



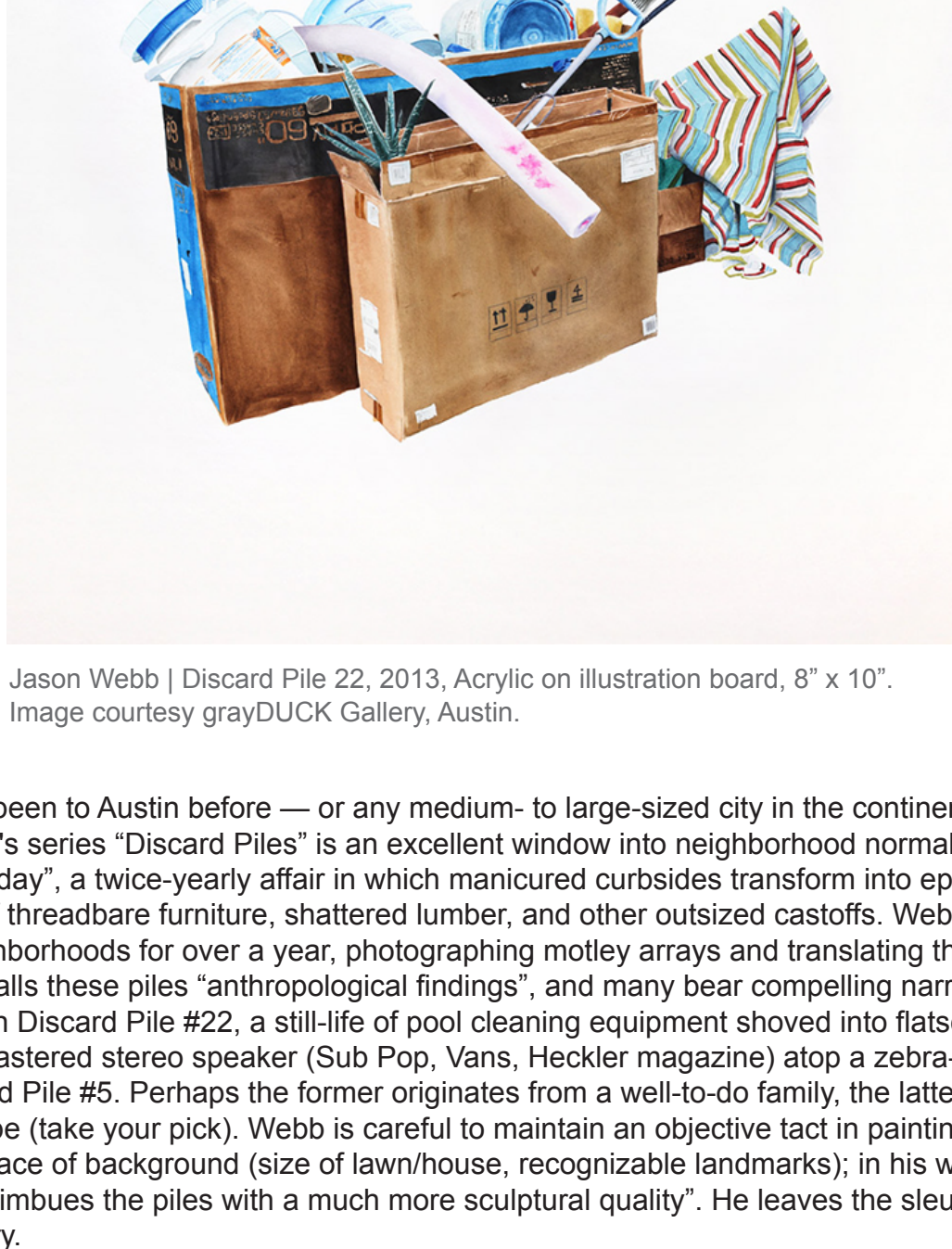
VALUE JUDGEMENT: JASON WEBB

AT GRAYDUCK GALLERY by New American Paintings

August 6, 2013, 8:30 am

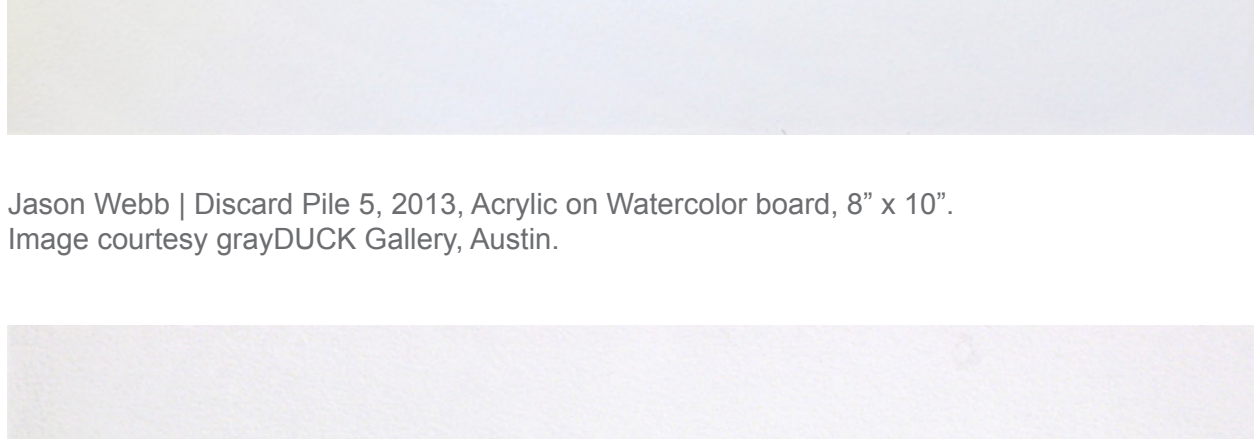
Filed under: Review | Tags: Brian Fee, grayDuck Gallery, Jason Webb

One person's trash is another person's treasure. That message resounds in Jason Webb's acrylic paintings, on view as Bulk Collection, his solo debut at Austin's grayDUCK Gallery. Rooting through these photorealistic accumulations of...stuff...we discern degrees of worth, on what is kept and what is left behind. — Brian Fee, Austin contributor



Jason Webb | Discard Pile 22, 2013, Acrylic on illustration board, 8" x 10".
Image courtesy grayDUCK Gallery, Austin.

If you've never been to Austin before — or any medium- to large-sized city in the continental United States — Webb's series "Discard Piles" is an excellent window into neighborhood normalcy. Specifically "bulk collection day", a twice-yearly affair in which manicured curbsides transform into ephemeral assemblages of threadbare furniture, shattered lumber, and other outsized castoffs. Webb has cased residential neighborhoods for over a year, photographing motley arrays and translating them into paint in his studio. He calls these piles "anthropological findings", and many bear compelling narratives. Consider the "new toys" in Discard Pile #22, a still-life of pool cleaning equipment shoved into flatscreen TV boxes, or the sticker-plastered stereo speaker (Sub Pop, Vans, Heckler magazine) atop a zebra-print shag carpet in Discard Pile #5. Perhaps the former originates from a well-to-do family, the latter a young or aging rocker-type (take your pick). Webb is careful to maintain an objective tact in painting his subjects, removing any trace of background (size of lawn/house, recognizable landmarks); in his words "the negative space imbues the piles with a much more sculptural quality". He leaves the sleuthing to us, and opinions will vary.

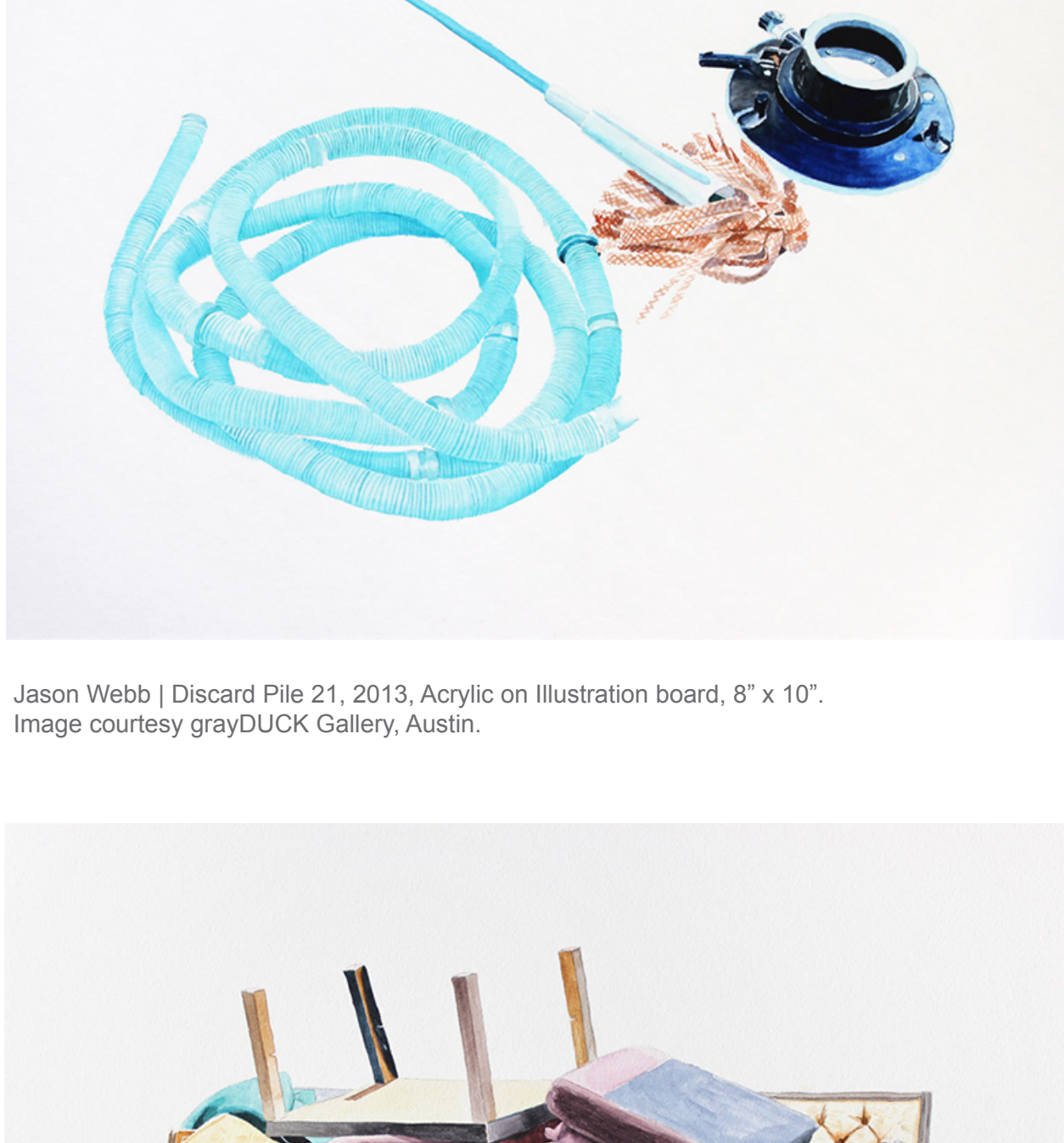


Jason Webb | Discard Pile 5, 2013, Acrylic on Watercolor board, 8" x 10".
Image courtesy grayDUCK Gallery, Austin.

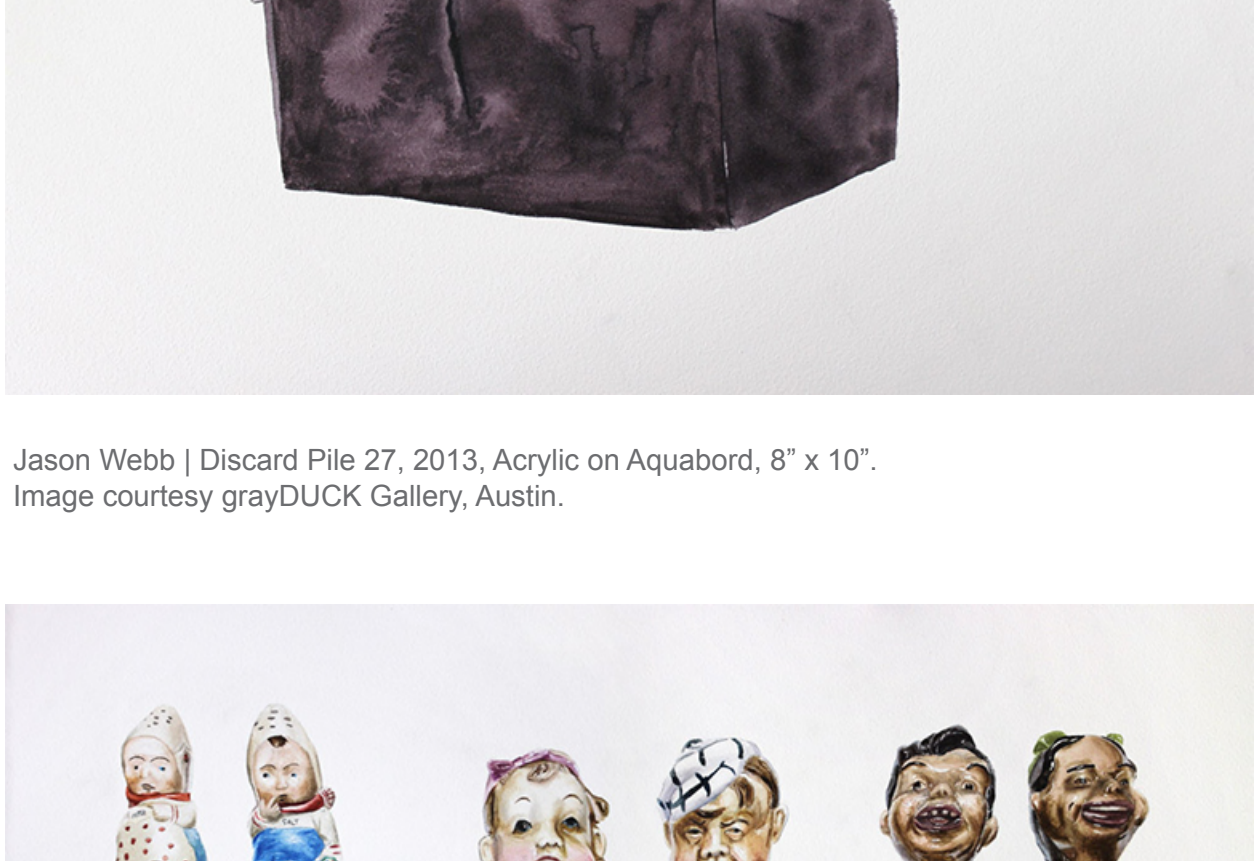


Jason Webb | Discard Pile 12, 2013, Acrylic on Watercolor board, 8" x 10".
Image courtesy grayDUCK Gallery, Austin.

Some compositions are cryptic, sober little mini-mysteries. For instance, why does the royal blue easy-chair in Discard Pile #12 have an extra seat cushion? Did the former owner decide to keep its (albeit cushion-less) mate? The accompanying '90s-era computer monitor and pastel-pink toilet seat liberate no obvious clues. Or, how did the furniture of Discard Pile #27 coalesce into an upholstered approximation of "rock balancing"? And what exactly is that bulbous raspberry-like form dwarfing its neighbors in Discard Pile #11, a deflated weather balloon or parachute? Or — considering the proliferation of water-related ephemera in Austin rubbish — is it a raft? Mattresses seem to recur as often as pool supplies. As a seven-year-plus Manhattan resident, I equate busted box-springs posed against city dumpsters with vermin. I wonder if it's the same idea in Austin? Or are they moving and could not be bothered to lug the mattress along?



Jason Webb | Discard Pile 21, 2013, Acrylic on Illustration board, 8" x 10".
Image courtesy grayDUCK Gallery, Austin.

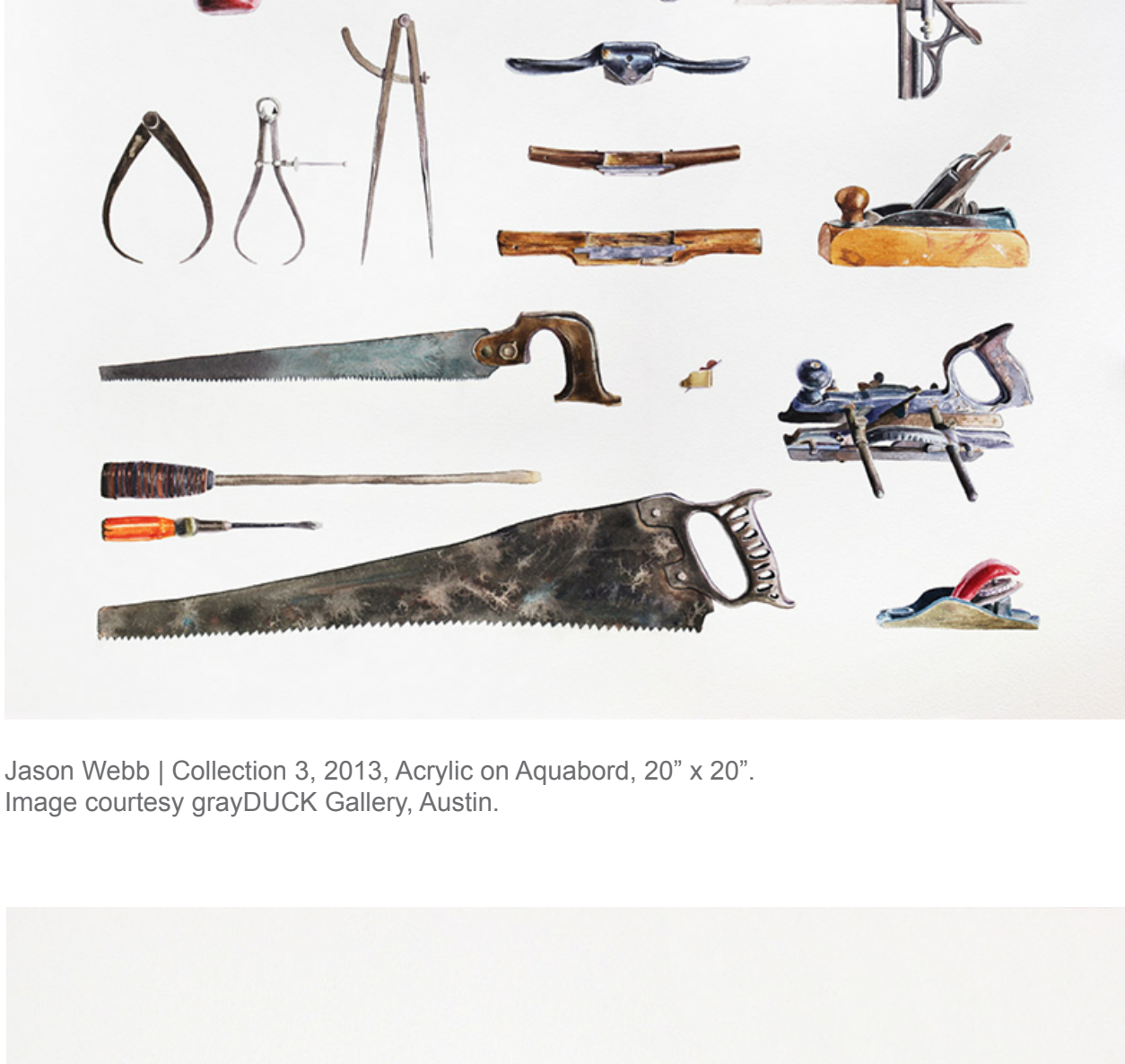


Jason Webb | Discard Pile 27, 2013, Acrylic on Aquabord, 8" x 10".
Image courtesy grayDUCK Gallery, Austin.



Jason Webb | Collection 4, 2013, Acrylic on Aquabord, 20" x 20".
Image courtesy grayDUCK Gallery, Austin.

Webb's new series "Collections" is a logical tangent from "Discard Piles", lifelike objects painted against white backdrops, divorced from their owners or histories. Webb's attention to detail translates from "Discard Piles": it's not simply that these odd salt and pepper shakers look more valuable (or rather, valued) due to their uncannily ceramic-like realization. Kitsch aside, these are grinning children, Paul Bunyan and Blue, couples with double sets of eyes, a Native American "Chief" and his Pilgrim wife. Rather, it is the repetition of these objects, banal to some of us yet deeply personal to the owner, that differentiate them from the hodgepodge (if photo-true) "Discard Piles". These spice shakers may never see use, relegated to display cases like the vintage woodworking apparatuses in Collection #3, but their intrinsic value is clear, odd though it may be for non-collectors of curious curios.

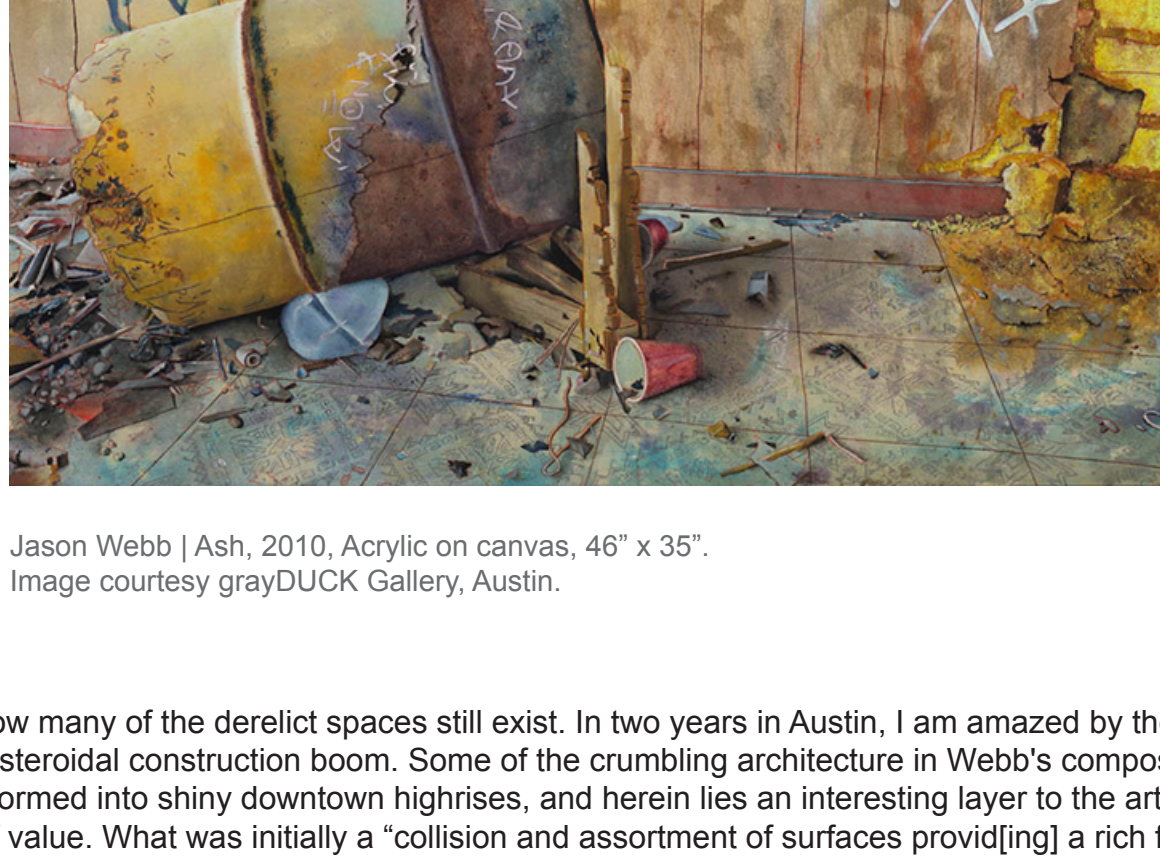


Jason Webb | Collection 3, 2013, Acrylic on Aquabord, 20" x 20".
Image courtesy grayDUCK Gallery, Austin.



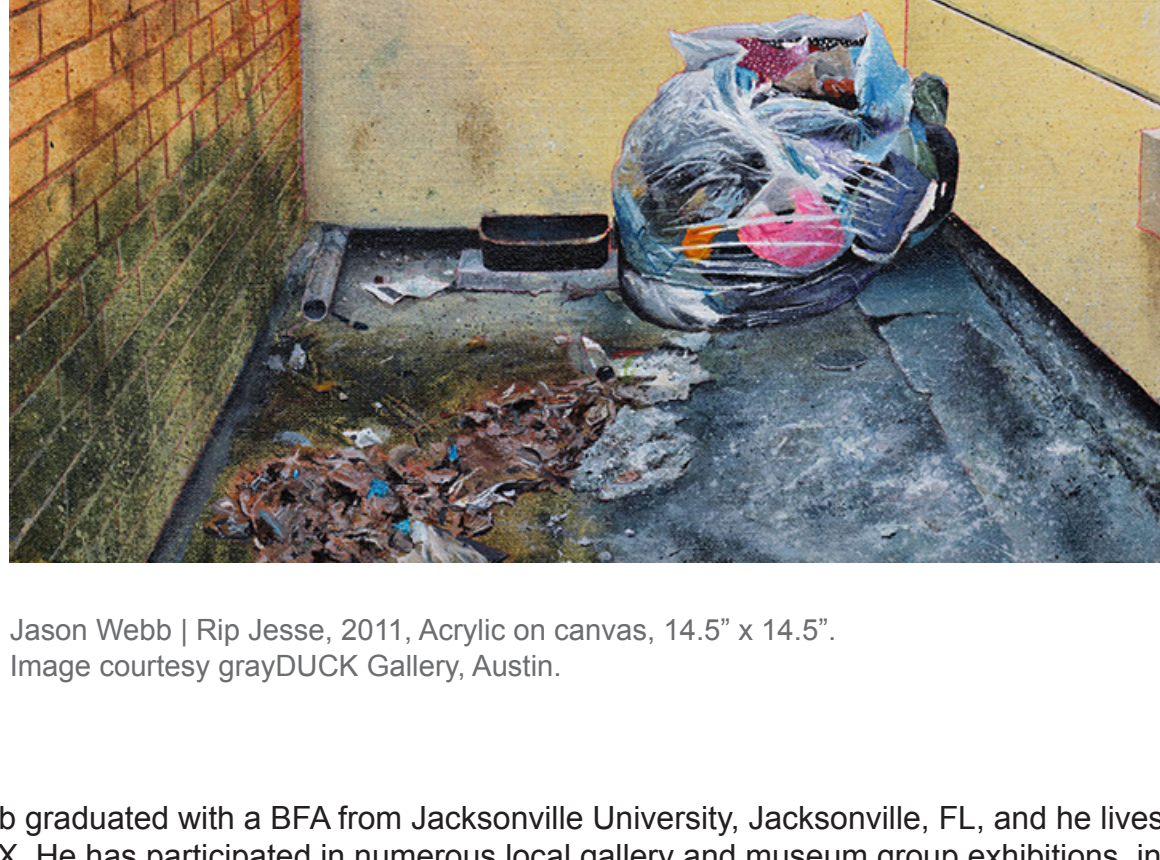
Jason Webb | Discard Pile 11, 2013, Acrylic on Aquabord, 8" x 10".
Image courtesy grayDUCK Gallery, Austin.

Before deciding on aquabord for "Collections", Webb experimented with a variety of surfaces for the intimately scaled (think junior-high photo print-sized) "Discard Piles". According to the artist, initially "the small size was to address as many piles as possible" due to the source material's abundance (lots of Austinites with lots of bulk rubbish), and "as the series progressed and I discovered strengths or weaknesses for each surface, I began to make conscious decisions about which surface suited particular piles." Aquabord's porous clay surface and its ability to take paint like paper without warping eventually won the day. Though Webb proves equally dexterous in painting on canvas, signaled by a four-piece "retrospective" of the young artist's older "Abandoned Buildings" from 2010-11. Webb channels depth and texture in Ash, painting a rusted oil drum with patina and shadow until it practically rolls of the canvas. Likewise in RIP Jesse, the translucency of a slouching garbage bag and tactile slick of foreground muck contrasts with the ultra-flat walls.



Jason Webb | Ash, 2010, Acrylic on canvas, 46" x 35".
Image courtesy grayDUCK Gallery, Austin.

I wonder how many of the derelict spaces still exist. In two years in Austin, I am amazed by the city's ceaseless, steroidal construction boom. Some of the crumbling architecture in Webb's compositions may have transformed into shiny downtown highrises, and herein lies an interesting layer to the artist's portrayal of value. What was initially a "collision and assortment of surfaces provid[ing] a rich framework for [Webb] to sharpen and evolve [his] visual language" becomes the disposable objects themselves, fated to be recycled back into society like prospectors sifting for metal, or more likely torn down and removed forever.



Jason Webb | Rip Jesse, 2011, Acrylic on canvas, 14.5" x 14.5".
Image courtesy grayDUCK Gallery, Austin.

Jason Webb graduated with a BFA from Jacksonville University, Jacksonville, FL, and he lives and works in Austin, TX. He has participated in numerous local gallery and museum group exhibitions, including Five x Seven 2013 at AMOA-Arthouse (now The Contemporary Austin) and CANTANKER: THE END at Big Medium. Webb is the recipient of the 2012 "Eyes Got It!" award. Bulk Collection is his third exhibition at grayDUCK (after Waputui in 2011 and Symptoms of Structure in 2012) and his first solo, continuing through August 25.

Brian Fee is an art punk based currently in Austin, TX, but he can usually be found in New York or deep in Tokyo, depending on the art season.