



## Texas sculptor's work graces Yo La Tengo album cover

By DOUGLAS BRITT Copyright 2009 Houston Chronicle

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Yo La Tengo used a photo of Texas artist Dario Robleto's 2002 sculpture *At War With the Entropy of Nature / Ghosts Don't Always Want to Come Back* on the cover of its new album, *Popular Songs*.

Being included in the 2004 edition of the Whitney Museum of American Art's biannual survey of contemporary art was nice. Landing a traveling museum survey of his work and an accompanying monograph was pretty cool too. Most artists would kill for that kind of recognition.

But for Dario Robleto, who's as committed a music fan as he is an artist, all that pales in comparison to having one of his favorite bands, Yo La Tengo, contact him out of the blue to ask if they could use photos of three of his sculptures for the album art of *Popular Songs*, its latest release.

"I didn't even believe it at first," the San Antonio-born, Houston-based artist said about the e-mail he received from band member Ira Kaplan, who wrote that he and fellow members Georgia Hubley and James McNew were fans of Robleto's work and had bought his 2008 monograph, *Alloy of Love*.

"Honestly, I would have let (Kaplan) do anything (with the images), but he was very sensitive to the art aspect of it," Robleto said. "I've never seen an album cover using contemporary art that is designed this way, where it's almost like a minishow within the album."

Robleto's work has long drawn inspiration from pop-music traditions. Many of his sculptures include melted vinyl records among their materials — along with other reconstituted artifacts, like rubble from the Berlin Wall or pulp made from Civil War soldiers' letters — and he likens his practice of "remixing history" to that of a DJ.

All that was part of Robleto's appeal to Kaplan.

"The work was visually exciting, and Dario's interest — maybe that word's not strong enough — in music certainly added to my appreciation," Kaplan said.

While few artists give much thought to the wall labels that accompany their creations, for Robleto, they're liner notes, like the kind he's read obsessively since the first time he came home with a new record. As such, they're sacred. So he was thrilled when Kaplan "didn't even

blink" at the prospect of including the full text of Robleto's liner notes with that of the band's.

The materials list for *At War With the Entropy of Nature / Ghosts Don't Always Want to Come Back* — Robleto's 2002 sculpture of a battered cassette tape, which the band used on the front album cover and a T-shirt — is a mouthful, but it's key to understanding the work:

"Cassette: carved bone & bone dust from every bone in the body, trinitite (glass produced during the first atomic test explosion at Trinity test site circa 1945, when heat from the blast melted surrounding sand), metal screws, rust, letraset; audio tape: an original composition of military drum marches, weapon fire, and soldiers' voices from battlefields of various wars made from Electronic Voice Phenomena recordings (voices and sounds of the dead or past, detected through magnetic audio tape)."

Echoing Robleto's example, the band's liner notes list the materials that went into the making of *Popular Songs*:

"NordWave, Astelin, espresso, Mackie 1202VLZ, 8-pin Trek pedal, carmitas, 2'x4'x1" plywood, Prince's hot chicken, recycled denim insulation, Vox Tone Bender, med. gauge flatwound bass strings (manufacturer unknown), duct tape, Fender Princeton reverb, Sabian 18" sizzle, Flying Faders."

"We thought it would help tie Dario's work in with ours to provide our own description, and that it would be funny," Kaplan said.