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Michael Jones McKean: The Astronomer, The Builder and The Volunteers

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In Inman's north gallery, Michael Jones McKean's *The Astronomer, The Builder and The Volunteers* features three formal arrangements of objects, some of which he sculpted himself and some of which he found or purchased.

Some of the objects are abstract forms, while others are real things, such as the chain saw in *The Builder and Science* and the 1984 Ocean Pacific windbreaker in *Volunteer*. The 27-pound meteorite in *The Astronomer* and *The Wake* both looks oddly fake and appears to weigh less than the papier-mâché head next to it.

"I don't want to make distinctions or value judgments between what's 'real' and 'artificial' or what's 'mimicry' and what's 'invention,'" McKean, a former Core fellow who teaches at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Va., wrote in 2004. These works challenge viewers' tendency to do just that.

They also invite attention as thoughtful as the care that went into the arrangements. The narratives within and between these sculptures are subtle, and the juxtaposition of textures brings forth a quiet sense of delight that intensifies the longer you look.

So do art-historical associations. *The Builder and Science* bears some resemblance to a Robert Rauschenberg assemblage, but both times I saw this show, the artist I couldn't stop thinking of was minimalist pioneer Robert Ryman because of McKean's intriguing use of white paint in all three sculptures. How much of each piece gets covered in paint varies, but the effect recalls Ryman's remark that "white has a tendency to make things visible. With white, you can see more of a nuance; you can see more." McKean's white brings out and enhances his juxtapositions of textures and surfaces.

Fortunately, if McKean's show leaves you craving more of Ryman, the Menil Collection's small but terrific *Contemporary Conversations: Robert Ryman, 1976* should hit the spot.