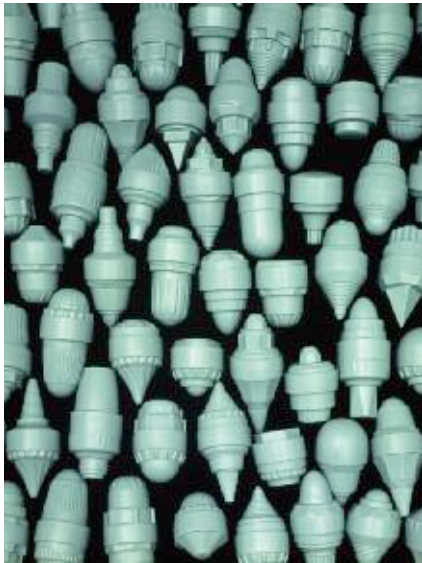


I've done 30,000 unique plaster objects...and I had to do all of that by hand. The word digital includes fingers. I hate it when people say that my shapes are generated digitally, because what does that mean? It's like saying a painting is generated by a brush. Of course, it's by hand.



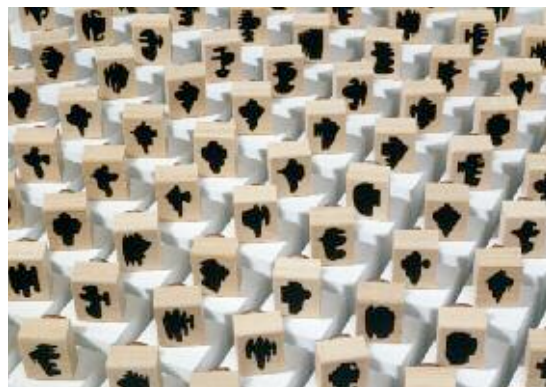
Over Ten Thousand Individual Works, 1987/1988. Enamel on cast Hydrocal, 2 inches in diameter each, with variable lengths, each unique. Photo: Fred Scruton, © Allan McCollum, courtesy the artist.

After Viewing

- How is McCollum's collaboration with **fabricators** similar to and different from forms of collaboration used by other artists today and throughout history?
- Discuss the different ways in which McCollum uses the idea of what he calls combinatorial elements in his work, working process, and **collaborations**.

CREATE

- Create a set of instructions for a work of art and ask three different people to carry them out. Compare and contrast the results.
- Select a mass-produced item and collect examples of it over the course of a few days. At the end of this period, begin making slight changes to each of the items in order to create unique objects. Create an **installation** of these unique objects in order to tell a story about the process or the idea behind collecting the item.



Shapes from Maine: Shapes Rubber Stamps, 2005/2008. Wood and rubber, 1¼ x 1½ x 1⅜ inches each, each unique. Produced in collaboration with Wendy Wyman and Bill Welsh, founders of Repeat Impressions, Trescott, Maine. Photo: Lamay Photo, © Allan McCollum, courtesy Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York.

DISCUSS

Before Viewing

- What is uniqueness? Discuss the question of whether art is inherently unique. How might the consideration of prints or photographs influence this discussion?
- Describe the tradition of heraldry. How do symbolic systems like heraldry categorize or represent groups of people? What are some contemporary symbols used to define or describe groups?

While Viewing

- Before McCollum creates a work he asks himself whether it makes a good story. Take note of the different stories McCollum is trying to tell and then compare notes with your classmates.
- McCollum talks about how his work could be considered awe-inspiring or nightmarish because of its sheer magnitude. Pick a particular work in relation to these descriptors and choose other words you would use to describe the work and the ideas it conveys.



Born

1944, Los Angeles, CA

Education

Allan McCollum educated himself as an artist

Lives and Works

New York, NY

About the Artist

Applying strategies of mass production to hand-made objects, McCollum's labor-intensive practice questions the intrinsic value of the unique work of art. McCollum's **installations**—fields of vast numbers of small-scale works, systematically arranged—are the product of many tiny gestures, built up over time. Viewing his work often produces a sublime effect as one slowly realizes that the dizzying array of thousands of identical-looking shapes is, in fact, comprised of subtly different, unique things. Engaging assistants, scientists, and local craftspeople in his process, McCollum embraces a collaborative and democratic form of creativity. His drawings and sculptures often serve a **symbolic** purpose—as surrogates, faithful copies, or stand-ins for people—and are presented theatrically, transforming the exhibition space into a laboratory where artifice and context are scrutinized. Economical in form, yet curious in function, his work and mechanical-looking processes are infused with humor and humility.

Teaching Connections

Media and Materials

drawing, digital images, **installation**, sculpture

Key Words and Ideas

collaboration, **craft**, **installation**, mass-production, **symbol**

Related Artists

Josiah McElheny, Matthew Ritchie, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Do-Ho Suh, Andrea Zittel