

New England Digs Reading

Excerpted and adapted from:

Brown University. *Mark Dion: New England Digs*. Retrieved January 19, 2012 from: http://www.brown.edu/Facilities/David_Winton_Bell_Gallery/dionpfahl.html.

Over five weeks in the spring of 2001, Mark Dion, along with photographer Bob Braine and nearly 90 volunteers, took to the shores, vacant lots, and farmland of New England, collecting trash as they went. The result of this work is *New England Digs*, an exhibition that involved collecting materials, cleaning them, and re-contextualizing the objects into a final exhibition.

Dion and volunteers spent a week at each site collecting contemporary detritus (trash) alongside 18th and 19th century debris (garbage) like bits of glass and porcelain. The digging began in Providence, on the shores of the Seekonk River and Narragansett Bay, where the dig team found large amounts of industrial debris and contemporary garbage. Next, the team moved to New Bedford to dig a giant hole, nearly seven feet deep, on the land where O'Malley's Tavern once stood, sifting through materials including mountains of broken glass and pottery shards, in hopes of reaching the former landmark's basement. Finally, the digs commenced in Brockton as mounds of farmland dirt that had been moved several times were raked down, revealing domestic objects, intact bottles and some industrial items.

In witnessing the digs themselves, people enjoy the excitement of each new find. After the digs, each artifact is examined again and discovered anew during the cleaning and classification stages. The process then comes to its end as the objects enter their final resting place, the finished display cabinets. In the end, the objects have traveled full circle from being once useful things to becoming trash to treasure to artwork.

Questions

1. Why do you think Dion asks volunteers to help him in his collection of materials?
2. How does "old" trash compare to "new" trash?
3. Why do you think people feel excited as each item is discovered?
4. How have the objects "traveled full circle" once they are displayed in Dion's work?