

Artist Statement

Smith Eliot

Little Boxes

January 5, 2006 – from an entry in my private journal:

i've been thinking a lot about human relations

about the rigidity or fluidity of the boxes we paint ourselves into.

i love boxes.

there are secrets in them...

messages

random scraps

beads, gum wrappers, images cut from my contact sheets

they are dark inside.

i tried to make one wet but it rusted

so I tried to make another one wet but the wood got swollen

i am the wettest box I know.

A few years back I found a tiny wooden box at a garage sale. It was empty, but in its former life had been home to a set of 6 miniature sterling spoons. There was a strip of notched wood glued to its back wall –one spoon had fit neatly into each notch.

That box suggested things to me. I wanted to fill the notches, to breath purpose back into it. I took it home, installed tiny bones into the vacant notches, lined the walls with cyanotypes, painted the outside and gave birth to my first box.

I loved making that box. Having physical contact with the materials was important because it enabled me to focus differently; it triggered memories, and gave me the sensation of discovery.

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Slowly, over the years, as the boxes have grown in number, certain features stand out as important about them. There are, indeed, secrets in them. It's in the nature of boxes to hide something...if the box is closed, the insides are hidden from view. If the box is open, the exterior cannot be seen. That fact: that there is always something hidden -something secret- is essential to how they work...as it is essential to how human beings also work. Another important feature is that they require contact in order to be known. The viewer must touch, unlock, and open the box before the contents may be revealed. Often there are hidden compartments in the boxes, or surprises you can't see or even suspect from the first cursory glance.

Each box is a one of a kind creation and is its own little world with its own story or set of emotions. Recurring themes in this body of work include: the passing of time, memory, and challenging relationships. All the images are mine. Besides my own photos I also use wallpaper, paint, and paper-clay to sculpt the contours of the insides of the boxes. I also use antique doll parts, bones, insects and old books inside them. One box can take many weeks to make, depending on the construction choices and dry times.