

## Pack Rat Treasure: Ordinary And Odd

By MICHELLE L. DOZOIS

The New Museum's summer show "The Keeper" explores the complex relationships we have with the things we collect. Why do we amass certain objects? How do these collections affect us and those around us? When does a pleasant hobby cross the line into obsession, even madness?

Inspired by this vast exhibition, which includes some 4,000 items and artworks over four floors, created or preserved by 30 "keepers," The New York Times asked readers to submit stories and photos of their own collections. The hundreds of responses were inspirational, delightful, poignant, shocking and disgusting, occasionally all at once. A sampling of these collections:

Absolut Vodka ads. Apple stems. Avocado seeds. Beach plastic. Branded barware. Broken objects. Chopstick wrappers. Discarded snapshots. Doll heads ("The head must be found as a separate item," wrote Brenda Segel of New York). Donald Duck memorabilia. Egg cups. Goddess statues. Greeting cards. "Harry Potter" books in different languages. Hotel room keys. Lucite grape clusters. Mah-jongg sets. Marijuana tax stamps. Men's polyester disco shirts. Museum toilet paper from Europe. Nirvana posters. Oyster shells. Pockets. Potty-training books. Rubber ducks. Sand. Skull mugs. Soviet watches. Troll dolls. Typewriters. Vintage: Barbie structures, electric clothes irons, figures of the Virgin Mary, handkerchiefs, metal measuring tapes, photos of a baby and a dog in a playpen, photos of people and places named Dick, Thermoses, Western Electric telephones.

The word "hoarder" came up more than once. Some readers expressed a tinge of regret; many more, joy. And a few, befuddlement. "It started out innocently enough with a plastic banana in a Ziploc bag on the door of my apartment when I was in college," wrote Scott McCarney of Rochester. "Before I knew it I was publishing a newsletter and collecting bananabilia."

Here are some of our favorite reader collections, with explanations edited for space. "The Keeper" runs through Sept. 25.



### Novelty Pens

BETTY SCHWARTZ AND, ALEXANDER WILENSKY, NEW YORK

▲ "We have a novelty pen collection, between 300 and 500 pieces (our best guess). The criteria for our pen collection is that each pen should have a fun novelty element — it should either move, light up, talk or make sounds and, of course, it should write! Some of the pens can even project slides on the wall, make soap bubbles, record voices and even function as a one-armed bandit! We started to collect the pens in the 1990s and still continue. The collection is a happy respite from the digital world."



### Dolls Eyes

LISA WOOD, SAN FRANCISCO

▲ "I tend to collect objects that are overlooked, discarded or rejected. I also tend to focus on children's toys because I love the juxtaposition between the sweet and the forlorn. I call them my 'Loved to Death' collection. Being a misfit myself, I have always been drawn to anything out of the ordinary. I think most people don't understand my attraction to these objects, but there are a few out there that appreciate the search."



### Shoe Treads

HEIDI DAUPHIN, PHOENIX

▲ "One of my most unusual collections is treads from the bottom of peoples' shoes found on hiking trails. I live in Phoenix and our trails are extremely rocky and hard causing soles to break down. In 2010 I was working on a project to collect a small object a day that represented something I did each day. On the first few hikes that year I picked up some rocks from the trails I was hiking. Soon I noticed tiny pieces of colored rubber on the trail and I couldn't resist picking them up. The year 2010 ended, but I kept on hiking and kept on picking up treads. I have never counted the pieces, but I imagine I have over a thousand. I can't resist the array of colors I see and different textures, markings, and logos each little piece holds."



### Vacuum Cleaner Dirt

CONSTANCE THALKEN, DECATUR, GA.

▲ "For one year, at the end of every month, I collected and saved the contents of my vacuum cleaner. I simply dumped the contents into a plastic grocery bag, labeled the bag with the month, and placed it in a dark corner of my attic to incubate. I valued the monthly ritual and somehow was comforted to know that this practice was now part of living a life in my home. After the year passed, I brought the bags downstairs to my studio. I opened each month and methodically spread out the contents on a piece of artist paper. And I was mesmerized by what I saw. I was moved by

the massive mounds of hair shedded by my dog Tyner, now matted and entangled in its own dark dusty beauty. I saw how the ladybugs that gathered on the sun drenched living room windows in the summer had transformed in death into enameled shells of spotted amber now headless, legless. My usual fright of the wasps and bees gave way to tenderness; their frozen poses now elegiac and wistful. The dense clumps of pollen from April made my throat tighten. Everywhere the remnants from life in my home were woven into the debris."



### Knots

WINDY CHIEN, SAN FRANCISCO

▲ "I'm learning and making one new knot every day in 2016, using ye olde sailors' knot tying books from the 1940s and prior. When I set out to make a knot a day, I had no idea that the way I store the pieces would itself become a thing. The knot wall is now so big I'm running out of space for it."



### Men in Rows

BARRY HARRISON, RANCHO MIRAGE, CALIF.

▲ "I collect anonymous vintage photos of men in rows. The variations on this theme are endless and endlessly fascinating to me: from standing to sitting to lying, from warmly intimate to cool and unemotional. How men interact when they line up in front of a camera says much about their times, social mores, and individual preferences. In these photos they define manhood in relation to one another."

PHOTOGRAPHS VIA THE COLLECTORS

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Miles Salerni, a percussionist, spent two summers in the orchestra crew and dreamed of being onstage. Now he is, as a Tanglewood fellow. PAGE 2

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This pop culture festival, which is usually largely white and male, gave space to films like "Black Panther" and "Wonder Woman." PAGE 3

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In the mood for short stories, a novella or a novel? Consider new work by Amie Barrodale, Joy Williams, Hubert Mingarelli and Rikki Ducornet. PAGE 4