

ANALYSIS OF JOSEPH CORNELLS BOXES

Cornell's dream-like, glass-fronted boxes with arranged bric-a-brac, old Important Art by Joseph Cornell Important Art and Analysis.

This not only creates a more personal connection between the viewer and artwork, but also sets it aside from most pieces because it allows them to feel like they are stepping into an exciting and alternate universe. When he was in his twenties, he learned about Christian Science and became a devout follower of the religion, as he believed it had cured him of recurring stomach ailments. Also, the layout of the box is intriguingly arranged, in a format where none of the colours particularly stand out from each other. She is suspended by strings as if hanging from a hot air balloon. Boxes were his thing. Halfway through, it becomes enraptured by a succession of people, among them a woman with a dog – an elderly vagrant, who gazes back impassively – and a trash-collector. After his father's death, the family moved to Douglastown, Long Island where his mother took on several odd jobs to support her children. Cornell seemed to be overly fearful of many things, and he once confided in his sister Elizabeth how frightened he was at the concept of infinity. Both pieces present a particularly personal quality, through which we are able to uncover something about the artist, however Cornell is notably much more contained and subtle. He skilfully uses mundane objects such as the photographs of the night sky, and a plain white ball, and completely transforms them into a realm of interest and expression. And it is surely because these works are in the microcosm of a box that we feel this kind of expansiveness over time and space. Cornell adored women. In addition, the medium of a shadow box creates more of a personal connection with the items included, therefore causing the viewer to feel as they are experiencing something private to the artist himself. He added film and theatre to his repertoire, but whatever the form he worked in collage and assemblage exclusively. By Alastair Sooke 23 October Ever since antiquity, when jobbing sculptors and painters moved around the shores of the Mediterranean hunting for future commissions, artists have often been on the move. While at Phillips, the headmaster took notice of Cornell's extreme shyness and insecurity and expressed his concern to Cornell's mother. A couple of centuries later, it was commonplace for artists from northern Europe to travel, often via France and on to Italy, on the so-called Grand Tour, in order to acquaint themselves with masterpieces from antiquity. In time though, Cornell found his own vision and stuck with it. It was here that he felt connected to the long tradition of travelling artists, because he could indulge his own peculiar wanderlust – of the mind. It is a highly urbane work of art, which presents itself as an elegant distillation of a memory of visiting this bewitching city. Among the earliest examples of assemblage, the shadow boxes also helped give rise to a host of other Modern and Contemporary American art forms, from Installation art to Fluxus boxes. Infused with a dream-like aura, the shadow boxes invite the viewer into Cornell's own private, magical world. Forced to go to work at a young age to support his mother and younger brothers, Cornell would never set foot out of his native New York. Alternately known as "memory boxes" or "poetic theaters," the boxes evoke the memories associated with the items contained within, while also containing parallels with, or expressing reverence for, other art forms, such as theater, ballet, and film. He was a delicate, complicated person whose imagination worked in a very special way. From the music scores that he probably bought at the used book stores of Manhattan he chose a piano adaptation of a 19th century European romantic opera, and if you follow the notes you can perhaps hear the elegant intonations of its music. And yet, of course, Cornell had never been there. Within a glazed wooden box, with a metal handle, we see a wine glass and a seashell in front of a photograph of a street in the Italian city. When Cornell was thirteen, his father died of leukemia after battling the disease for several years. What he preferred was to give them away, especially to women. It presents his thoughts of another world and the concept of an alternate universe, possibly suggesting a sense of dissatisfaction with his own life, dreaming of another world in which he no longer felt confined and isolated by society. These are arbitrary – just about anything Cornell made can be called playful or experimental – but at least they are not intrusive, and his work captivates from beginning to end. He longed to touch, but looking and fantasising were safer and had their own deep satisfactions. Knowing without seeing Yet adventures far afield are not always necessary when it comes to fashioning great art – as the biography of the spellbinding 20th Century American artist Joseph Cornell, the subject of a new retrospective at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, attests. He was the

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oldest child of four including two sisters, Elizabeth and Helen, and a brother, Robert, who suffered from cerebral palsy. There is no denying that Cornell was an obsessive. According to her autobiography, *Infinity Net*, their relationship was erotic and creative, though his mother did her best to quash it, once throwing a bucket of water over them as they sat kissing beneath the backyard quince tree. The artist, a Christian Scientist, believed that faith not drugs cured physical ills. Also, if you see the blue of the box interior as the blue of the sea instead of a blue sky, we can imagine the ceramic pipe, the shells and the broken piece of board with bent nails in it to be the remains of a wrecked ship that sunk to the sea floor long ago. And yet he was intoxicated by European culture and history, which he researched avidly, combing the bookshops on Fourth Avenue during lunch breaks from his tedious day-job as a textile salesman. Cornell also had a great passion for ballet.