

TRASHFORMATION: Contemporary Eco-art



**Curated by: MGMM Students
Western Colorado University, Gunnison
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TRASHFORMATION: Contemporary Eco-Art

This exhibition focuses on visual production by artists who research, engage, and often intervene with the effects of overconsumption on our natural and built environments. Through globalization and technology, such as social media, we encounter works of art in a variety of forms, content, materials, and from different cultures that have transformed trash from this over consumption, creating a viable alternative to recycling. Artists from around the world explore and address these issues of excess, overindulgence, waste management, the reuse of materials and pollution.

What happens to recyclable items once they are picked up or dropped off at a recycling facility? What happens to all of our trash and where does it go besides landfills? An estimated 14 billion pounds of trash—mostly plastic—is dumped into the world's oceans every year. According to The Ocean Cleanup, a project dedicated to ridding the ocean of trash, there are currently over 5 trillion pieces of plastic waste in the world's oceans. On average, each American disposes of 5 pounds of trash per person per day into its landfills. Of the estimated 251 million tons of consumer sold waste generated each year in the U.S., approximately 32.5% of the trash is recycled or composted, 12.5% is burned and the remaining 55% is buried in landfills. Items can only be recycled if cleaned properly, labels removed, and objects placed in the correctly numbered bin, steps that are often missed by consumers and lead to contamination within the recycling facility and a higher percentage of materials that end up in the landfill.

The artists featured in this exhibition address the world's ecological imbalance in their work by utilizing trash and reused items in an effort to help recycle and decrease the waste that different nations output. One way to combat the pollution produced by recycling plants, landfills, manufacturing facilities and consumer industries is to repurpose or reclaim these objects and materials through art. Presenting this work in a virtual exhibition format offers opportunities for viewer engagement, enjoyment, and for learning about social issues, cause and effects, and about contemporary art being produced in the world today outside the Gunnison Valley. The exhibition will be accompanied by educational programs designed to promote critical thinking, creative problem solving, and understanding about art and people who produce it.

This virtual exhibition was curated by master's students in the Western Colorado University Spring 2020 Gallery and Museum Management 602 course. Support was provided by Professor Jeffrey Taylor with expert technical assistance and virtual gallery exhibition design provided by Jessie Miller Murphy, the manager of Quigley Hall Art Gallery.

**TRANSFORMATION – Contemporary Eco-Art
EXHIBITION CHECKLIST**

1—

Vik Muniz (lives, works in New York and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)
Narcissus After Caravaggio, 2005
Chromogenic print
7 ft, 5.0625 inches x 5ft, 11.875 inches
Gift of Kara and Stephen Ross, Museum of Modern Art, New York

2 –

David Mach (lives, works in London, England, UK; born 1956)
Spike, 2012
Coat hanger sculpture
89.8 x 33.5 x 41.3 inches
Collection of the Artist

3—

Veronika Richterova (lives, works in Prague, Czech Republic)
PET-Tropicana (Crocodile), 2009
Installed in Prague Botanical Garden, 2019
Approximately 12 feet in length

4—

Benjamin Von Wong (lives, works in Montreal, Canada)
The Parting of the Plastic Sea (Strawpocalypse), 2019
Sculpture with 168,000 plastic straws
10.9 x 36.2 x 14.9 feet
Currently installed at Estella Place, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

5—

Hong Yi-Chen, Guo Yi-hui, Zheng Yu-ti (live, work in Taiwan)
Treats, 2019
Popsicles made with water from 100 polluted Taiwan waterways

6—

Barry Rosenthal (lives, works in Brooklyn, New York, USA)
Green Containers and *Blue Ocean*, n.d.
From *Found in Nature* series
Plastic washed up on beach, Floyd Bennett Field, Brooklyn
Variable dimensions
Collection of the Artist

7—

Zac Freeman (lives, works in Jacksonville, Florida, USA)

Garrett, 2013

Mostly plastic, metal, other found objects glued to board

25 x 32 inches

8—

HA Schult (lives, works in Parchim, Germany)

Trash People, Red Square, 1999

1,000 life-sized sculptures made from construction foam and computer parts, scrap metal, cans, bottles

Collection of the Artist

9—

Tim and Sue Webster (live, work in London, England, UK)

Wasted Youth, 2000

Trash, replica food, McDonalds packaging, wood, light projector

52.75 x 82.67 x 26 inches

Private Collection

10—

Noah Deledda (lives, works in Tampa, Florida, USA)

Quatrene, 2018

Aluminum, tin sculpture

12.6 x 8.7 inches

Artbox Gallery Collection, Zurich, Switzerland

11—

Ji Yong-Ho (lives, works in Seoul, South Korea)

Bull's Head, 2007

Used rubber tire, steel, wood, and synthetic resin

35.4 x 44.1 x 39 inches

Private Collection

12—

Ji Yong-Ho (lives, works Seoul, Korea, born 1978)

Mutant Spider, 2006

Used rubber tire, steel

63 x 78.3 x 46.1 inches

Private Collection

13—

Sue Lipscombe (lives, works in Bristol, England, UK)

The Bristol Whales, 2019

70,000 plastic bottles, Somerset willow

50 x 60 feet

Ephemeral (destroyed)

14—

Gabriel Orozco (lives, works in Mexico City, New York, and Paris)

Sandstars, 2012

Asterisms, Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin, July 6–Oct. 21, 2012

1,200 found objects, including wood, metal, glass, paper, plastic, Styrofoam, rock, rope, rubber, and other materials, and 13 photographic grids, each comprising 99

chromogenic prints. Found Objects overall dimensions vary with installation;

photographs - each print 4 x 6 inches; each grid 48.5 x 158 x 2 inches

Deutsche Guggenheim Museum, Berlin

15—

Elizabeth Morissette (lives, works in Fort Collins, Colorado, USA)

Red China, 2018

Hand woven discarded plastic toys on a cotton warp

30 x 23 x 2 inches

Collection of the Artist

16—

Chris Jordan (lives, works in Seattle, Washington, USA)

Gyre, 2009

2.4 million pieces of plastic collected from the Pacific Ocean

8 x 11 feet in three vertical panels

17—

Angela Haseltine Pozzi (lives, works in Portland, Oregon, USA)

Washed Ashore Project, 2010

First installed at Art 101, Bandon, Oregon

Plastic washed up on Pacific Ocean beaches, almost 17 tons of plastic

Variable dimensions

18—

Erika Iris a.k.a. iri5 (lives, works in Chicago, Illinois, USA)

Boy George, n.d.

Cassette tape on canvas

16 x 12 inches

Collection of the Artist

19—

Erika Iris a.k.a. iri5 (lives, works in Chicago, Illinois, USA)

Ghost in the Machine: The Clash, 2016

Cassette tape on canvas

24 x 16 inches

Collection of the Artist

20—

Sayaka Ganz (lives, works in Yokohama, Japan)

Momentum, 2016

Reclaimed plastic objects, aluminum armature, cable ties, wire

42 x 42 x 36 inches

21—

El Anatsui (b. Anyanko, Ghana; lives, works in Nsukka, Nigeria)

Trova, 2016

Aluminum (liquor bottle caps), copper wire sculpture for wall installation

109 x 110 inches

Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery, New York



TRANSFORMATION – Contemporary Eco-Art
EXTENDED LABELS FOR SELECT WORKS



Chris Jordan (b. San Francisco, California, 1963; lives, works in Seattle, Washington, USA)

Gyre, 2009

2.4 million pieces of plastic collected from the Pacific Ocean

8 x 11 feet in three vertical panels

Chris Jordan is well known for his artwork - 2D sculptures and photography, along with film producing - that lets the viewer experience the enormous impact that trash and waste from human consumption has had upon the environment. With this work, Jordan references the iconic print *Under the Great Wave off Kanagawa*, ca.1830-32 by Katsushika Hokusai. Sometimes at first glance from a distance, it is hard to grasp the full meaning of one of his designs but when going in for a closer look, you see most of Jordan's work is made completely from objects that have been "thrown away." Jordan creations (which he has exhibited around the world and won several awards for), and many of which are made in the form of Master works of art, beg the question "Thrown away to where?" Thrown away to litter and destroy the environment of the earth and its oceans, a fact that Chris Jordan has worked hard as an artist, as well as a humanitarian, to shed his artistic light on since the early 2000's.

Do you feel there is something symbolic between the image of the ocean wave and the fact that it is made entirely from plastic that came from the Pacific Ocean? If so, what and how do you feel about it?

Written by WCU MGMM graduate student Laura Neely.



El Anatsui (b. Anyanko, Ghana, 1944; lives, works in Nsukka, Nigeria)

Trova, 2016

Aluminum (liquor bottle caps), copper wire sculpture for wall installation

109 x 110 inches

Photo credit: Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

For 40 years, El Anatsui taught University of Nigeria art students to “use whatever the environment throws up” in order to move them beyond traditional media and form. “The Earth is our greatest resource – it’s cheap too,” the 76-year old artist exclaims. Like with *Trova*, his works appear to be woven monumental tapestries when placed on walls in museums and gallery throughout the World. However, Anatsui insists that his work is sculpture, “a freer form of expression”, conceived to be free and flexible so they are mutable in form and can be shaped in different forms when installing.

What do you think the artist’s intentions are in making work from discarded metal liquor bottle caps?

In your opinion do the colors and patterns used in sculpting Trova have a specific cultural significance?

Written by Ted G. Decker, WCU MGMM Instructor.



Vik Muniz (lives, works in New York and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)
Narcissus After Caravaggio, 2005
Chromogenic print
7 ft, 5.0625 inches x 5ft, 11.875 inches
Gift of Kara and Stephen Ross, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Born and raised in São Paulo, Brazil, Vik Muniz is a renowned mixed media artist known for his monumental revisionist photographs of famous artworks in trash. This photograph is from his *Pictures in Garbage* series, which garnered international acclaim and attention because of the 2010 documentary *Waste Land*. In his basketball court size studio in Rio de Janeiro, Muniz creates his compositions from a cherry picker and uses a laser pointer to direct his staff of local art students on the placement of the junk objects below. “I’m a product of a military dictatorship,” Muniz explains. “Under a dictatorship, you cannot trust information or dispense it freely because of censorship. So, Brazilians become very flexible in the use of metaphors. They learn to communicate with double meanings.”

What do you think is the meaning behind the work?

Why do you think the artist uses art historical references as his subjects?

Written by Tiffany Fairall, Chief Curator, Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum at Mesa Arts Center, Mesa, Arizona.



Gabriel Orozco (b. Jalapa, Veracruz, 1962; lives, works in New York, Mexico and France)
Sandstars, 2012

1,200 found objects, including wood, metal, glass, paper, plastic, Styrofoam, rock, rope, rubber, and other materials, and 13 photographic grids, each comprising 99 chromogenic prints.

Objects overall dimensions vary with installation; photographs - each print 4 x 6 inches; each grid 48.5 x 158 x 2 inches

Deutsche Guggenheim Museum, Berlin

Photo Credit: Mathias Schormann

Sandstars is a collection of objects excavated from the sands of Isla Arena, Mexico, a wildlife preserve and mating ground from which the artist famously removed an entire whale skeleton that he covered in graceful graphite lines for his piece *Mobile Matrix*. Though *Sandstars* was made far before *Sandy* and in a vastly different climate, the work brings immediately to mind the ravages of natural disaster in a city, and in particular an art community, still reeling from flooding. Orozco works in media including drawing, installation, photography, sculpture, and video. His aesthetic vocabulary is indebted to Conceptualism, the artistic traditions of his native Mexico, and Marcel Duchamp's *Readymades*. The fragile relationship of everyday objects to one another and to human beings is Orozco's principal subject. In his early work, he placed such items in unexpected locations, documenting their presence in photographs.

In what ways does Orozco's work, Sandstars, compare to the Readymades of Marcel Duchamp?

Do you feel that the collection of objects from the wildlife preserve prompts people to think about their own consumption and disposal of their belongings?

Written by WCU MGMM graduate student Sarah Johnson.



Erika Iris Simmons a.k.a. iri5 (lives, works in Atlanta, Georgia, USA)

Ghost in the Machine: The Clash, 2016

Cassette tape on canvas

24 x 16 inches

Collection of the Artist

Boy George, n.d.

Cassette tape on canvas

16 x 12 inches

Collection of the Artist

Born in 1983 in St. Louis, USA, **Erika Iris Simmons** is an artist who specializes in using old cassette tapes to create incredibly artistic celebrity portraits. She makes portraits of people associated with the item she chooses – without adding any paint or pigments.

Since her emergence Erika has blended the concerns and methods of conceptual art with craft-making and popular culture to create her own whimsical installations. She explores the nostalgia of the archaic, using donated second-hand items as her prime media.

Why is she only choosing secondhand materials? Why no color?

What is she trying to show us with old cassette tapes?

Is it clever only? It is nostalgic?

Why has she chosen iconic figures to portray?

How is she trying to communicate with us?

Written by WCU MGMM graduate student Liska Blodgett.



Angela Haseltine Pozzi (lives, works in Portland, Oregon, USA)

Washed Ashore Project, 2010

First installed at Art 101, Bandon, Oregon

Plastic washed up on Pacific Ocean beaches, almost 17 tons of plastic

Variable dimensions

Pozzi is an educator for over 30 years. Community helped with 10,000 volunteers. From The 17 tons of plastic she has created 66 giant sculptures to impress upon the public in a massive way that this is what we are doing to the oceans. She says we can't be too "preachy" about it or people will just turn off their interest. They don't want to be preached to, they want to learn." So Pozzi teaches the public by showing the public 17 tons of plastic that her and her volunteers have collected every Thursday to Saturday on the oceanside of her community in Oregon.

Does Angela Pozzi get you to understand the massive problem that we have with the ocean plastic?

What can you do in your daily actions to not use plastic, or plastic bottles?

Written by WCU MGMM graduate student Liska Blodgett.



Benjamin Von Wong (lives, works in Montreal, Canada)

The Parting of the Plastic Sea (Strawpocalypse), 2019

Sculpture with 168,000 plastic straws

10.9 x 36.2 x 14.9 feet

Currently installed at Estella Place, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Born in 1986 of Malaysian Chinese Parents, Von Wong graduated from McGill University in Mining Engineering. He raised \$2,000,000 (Canadian) for the environment with a Go Fund Me Campaign. In 2019 Von Wong earned a Guinness book World record by amassing a “Stawpocalypse” of 168,000 straws. He got the help of Starbucks, but it seems that he did not deter them from selling beverages with straws. It seems like the company Starbucks just wanted to buy “good will”. He garnered wide-spread community support in Vietnam, especially from people in Ho Chi Minh City where the installation was first presented.

Has Von Wong moved you to quit using straws by his using waste straws and transforming them into art?

He has also done this with clothing, plastic bottles, and photographic gear and show how every 60 seconds a truckload of plastic flows into the ocean.

Do you the viewer want to responsible for this?

What can you do to stop it?

Written by WCU MGMM graduate student Liska Blodgett.



HA Schult (b. Germany, 1939; lives, works in Parchim, Germany)

Trash People, Red Square, 1999

1,000 life-sized sculptures made from construction foam and computer parts, scrap metal, cans, bottles

Collection of the Artist

According to the *Washington Post*, Schult is the “Eco-Pioneer”. He has closed the gap between the established art world and environmental art made from human trash according to many of Public Art experts and to a large, global public following. His marvelous *TRASH People* are stunning examples of making us aware of what is going on in our society. He started to do this 50 years ago which does make him certainly one of the founders of Eco-ART.

With his Trash People scenes in major capital cities around the world what is the artist trying to tell viewers like you?

Each of his “trash persons” is filled with crushed cans. So, by the nature of how much we consume today plastic and aluminum, we are Trash People!

Am I a Trash Person? Are you?

Written by WCU MGMM graduate student Liska Blodgett.