



**On first glance we see a human shape; looking closer, we realize it's a wasp nest. Yet as we examine FOUND WASP NEST ever more closely, what it is becomes more difficult to interpret. The optical illusion is intentional.**

*Joshua Smith. FOUND WASP NEST, 2004. Cast resin, 4" x 2" x 1.5". Used by permission of the artist.*

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# Repeating Realities

BY HEIDI J. HORNICK

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In *Found Wasp Nest*, Josh Smith exhibits his fascination with fake things that look “real,” as well as his interest in repetition of form. The sculpture intentionally looks like an intricate “real” wasp nest, yet also suggests the figure of a human fetus.

The sculptor, who is an MFA candidate at the University of Dallas after studying studio art at Baylor University, began fabricating wasp nests in a roundabout way, through a previous interest in faux history or a nostalgic aesthetic. In earlier work he had combined materials to look like old signs from the 1950s, and then placed fake wasp nests inside the signs that were painted and rusted to look as realistic as possible. Smith had noticed that we like things that *look* antique, but don’t care whether the objects really *are* old. Our desire for such things as new “worn and rustic” furniture and “vintage” couture is stimulated by the merciless repetition of objects marketed through nostalgia specialty catalogs, Internet sites, and shops.

Repetition occurs in the form and thematic concept of this piece. While casting artificial wasp nests, the process of forming the repeated holes encouraged Smith to reflect on how people’s identities are reduced to repeated patterns of numbers—like social security, cell phone, or credit card numbers. This culminates in the social fantasy that we might determine an entire individual before birth by repeating a genetic code through cloning.

Smith says that he plays with ideas in his sculpture and expects his audience to do the same; for instance, *Found Wasp Nest* has prompted discussion not only about cloning but also about abortion. He thinks the interpretation of this piece, like most contemporary art, is entirely dependent on what the viewer brings to it. Yet Smith knows several other artists who explore the themes of multiplicity and repetition in their art and he suspects, given the fascination with cloning in our society, these artists are concerned about cloning as well.

*Found Wasp Nest* was featured last year in the artist’s Master of Fine Arts thesis exhibition entitled “Pulling Punches.” Each work in the exhibition had multiple layers of meaning and encouraged viewers to wonder: “What is real?” “Why is it real?” and “Is it real simply because it ‘looks’ real?” Smith challenges us to ask how we feel about being identified by numbers in a society where identity theft is prevalent and scientists can replicate DNA, the numbers of biological life.