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Getting from One Place
 Outdoor installation (detail)
 Port Angeles Art Center
 1991



Personal, familial, historical, human, even cosmic—Ross Coates' art is richly textured with layers of meaning that echo the additive process by which the art is made. A "bricoleur," a tinkerer, is how Coates names himself. He operates not only in a broad tradition that includes Joseph Cornell and John Heartfield, but also in the older tradition of the tribal craftsman. Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss describes a

bricoleur as "someone who works with his hands and uses devious means...the rules of his game are always to make do with whatever is at hand."

Critic Susanna Finnell describes the making of art in this way: "The original concept of the final work of art can only be vaguely imagined by the artist. Inherently, the bricoleur must abandon his/her privileged position and show

respect for the integrity of the found, invented or fabricated materials. These may, in fact, transform and control the ultimate outcome as much as the willful direction of the artist. A sign emerges somewhere between image and concept, at a juncture between these things with a history of their own and the personality and life of the artist."

Poet and politician Leopold Sedar Senghor identifies in

CONNECTIONS

African Wolof poetry "the style of parataxis — placing words in sequences without explicit connection or transition." In Ross Coates' work the sequences are not of words, but of objects, and only on witnessing the resulting creation do we comprehend the potential of the visual connections he proposes.

Patricia Grieve Watkinson
 Director
 Fort Wayne Museum of Art

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Arrangement
on the Beach in Russia
 (near Vladivostok)
 1993