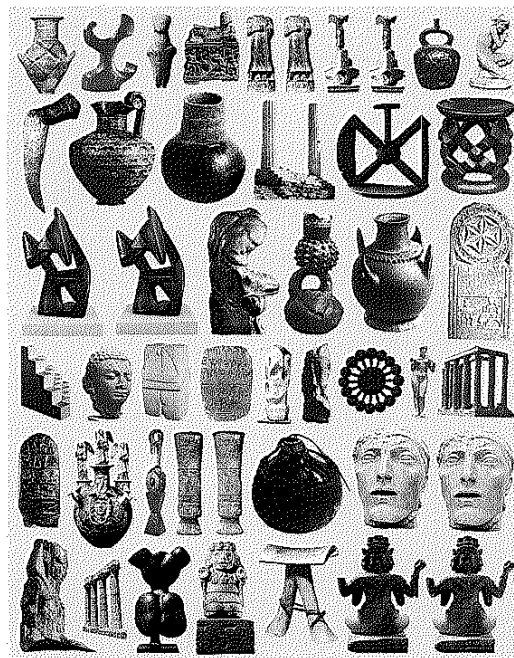


## Matthew Craven: History by Hand

"I'm always starting from the point of making things by hand," the artist Matthew Craven explains to me. This is important to Craven, since his meticulously constructed collages—cut-out black-and-white photographs of ancient artifacts floating on jazzed up patterns of zigzags and wavy lines—appear to have been manipulated by digital, that is, technological, means, as we often encounter in print or online. The "hand" that Craven refers to is evident not just in the technical activity of assembling his collages, but also in the time and care he takes in seeking out his images for repurposing. He flips through old textbooks he finds at used bookstores or orders from Amazon, searching for the pictures that compel him most, evoking the power of ancient imagery, of history, and of timelessness. "I dig through dirt; I dig through books," he states. Just as important as the image is the quality of the paper, and he tends towards drier, thicker paper such as that of old movie posters and used books. Thus, the paper and the image together present a kind of history, felt by hand.

The collages, mixing any number of landscapes and reproduced images of objects, mimic the language of display and collection, not unlike the acrylic boxes comprising "the globe" of Craven's Collection at the UB Art Galleries. While Matthew Craven and Annette Craven are not related, they share affinities in their drive to collect and organize the artifacts of our world.

For Matthew Craven, it is the mixing and remixing of images that compel the process of making. The bust of an ancient Egyptian pharaoh is placed next to Trajan's column, scaled to the same size, while a hand-drawn, zigzag backdrop punctuates a Mesoamerican serpent head. Removed from their cultural contexts, the formal attributes of the objects are amplified. "The images are ultra-flat," Craven explains. "From that, a kind of cataloging or databasing emerges and, yet, the images still interact with one another." No longer connected to worship, ritual, or use value, a Yoruba African mask juttied up against Constantin Brancusi's *The Kiss*, creates



Matthew Craven; *Crossed*, 2017; found image on found paper; 28 x 22

an entirely new narrative, one connected to visual synthesis through similarities and difference. Often, Craven will find and collect the same image, repeating it in twos or threes to introduce a visual rhythm to the arrangement of images.

Craven purposely removes the texts that surround the objects. "Often the information related to the image is distracting or even questionable in terms of its being accurate," he explains. "Yet, we always trust that the image, the representation of the object, is true." Working toward this trust, Craven eschews time-bound textual explanations and insights for presentations of the things themselves. As he seeks and sorts and arranges historical images, his hand layers them one upon the other to create "a present, amplified moment."

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