

T*imothy, can you please come
up to the front of the class and
tell us what you brought today?*

Remember that? Sure you do. Those were the days we brought a favorite toy, a pet rock, or dad's fireman helmet to class. Those choices revealed a lot about us.

From 2003 to 2011, Haim Steinbach led a seminar at the University of California San Diego called The Object Lesson. He instructed his students to chose an object—any object—and bring it to class every week. Over the course of the semester, they would consider these objects from every possible vantage point.

A bird-shaped ceramic whistle from Russia; a section of a tree trunk with a woodpecker's hole; an electric chainsaw in its packaging; a brown paper bag with a silkscreened image of Marcus Garvey; a Snickers bar; a pen without ink; a blue, white, and black glass eye of Medusa.

For ten weeks, three hours a week, they looked at the same fifteen objects. Again and again and again.

Haim Steinbach's Description of 'The Object'

OBJECT GAME (Number Game):

A. **Objects:** Each student places their object on the table in a row. Starting with the first object, each is named by number in their sequential position: 1, 2, 3, etc.

B. **Lottery:** Count the number of students in the class. Numbers are noted on pieces of paper that are folded and mixed. Each Student picks one.

C. **Student #1:** Student holding lottery #1 is first to choose an object that appeals to him/her. Student explains why he/she is attracted to the object.

D. **Object Position (3) in relation to the other objects on the table:** The object chosen and discussed by Student #1 is in position 3 in the line of objects. Student holding lottery #3 now describes his/her response to object 3.

E. **Subject:** The person to whom object 3 belongs explains his/her decision making in choosing this object.

F. **Student #2:** Student holding lottery #2 selects an object.

G. **Object Position (5) in relation to the other objects on the table:** The object chosen is in the 5 position. Student holding lottery #5 responds to this object. And so on.

H. **Context:** What is next to what may affect the perception of objects and consequently their appeal to an individual.

Observation: This play of revealing the objects continues until all objects presented are discussed, contingent on time.

Instructions for *The Object Lesson*, courtesy Adrienne Garbini (UCSD student, 2011)

According to these set of rules, students took turns responding to things they desired and despised on the table. Steinbach pressed them week after week: *Is it a real object? An ideal object? A love object? A conceptual object? An object of desire? An actual object? A virtual object? An art object?* While discussing the aggression of a piece of wood or the phallic quality of vampire teeth, students came to see how much the analysis hinged on their own projections and desires.

Steinbach joins a tradition of teachers who put objects first—including Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Friedrich Froebel, and Bruno Munari—convinced that learning begins with what’s physically in front of you. Or, as one student put it, *spending ten weeks looking at a plaster piggy bank shaped like Homer Simpson dressed in a Santa suit, drinking a beer is quite an education.*

Our final event of the season is a show and tell—artists bring an object and tell us about it. Featuring Malin Arnell, Darren Bader, Paul Branca, Alisa Baremboym, Frank Benson, Daniel Bozhkov, Kerstin Brätsch, Tyler Coburn, Alex Da Corte, Devon Costello, Cynthia Daignault, Constance DeJong, John Henry Donner, Malik Gaines, Ethan Greenbaum, Rachel Harrison, Bill Hayden, Matt Hoyt, Steffani Jemison, Kimberly Kay, Zerek Kempf, Zak Kitnick, Josh Kline, Ajay Kurian, Yve Laris Cohen, Ryan Lauderdale, Matthew Logsdon, Rose Marcus, Josiah McElheny, John Miller, Greg Parma Smith, Sam Pulitzer, Lisi Raskin, Carissa Rodriguez, Ben Schumacher, Sara Shaoul, Erin Shirreff, Amy Sillman, Gwen Smith, Tom Thayer, Danna Vajda, Roger van Voorhees, Julia Wachtel, Dena Yago, Amy Yao, Viola Yeşiltaç, and Anicka Yi. On January 27th, 2013, from 12pm to 6pm.