

## One man's junk becomes another man's treasure

*'Found objects' take on religious symbolism in the hands of Frank McEntire*

By [Dave Gagon](#)

Deseret Morning News

On his way to school each morning, young Frank McEntire often stopped to rummage through trash containers, scour gutters or explore weed patches, ever on the lookout for interesting discarded objects.

In the classroom, he would present these discoveries to his teachers, confident they would share his fascination with the resurrected junk.

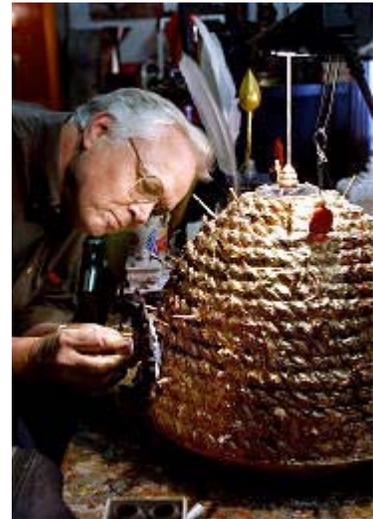
This continual search for the special item became a ritual for the boy. Occasionally he would arrive home late from school — much to his parents' chagrin — because he had stopped off at a junk shop along the way. "I'd love to go into the old-book section," McEntire said, "and thumb through the books trying to find flowers or paper or something else that was stuck in between the pages."

When his grandfather passed away, young McEntire took an unused aquarium and created a little memorial by inserting bits of collected stuff from his room. "No one ever told me to do that, and I'd never seen anything like it. But making arrangements in containers is something I've done since elementary school."

Today, little has changed for the 59-year-old. McEntire still enjoys "Dumpster-diving" — albeit more discreetly — as well as prowling through thrift stores or scouring garage sales and salvage yards. And he still juxtaposes and reconfigures the miscellany of someone's rejected paraphernalia into a presentation for audiences.

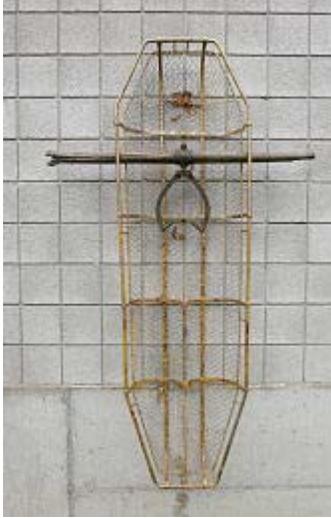
He's what is called an assemblage artist — one who creates 3-D works of art by combining various elements, especially found objects (mostly religious items, in McEntire's case), into an integrated whole that runs counter to the objects' original intent. And while often difficult to decipher, McEntire's work is cogent and fraught with social, political and spiritual commentary.

"Such unconventional use of familiar objects of devotion typically poses unanticipated questions about our times," said McEntire. "Although my assemblages are personal explorations about current events, they nonetheless challenge others to re-examine their deeply held beliefs and assumptions and become participants in the creative process."



Frank McEntire applies caulk to "Buddha in the Beehive's Hive" in his West Valley studio. His interest in junk began when he was a boy living in Texas.

*Tom Smart, Deseret Morning News*



A work called "Rescue" (litter, hand-forged iron tong).

*Tom Smart, Deseret Morning News*

"I think Frank's work is very interesting," said Lila Abersold, visual arts coordinator for the Utah Arts Council. "He's always thinking. He makes you wonder what his direction is when he juxtaposes something like a little baby Jesus inside forceps that are used in childbirth."

"For me," said performance poet Alex Caldiero, "Frank descends from 'that Dada strain' (Arp, Schwitters, Ernst, Duchamp, et al., for whom the urge to make is the birthing force at the core of their activities as artists."

McEntire was born Sept. 30, 1946, in Wichita Falls, Texas. When he was 9, his family moved to Houston. Reared a Baptist, he later joined the Lutheran Church during junior high school. He loved to draw, and after high school he attended Lon Morris College, where he studied theater arts and painted scenery for the school before graduating with an associate's degree.

At the same time, McEntire began studying nontraditional, unorthodox religions. "I guess today we'd call them new age or occult kinds of things. But that was in the mid-'60s."

After a year of studying at the University of Texas, he dropped out and moved to Los Angeles to become part of the Hare Krishna movement. "I think that was in '68 or '69." He was sent to Boulder, Colo., to open a temple site but began having "inner conflicts about Jesus and Krishna."

Back in Los Angeles, McEntire met a pair of LDS missionaries, but it was only after he hitchhiked back to Houston that he took the missionary discussions and joined the church.

While serving as an LDS missionary in Washington state (1971-73), he came into contact with the religious practices of the Northwest Coast Indians and became entranced with their art and use of objects in their rituals.

"Obviously," said Jim Edwards, curator of exhibitions at the Salt Lake Art Center, "Frank's work has to do with his interests in spiritual matters and with religion. From Buddhist to Hare Krishna to LDS to all kinds of religious symbology, his background is very diverse. I know very few artists who explore the area he explores."

McEntire completed his studies for his bachelor's degree in theater and cinematic arts at Brigham Young University and in 1976 received his master's degree in the same emphasis. (It was also at BYU that McEntire met his future wife, Marjorie Hinckley. "Frank always had dedicated studio space at home," she said. "When we lived in Springville 30 years ago, he had his easel and materials set up.")

While in Springville, McEntire had an epiphany: "I could marry my 3-D theatrical passions with my studio work." The first manifestation of this union was a show at the Springville Museum of Art in the '80s. Titled "Divining," the tableaux McEntire created were inspired by the Mormon magic world-view in the early church and all his previous, ubiquitous religious studies.

In order to create his art, McEntire has procured some rather unusual stuff over the years — angels, cages, traps, crucifixes, sticks, stones, small figures of Christ, feathers and pop-  
icon figurines, miniature temples, Hindu gods, scriptures, prayer and hymn books, the Virgin Mary, the angel Moroni and Buddha.

"Typically, my antennas are up all the time," he said. "When I'm traveling, quite often I'll just look in the phone book and see where the junk shops are, and if I have any time, I'll try to scout them out."

"It's gotten to the point now," said Marjorie, "that several of the kids will come home and tell him about some fantastic item they saw in the trash somewhere and they'll all go out and get it."

As McEntire's art is primarily conceptual — one has to really spend time with it and consider its meanings — it is often difficult to find buyers. To make ends meet, and to continue his art, McEntire worked for the LDS Church for 25 years. He did his art at night and on weekends, whenever an opportunity arose, but never at the expense of his family. In fact, his children were often his studio assistants.



"Tire Tool for an 'East/West' Cosmic Wheel" (four wooden temples, ceramic Mary and Mormon temple, iron Buddha, wooden spirit house with magic stone and tire tool).

*Tom Smart, Deseret Morning News*



"Diviner's Tool" (carved divining rod, twine, lab glassware, nails and oil) and "Plumb Line of Heaven" (metal tub, plumb bob with red twine, wooden louver, iron hand and steel plate) and "Choir Boy Angel Catcher" (paper and feather wings, candle holder, gears, stand, handmade 19th-century doily).

*Tom Smart, Deseret Morning News*

other part about him that's amazing is he's a very good arts administrator, which is the oddest thing of all."

In 2003, McEntire was appointed executive director of the Utah Arts Council. He served faithfully and effectively for two years. When Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. took office, McEntire, along with 32 others from the Department of Community and Economic Development, were rather brusquely shown the door.

"Being removed from the Arts Council was just a new chapter for Frank," Marjorie said. "It was a surprise, but I think he handled it well. Frank has very Buddhist tendencies. He was able to let it go and move on to the next step."

His dismissal actually gave McEntire more time for his art. He'd look for work in the morning and spend afternoons in his studio.

Recently he went back to work for the LDS Church, assisting in their philanthropy department. "I'm very excited about it. It's a good cause — good cause, good people trying to help the world be a better place."

"I'm a hard-scrabble, economic-dependent person," he said, "who lives on the edge of Kearns and Taylorsville in the middle of the valley in a modest home. I drive old cars. But what that does is give me the freedom to buy materials when I see something that's really important."

In Allen Bishop's recent online review of McEntire's "Small Acts of Devotion" (at David Ericson Fine Art), McEntire stated that his task was to assist the objects he'd collected in "regaining their spiritual voice, and in unexpected recombinations, allow them to speak again — to stimulate, to challenge and to renew."

Not only is McEntire an accomplished artist, he's also an excellent curator, art critic/columnist and arts administrator. "Frank's a very good writer," Abersold said, "I wish he'd do more of it."

Edwards agrees, adding that McEntire's curatorial skills are without parallel. "And the

It's ironic; this is what McEntire has tried to do with his art from the first moment his tiny Texas hand picked up a piece of somebody's junk. The young boy who constructed a memorial to his grandfather was a good boy who became a good man — a man moved to share his art, encouraging viewers to consider and improve the political, environmental and spiritual needs of mankind.

Perhaps Edwards said it best: "I think Frank's a really important artist, and, of course, he's a wonderful human being, which is probably more important than being an important artist. I really admire Frank."

*To read and see more on Frank McEntire and his art, visit the artist's Web site: [www.frankmcentire.com](http://www.frankmcentire.com)*

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*E-mail: [gag@desnews.com](mailto:gag@desnews.com)*

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Some pre-recombination items in Frank McEntire's curious studio.

*Laura Seitz, Deseret Morning News*