scientist and artist, he is captivated by the many combinations created from positioning a single object.



Tom Paiement, *Entropy Aftermath 7812*, 2010, mixed-media, 22 x 16".

to create associations that can only be expressed through visual art.

Entropy, a thermodynamic term, refers to how a small amount of energy is always lost. Paiement applies this scientific definition to the examination of his materials. He captures lost energy when reusing discarded objects. His current series, *Entropy Aftermath A,B,C,X*, contains botanicals not of the *vanitas* variety. When the world appears full of morose discord, Paiement's flowers optimistically rise. They constantly search and refuse to wilt.

Almost any used object can potentially find its way into Paiement's art. Old doors and tin roofing become petals with rust bleeding through. Feral flowers spread over a window composed of newsprint in *Entropy Aftermath 4213*. Watercolor flowers, buds of colored wood, and the collaged word "new" blossom over the straight bamboo stem.

**"I created my first floral when my son turned eighteen years old and was eligible for the draft...I thought of the young, smart soldiers that romanticize the glories of war but then face the truth of its terrible conflict."**

Arranging his words as carefully as his complex layers, Paiement says that his process correlates well with science. Artists and scientists alike boldly search for answers to inexplicable questions. "Scientists think like artists," he says, "but the difference is the artist's sensitivity to visual expression."

Paiement's flowers search for truth in the

scientifically unexplainable. In *Entropy Aftermath 3651*, circular Plexiglas encases painted petals and hints at Paiement's fascination with black holes. The alluring floral arrangement flourishes over an abraded "for sale" sign background. Cool, ethereal petals burst against resplendent hues of purple and crimson. Scientific reasoning gives Paiement a purpose

Two works from his *Entropy Trilogy* series were shown this past winter at the University of New Hampshire's exhibition, *War and Remembrance*, while a third was simultaneously displayed in *Collage: Piecing It Together* at the Portland Museum of Art. Paiement's current series, *Entropy Aftermath A,B,C,X*, will be exhibited June 3–26 in Portland's Greenhut Galleries.

"Scientifically, the flower is a delicate aspect of the physical world due to its cell structure," Paiement said during a lecture that coincided with the *War and Remembrance* exhibit. "I created my first floral when my son turned eighteen years old and was eligible for the draft...I thought of the young, smart soldiers that romanticize the glories of war but then face the truth of its terrible conflict."

Paiement's botanicals do not hold an anti-war statement but focus on the human perseverance through war. He conveys this, in part, through texture. The mesh alludes to war's reality while the loose watercolor petals represent the soldiers' delicate impermanence.

"When creating these works, I thought of my father's generation fighting in World War II," says Paiement. "However, through all this struggle, the world eventually continued." The artist predicts no death for his flowers. In spite of war, social class barriers, and other obstacles, society gathers its ruins and rebuilds.

Initially Paiement studied engineering until a chance encounter with a collage artist inspired him to study art for ten years. This led him to study printmaking under Mauricio Lasansky at the University of Iowa, which played a crucial role in his artistic development.

"[Lasansky] pushed students to not look back and question their work," says Paiement.



Tom Paiement in his studio.



Tom Paiement, *Entropy Aftermath 3651*, 2010, mixed-media, 32 x 36".

So in 2006 when the artist discovered abandoned tin ceiling sheets behind his studio, he took the metal and never looked back. After nailing and adhering pieces onto the board, Paiement applies printmaking techniques. He collages relief prints into his work. Using a palette knife, Paiement scratches linear marks into painted metal surfaces as if drawing with a stylus into a copper plate. He also sands areas as if burnishing an etching line. Paiement recently plastered over an image he had worked on for three months, and he will erase a painting if it appears overworked. Surprisingly, this is the point in his process that Paiement enjoys most. Restarting allows him to again apply inherent marks of paint or metal.

Because of his general interest in human life, Paiement believes his studio could be located anywhere. Inside his small studio in Bath, paint tubes, large containers, ripped sheets, spray

adhesive, and books flood over the tables. A few boards hold petal palimpsests that anticipate Paiement's adjustment. A wooden door opens to his summer studio; sunlight overwhelms the space and highlights more nailed panels and discarded material. The noise of clanging metal and the shifting of wood echoes underneath the cathedral ceilings. In spring, when his larger studio warms, more of his flowers will grow. Beneath the call of seagulls and otherwise coastal silence, Paiement creates a garden of prospect based on what the world has lost.

Carand Burnet, a construction artist, received a BFA from New Hampshire Institute of Art. Her poems have appeared in *The Arsenic Lobster Poetry Journal*, *Omphalos Journal*, and others.

**TOM PAIEMENT**  
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