

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

Pam Rosenblatt  
Kirk Etherton

**O**n one sunny Friday, January 17, 2014 afternoon, *Wilderness House Literary Review's* art editor Pam Rosenblatt met with Somerville artist/poet/musician Kirk Etherton at the Middle East Restaurant, Cambridge, Massachusetts, for an arts interview. The two people were acquainted through the Bagel Bards, a group of poets, writers, small press publishers, and artists who meet at Au Bon Pain, Somerville, Massachusetts, on Saturday mornings. Kirk and his wife, Lucy, frequently attend this Saturday gatherings. Etherton was all excited about his art show at ZuZu, affiliated with the Middle East Restaurant, to start the next day. The next few paragraphs discuss Etherton's art pieces, or his "objet trouvé".

A NATURAL WOODEN MAZE made out of discarded but found picture frame pieces, either natural or painted, glued together abstractly into the shape of a standard or a distorted picture frame, is what an artwork by Somerville Bagel Bard Kirk Etherton most likely looks like.

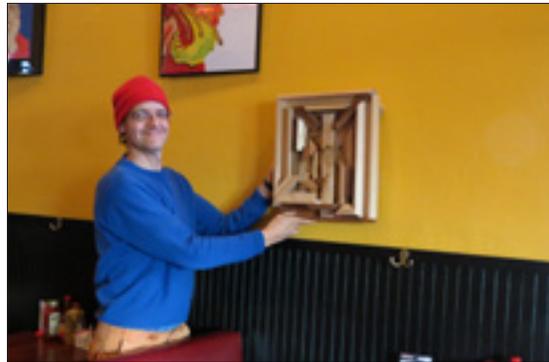
While a picture frame usually houses a painting or a photograph, Etherton has deconstructed and then reconstructed actual picture frames into non-representational structures that hold pieces of picture frames that are held together with glue. His picture frame art is undefined, exits the realm of reality as we, the observers, know it.

Etherton is a man with many creative outlets. He works professional in the fields of public relations and advertising. But during off hours, he is a poet, a photographer, a musician, and, yes, he is an artist. His artwork is non-traditional. And, while he has been known to take photographs with five dollar disposable cameras, he never really developed his artistic skills until 10 years ago while the idea of creating found picture frame art came to his mind as he walked down Somerville's Somerville Avenue.

"It actually became important for me to make art by gluing together pieces of found discarded picture frames – large and small –, glue them together to make something out of them. Nothing representational. Just to get these things and start working on them."

He found some sources that gave him the no-longer-wanted picture frames and began creating art from the disposed of frames. He would take one piece and glue it to another piece – sometimes straight, sometimes different shapes, usually angular – and eventually a finished product consisting of natural wooden frame pieces or painted frame pieces filled the sides and the centers of the artwork.

Sometimes the artwork looked like a multi-colored picture frame with pieces of former frames fitted into the entire center of the frame making



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the artwork two dimensional or three dimensional. The sizes of the artworks range from 12" x 12" to 5' tall x 2/12' to 3' wide. Etherton's largest picture frame artworks are usually approximately 3' x 3', though.

Conservation plays a major part in these maze-like artworks. "The tenants of conservation, they always say, '... reduce, re-use, and recycle.'" Etherton said. "The most important thing is reducing your use of things, especially true of fossil fuel."

Etherton's frame artworks are "re-used or re-purposed. All of these things would have ended up in the dump some place," he said.

Where Etherton finds these disposed of picture frame parts is a mystery. He doesn't want to divulge his suppliers who have allowed him to be "very focused on [making picture frame art]. I felt like these elements that I found taught me about art," said Etherton.

It isn't unusual for professional artists acquainted with Etherton to ask him what his art background is, where he received his M.F.A. from, after viewing the art pieces. Ironically, though, Etherton has simply received a Bachelor of Arts degree from University of Vermont where he majored in Political Science. He doesn't have a degree in art.

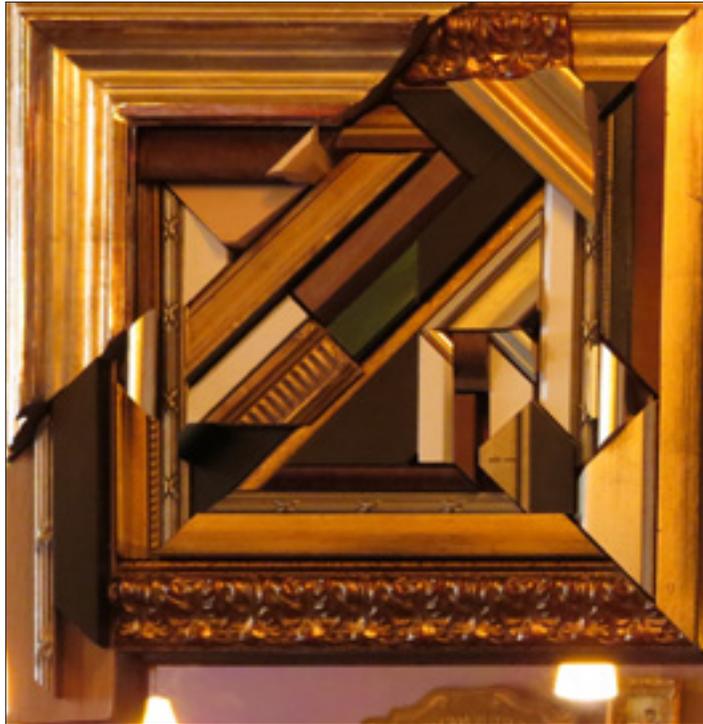
His work has been compared to Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase" because of all the various angles found in Etherton's art pieces. But Etherton's works also reflect the long line of "objet trouvé", or found art, that has developed since the years of Pablo Picasso



(1881-1973), George Braque (1882-1963), Antoni Gaudé (1852-1926) where real objects have been used in the construction of their paintings to show the links between reality, representation, and illusion.<sup>1</sup>

But, as mentioned earlier, Etherton's art pieces are non-representational. They're totally abstract, reflect the creativeness of a very fine, creative mind. Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948) was a German painter, sculptor, writer, and designer who worked professionally as a clerical worker and a mechanical draftsman. He made non-representational collages created from discarded trash collected off the streets and parks of Hannover, Germany after World War I. His artistic purpose was to create beauty out of the

<sup>1</sup> Oxford University Press, "objet trouvé", [www.moma.org/collection/details.php?theme\\_id=10195](http://www.moma.org/collection/details.php?theme_id=10195), p. 1, 2/6/2014.



ruins of a war-torn Germany.<sup>2</sup>

Etherton never cuts or paints the pieces of picture frames that he works with, uses them only in their original condition. His “objet trouvé” reveals a beauty of thought and creativity reflective of trying to save – reduce, reuse, recycle – a culture preoccupied with throwing away things no longer needed. As mentioned before, these picture frame pieces would have found a new home in a landfill somewhere.

He enjoys working with his “objet trouvé” picture frame pieces and learning a bit about life from them. A “mistake” in a frame piece or a “flaw” in a piece of the frame often turns out to be the most intriguing part of the artwork, said Etherton.

“Keeping an open mind is essential. I seldom know what [direction] will be most useful – or in what way,” he said.



2 MoMa, “The Collection | Kurt Schwitters”, [http://www.moma.org/col-lection/artist.php?artist\\_id=5293](http://www.moma.org/col-lection/artist.php?artist_id=5293), p. 3, 2/6/2014.