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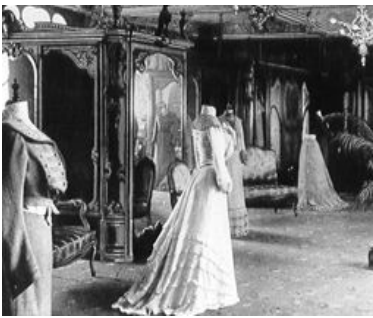
Hans Haacke



Ben Vautier



Ben Vautier



Harrods 1



Printemps

Art Against Consumerism

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Introduction

[image 1 - Ben Vautier] While consuming and creating waste are what we do all the time as natural beings to stay alive, consumerism is an aberrant behaviour that began in the early 20th century and is now global in scope. [image 2 - Ben Vautier] As Swiss artist **Ben Vautier** proclaims in his *Baz'art*, we live in a world where, increasingly, everything is for sale.

Definition of consumerism

[Image 3 - Harrods 1] In 1899 Thorstein Veblen coined the term “conspicuous consumption” in his book *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, to describe the behaviour of a growing middle class that was acquiring goods that denoted superior social status. We now use the term *consumerism* to describe the over-consuming of goods and services that is spreading across the world.

The rise of consumerism

[Image 4 - Printemps] Modern consumer culture is defined by the emergence of department stores in the mid-19th century with fixed prices and the introduction of credit.

Colonialism supplied cheap labour and resources as well as exotic products. It became possible to produce a wide variety of standardized goods. In 1914 Henry Ford introduced the assembly line, a symbol of the development of modern mass production systems. Economies of scale and scope and increased worker efficiency enabled firms to cut prices and make goods widely accessible.

As production costs diminished over time, investment shifted into improving transport and distribution. A new class of mobile urban consumers came about not just for goods, but for services, entertainment, advice, leisure and social interchange. Mail order catalogue shopping, door-to-door sales, promotional contests, discount coupons, etc. were used to build and retain a widespread population of loyal customers.



Big Display



Harrods 2



Brian Ulrich

[Image 5 - Big Display) Since the late 19th century, stores have become temples of consumption. The invention of plate glass led to the development of display windows creating the illusion of accessible luxury. [Image 6 - Harrods 2] Retailers introduced open displays of merchandise to stimulate counter shopping.

[Image 7 - Brian Ulrich] In-store browsing and window shopping have evolved into a leisure activity or form of entertainment. Retail malls are being grafted onto theme parks, stadiums, museums and airports. Merchandising is providing a whole new income stream for the entertainment industry. Employing increasingly elaborate architecture or interior decoration, restaurants and stores often strive to create an atmosphere of exotic make-believe. High-end retailers use art to stimulate shopping and conversely, commercial display techniques are adopted for contemporary museum exhibitions.

What sustains consumerism?



Ed Burtynsky



Ed Burtynsky



Allan Sekula



Douglas Coupland



Brian Ulrich

Worldwide capitalism

[Image 8 - factory in China, Ed Burtynsky] The vast factories of China, documented by **Ed Burtynsky**, symbolize both the triumph and tyranny of consumerism and the collapse of alternatives to capitalism. [Image 9 - workers in chicken processing plant in China, Ed Burtynsky] Since the 1990s commodification has been part of the neoliberal model encompassing privatization, high unemployment, low wages, weakening of unions, and neglect of public services. Private corporate power dominates politics and culture and a free market economy prevails.

[Image 10 - Allan Sekula] Global trade has brought prosperity for many but created instability and poor working conditions for workers who must migrate in search of jobs and live a hand-to-mouth existence. A new form of colonialism has taken hold as multinational corporations employ cheap labour in developing nations. The artist **Allan Sekula** has documented shifts in the shipping industry and the precarious lifestyle of its workforce in his project *Fish Story* (1987-1994).

[image 11 - *Corporate Security Blanket* by Douglas Coupland] In our society, success is measured overwhelmingly by material affluence. Consumer economics assumes that the economy must constantly grow in order to stay healthy, without taking into account the consequences of unlimited growth. [image 12 - **Brian Ulrich**] Profit is defined narrowly without taking into account human and natural costs. Economic growth is justified socially as providing employment, hence consumerism is encouraged as patriotic.

Marketing and Advertising



Chris Woods



Brian Ulrich



Brian Ulrich



Brian Ulrich



Brian Ulrich

The drive to unlimited and unrestrained consumption is culturally entrenched in consumer society by mass media who promote the belief that products and services can solve all our problems and bring us happiness. Advertising and marketing media extend their reach ever deeper into our institutions, shaping our mythology and our consciousness. [Image 13 - Chris Woods] In her book *NoLogo*, Naomi Klein describes the process of corporate branding where a company's public image, independent of its products or services, acquires the status of an allegorical character embodying admirable virtues.

[Image 15 - Brian Ulrich] The photographer Brian Ulrich records everyday scenes in stores and malls that show consumers caught in the spell of media propaganda and retail behavioural psychology.

Advertising must create new consumer needs, that is, it must produce consumers, not goods, and increasingly orient them toward prestige brands and luxury styles of particular goods.

[Image 16 - Brian Ulrich] Advertisers target groups such as “emulators” - people who look for products that make them feel like somebody more important, and [Image 17 - Brian Ulrich] “tinies” - young children who will nag their parents to buy advertised products.

[Image 18 - Brian Ulrich] Ad campaigns these days are becoming more cultural: it's less about selling things, and more about selling or supplying images, sounds and words. Through framing and context, products are promoted as the means to acquire style and selfhood. As Kalle Lasn points out in *Culture Jam*, these days “cool is indispensable.”



Brian Ulrich



Brian Ulrich



Brian Ulrich



Brian Ulrich



Brian Ulrich



Charles Ray

Retail Display

Since we in western consumer society are now overretailed, with sellers competing for the same customer, product presentation has become key to selling, from image, design and styling to branding and packaging. Where usefulness is the same for all products, surface must have greater appeal. Thus, even the most basic articles are being estheticized. Consumer goods are treated as fetish objects, that is, they are glamorized, they acquire symbolic value, or are attributed qualities and powers beyond their functionality or physical properties.

[Image 19 - Brian Ulrich] The world of retail creates a vision of endless excess or superabundance, and a fireworks of colour and shape. [Image 20 - Brian Ulrich] Shoppers are immersed in a sensual, aesthetic and theatrical experience yet at the same time, they need easy decodability, clarity and accessibility.

[Image 21 - Brian Ulrich] The techniques of retail display are based on detailed surveillance of shopper behaviour. Shopper trackers know that customers need a threshold space at the store entrance to get their bearings. They tend to turn right after entering a store and they slow down at reflective surfaces. [Image 22 - Brian Ulrich] Retailers create a planogram which maps out which products are stocked where on a shelf. The most popular products will be placed dead centre with the brand-to-build on the right hand. Endcaps on long rows of shelves are prime spaces. Since the optimum height for product display is from eye level to knee high, packaging designers ensure that package designs work from many sightlines. Lighting can affect the perception of price and value. [Image 23 - Brian Ulrich] Arrays of focused dramatic lighting direct the shopper's gaze to altar-like arrangements of merchandise or [Image 24 - Charles Ray] lofty mannequins posed like saints or heroes.



Brian Ulrich

[Image 25 - Brian Ulrich] Carefully planned pathways draw customers to the store's wall displays where product sales tend to be clinched. Knowing that "possession begins when the shopper's senses latch onto the object" retailers allow shoppers to touch and experience before buying. Aware of gender differences in consumer behaviour, they "sell to the woman and close to the man."



Deli Counter (not by Ulrich)

[Image 26 - Deli Counter] Pyramids of goods create an impression of abundance yet must not convey a sense of cheap excess. [Image 27 - Brian Ulrich] Spacious aisles allow for unimpeded passage beside racks and shelves on which goods are proffered like ripe fruit for the taking. [Image 28 - Brian Ulrich] Diagonals guide and move the eyes. [Image 29 - Brian Ulrich] Shopping baskets and bags are strategically positioned so customers can free up their hands for impulse purchases and add-on sales. Larger shopping carts mean more sales.



Brian Ulrich



Brian Ulrich



Brian Ulrich

Attacking Consumerism



Ed Burtynsky

SHOW THE UGLY TRUTH

Artists can play an important role in documenting the problems of consumerism. Operating as social outsiders and watching for authenticity, their images increase public awareness, provide pungent commentary or psychological insight.



Ed Burtynsky

Environmental Destruction

Although the consumer lifestyle is only a dream for millions of people who struggle for basic subsistence, it has reached the point of planetary destructiveness by exhausting nonrenewable resources and leaving behind mountains of trash and toxicity.

[Image 30 - mine in Australia, Ed Burtynsky] The sheer scale of environmental destruction is made manifest in the work of **Ed Burtynsky** whose photographs are paradoxically stunning in their beauty. [Image 31 - quarry, Ed Burtynsky] Compelling in their richness of detail and majestic scale, they visualize the contradiction between our dependence on nature and our concern for its future health.



Ines Doujak



Ines Doujak



Ines Doujak



Ines Doujak



Ines Doujak

“Biopiracy”: Commodification of natural resources

[Image 32 - Doujak] Where nature was once deemed a sacred source of life, now it is commodified. In the last decade, we have witnessed the commodification of the very building blocks of life as private corporations register patents for engineered organisms, take control of local water supplies, sell human body parts, and manipulate genetic material.

The *Siegesgarten* (Victory Gardens, 2007) of **Ines Doujak** documents the corporate expropriation of plants and animals.

[Image 33 - Doujak] Plants are flourishing in a long bed staked with 69 seed packets. [Image 34 - Doujak] The packets carry information on a particular incident of biopiracy in which Western industrial nations are acquiring property rights on valuable genetic resources without financial compensation. The seed packets educate the viewer about global exploitation, genetic engineering and monoculture and rebel against these developments visually. [Image 35 - Doujak] On the front of the packets, plant photographs and collages also show a queered sexuality. [Image 36 - Doujak] On the back, conditions and consequences are described using sample products.



Banksy



Banksy



Banksy



Banksy



Banksy

Disconnected Consumerism

[Image 37 - Banksy] The processes of mass production have created a gulf between human beings and the plants and animals they consume. Urban consumers are increasingly distanced from farms and factories where animals are killed, paper is printed or trucks are assembled.

The artist **Banksy** recently created a mock pet store in New York City which satirizes the disconnection between consumers and the food they eat. [Image 38 - Banksy] Said Banksy, “New Yorkers don’t care about art, they care about pets. So I’m exhibiting them instead. [Image 39 - Banksy] I wanted to make art that questioned our relationship with animals and the ethics and sustainability of factory farming, but it ended up as chicken nuggets singing. [Image 40 - Banksy] I took all the money I made exploiting an animal in my last show [Image 41 - Banksy] and used it to fund a new show about the exploitation of animals.”

The End of the Natural



Banksy

[Image 42 - Banksy] Disregard for nature is also illustrated by **Banksy**. Four images from this British artist make a bitter comment about the trashing of nature.

Throughout history, landscape art has interpreted society's changing relationship to nature. Agricultural societies revered nature as sacred. As urban settlements developed, nature became a picturesque backdrop to human passions - love, war, work, etc. In the age of exploration, nature was a formidable enemy to be conquered.



Banksy

[Image 43 - Banksy] In enlightenment Europe, nature was subjected to scientific observation, dissection and reification. The practice of collecting and archiving in vast public and private institutions began.

[Image 44 - Banksy] In industrial England, nature became the Other to human society. In contrast to the evils of industrialization, nature was romanticized and artists reflected society's longing for a pastoral idyll rooted in a bygone and irrelevant past.



Banksy

[Image 45 - Banksy] In today's consumer society, notions of ownership dominate our view of nature and very little space on earth is left untouched or uncontaminated by human presence.



Banksy



Kembrew McLeod on Stayfree's website

Corporate Hegemony

[Image 46 - Kembrew McLeod] Issues of ownership are contested not only over physical, natural or biological material but also over cultural and intellectual property. The laws governing “intellectual property” have grown so expansive in recent years that artists need legal experts to sort them all out. Copyright was originally intended to facilitate the exchange of ideas but is now being used to stifle it. Loaded with gray areas, intellectual property law inevitably has a silencing effect, discouraging the creation of new works.

The **Illegal Art Exhibit** on the **Stayfree** website highlights some of the ways freedom of expression confronts corporate hegemony.



Natalka Husar

In 1998, Kembrew McLeod trademarked the phrase “Freedom of Expression” and created a zine with that title. He enlisted a friend, Brendan Love, to pose as the publisher of an imaginary punk rock magazine also called Freedom of Expression, whom he then pretended to sue. McLeod hired a lawyer and didn't let her in on the hoax. The lawyer sent a cease-and-desist letter to Love:

We represent Kembrew McLeod of Sunderland, Massachusetts, the owner of the federally registered trademark, FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ... Your company has been using the mark Freedom of Expression ... Such use creates a likelihood of confusion in the market and also creates a substantial risk of harm to the reputation and goodwill of our client. This letter, therefore, constitutes formal notice of your infringement of our client's trademark rights and a demand that you refrain from all further use of Freedom of Expression.

Shortly thereafter, the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* ran an interview with McLeod. He played it straight, telling the paper, “I didn't go to the trouble, the expense and the time of trademarking Freedom of Expression just to have someone else come along and think they can use it whenever they want.” Two years later, when McLeod asked to reprint the *Gazette* article in his book *Owning Culture*, the paper denied him permission.

[Image 47 - *Library*, 1999-2001, Natalka Husar] Taken from the exhibition *Blond with Dark Roots*, this 16-part series uses the covers of 1950s and '60s Harlequin romance novels to present the experiences of a young Ukrainian immigrant. The artist, Natalka Husar, bought the novels at thrift stores, left the title of each book intact, changed the publisher's logo to “A Husar Romance,” and painted over the rest of each cover with her own image.

In May 2002, Husar received a letter from Harlequin Enterprises Ltd. accusing her of violating the moral rights of its authors, artists, and editors. The company is demanding that Husar either alter the existing paintings or stop including them in exhibitions.

Husar has hired a lawyer and plans to fight the publisher's “absurd” accusations.



Kelly Wood



Kelly Wood



Kelly Wood



Kelly Wood



Kelly Wood

Accumulation of Waste

[Image 48 - *The Continuous Garbage Project: 1998-2003* - Kelly Wood]

The problem of accumulating garbage is addressed by **Kelly Wood** who photographed her daily accumulation of waste for 5 years.

[Image 49 - Kelly Wood] Beginning with Vancouver's garbage strike in the spring of 1998 and concluding the week before the project's inaugural exhibition in Vancouver in 2003, artist Kelly Wood lived in Toronto and Vancouver, and while at home photographed her garbage neatly packaged against a studio backdrop. [Image 50 - Kelly Wood] On her travels, Wood photographed discarded objects, bagged or unwrapped, in their immediate surroundings.

[Image 51 - Kelly Wood] The images are clearly focused, carefully composed and sumptuously printed. But the *Continuous Garbage Project* isn't simply about the aestheticisation of waste. [Image 52 - Kelly Wood] It also raises issues of environmental awareness, consumerism, labour, obsessive impulses, and a voyeuristic desire to examine what one individual finds useless. In a conscious effort that changed her consumer habits, Wood managed to reduce the amount of waste she produces.



Chris Jordan

[Image 53 - Chris Jordan] Many producers of consumer products, in pursuit of unrestricted growth, have introduced irresponsible but profitable strategies such as disposability and built-in obsolescence in their production. Consumers have become habituated or unwitting accomplices in the use of toxic, genetically modified or non biodegradable products and packaging materials which exacerbate the accumulation of waste and its lethal effect on the environment.



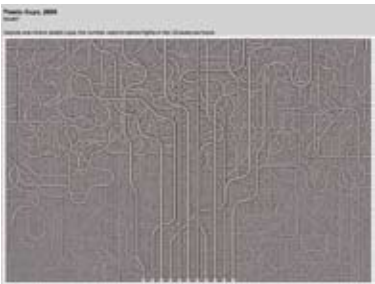
Chris Jordan

[Image 54 - Chris Jordan] Photographer **Chris Jordan** gives us a visual representation of the magnitude of overproduction and consumption that generates so much waste.

[Image 55 - Chris Jordan]

[Image 56 - Chris Jordan]

Rather than cutting back on production, manufacturers employ advertising and marketing media to stimulate consumer appetites.



Chris Jordan



Chris Jordan

Commercial propaganda



Campbell's Soup Cans, 1962
Agenda: polymer print on Wray-Bar canvas, 110cm canvas 20 x 14" (50.8 x 41.3 cm)
Andy Warhol, American, 1928-1987

Andy Warhol



Andy Warhol



Barbara Kruger



Barbara Kruger



Barbara Kruger

[Image 57 - *Campbell Soup Cans*, Andy Warhol] The effect of mass media advertising and consumerism in daily life and awareness was first reflected in the 60s in the work of the American Pop artists, most famously **Andy Warhol**.

Warhol's choice of subject matter was shocking at the time (60s). Warhol elevated mundane consumer goods such as soup cans and soap boxes to the level of high art. [Image 58 - *Marilyn Monroe*, Andy Warhol] He was fascinated by the creation of celebrity. Mimicking mass media techniques, he reproduced these objects and images as serial imagery, revealing how they become ingrained in our collective consciousness and elevated to the status of icons. At the same time, Warhol manipulated the images as flat surfaces of colour and shape with arbitrary variations, turning them into an empty or meaningless pattern dissociated from reality.

Warhol's approach to his work and life echoes the French philosopher Guy Debord's conception of *The Society of the Spectacle*, where people's relationship to each other is mediated by images. Debord spoke of "the decline of being into having, and having into merely appearing." In a consumer society, he said, social life was not about living but having. "All that was once directly lived has become mere representation."

[Image 59 - *Barbara Kruger*] In the decades following Warhol, **Barbara Kruger** examined how commercial techniques of combining language and image have the power to dominate and influence our consciousness and behaviour.

[Image 60 - *Barbara Kruger*] Kruger was particularly interested from a feminist perspective in how power relationships are constructed through text and image. Using classic print advertising techniques she makes accusations and pithy critical observations, positing an opposition between the pronouns "you" and "we," which satirically refer to "men" and "women."

[Image 61 - *Barbara Kruger*] Her statements, direct and provocative, are superimposed usually in white letters against a background of red on a tightly cropped magazine or newspaper image. The black and white enlargement of the image is crude and monumental. Text and image are unrelated or contradictory in an effort to create uncertainty and anxiety in the viewer.



Chris Woods



Six-Point Adjustable

Chris Woods



Chris Woods

[Image 62 - Chris Woods] Painter **Chris Woods** portrays the psychological entanglement of individuals with the fantasies and dreamworlds constructed by advertising media. [Image 63 - Chris Woods] He depicts himself and his friends as actors in imaginary consumer fantasies, [Image 64 - Chris Woods] showing the twisted contradictions between the everyday reality of real people and the utopian projection of their desires and needs in the advertising world.

Dumbing Down Society

[Image 65 - Paul McCarthy] Paul McCarthy's work came out of kids' television in Los Angeles. Using bodily fluids, paint, and food, McCarthy's raunchy and debased performances are elaborate critiques of the infantilization or dumbing-down of TV and movie audiences. [Image 66 - Paul McCarthy] They imply that a perverse and paternalistic abuse of power underlies the glamour of Disney and Hollywood. [Image 67 - Paul McCarthy] The brutality of the American invasion of Iraq, child abuse, family violence and disfunction are criticised through grotesque parodies of 'Pirates of the Carribbean', Johanna Spyri's 'Heidi' and Carlo Collodi's 'Pinocchio'.



Spaghetti Man, 1993 (collection FRAC)

Paul McCarthy

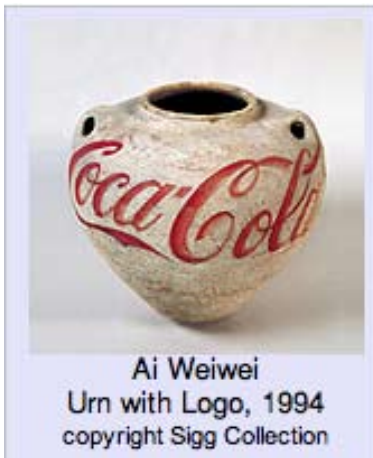


Paul McCarthy



Paul McCarthy

Trivializing Culture



Ai Wei Wei

[Image 68 - Ai Wei Wei] The ubiquity of advertising and commercial marketing in our daily lives is so prevalent as to become unremarkable. As consumer society becomes saturated with advertising images, history and cultural traditions are also being coopted, trivialized and re-presented to us as commodified artifacts, simulated experiences or entertainment spectacles.

As this iconic sculpture by **Ai Weiwei** shows, globalization is spreading a monoculture of western consumer messages and values to all corners of the world, compromising the status and viability of local culture and language.



Brian Jungen

[Image 69 - Brian Jungen] Artist **Brian Jungen** transforms consumer objects such as luggage and Nike sneakers into Northwest Coast Indian totems and masks. These amusing and ingenious hybrids create an unnerving syncretism between consumerism and spirituality, breaking down the boundaries of value and meaning of these two normally opposed realms.

Sut Jhally, Executive Director of the Media Education Foundation, in his article “Advertising at the Edge of the Apocalypse” warns that advertising is becoming the central storytelling mechanism of our society. Culture, as he says, “is the place and space where a society tells stories about itself, where values are articulated and expressed, where notions of good and evil, of morality and immorality, are defined.” This space and place is dominated in our consumer society by advertising which is pushing its values upon us.



Brian Jungen

[Image 70 - Banksy] Banksy’s satirical image illustrates Jhally’s point that the mass media tend to address us not as concerned and caring world citizens but as individuals with needs and desires. Advertising invites us to abandon hope in the future or past and to live in and for the moment. It turns our attention away from authentic collective issues and real sources of happiness toward the adulation of fame, power and fortune. Engagement in public life then appears drab compared to the glamour of consumerism.



Banksy



Richard Estes



Richard Estes



Ed Ruscha



Isabelle Hayeur



Isabelle Hayeur



Isabelle Hayeur

Underwriting Urbanization

[Image 71 - Richard Estes] In *The Consumer Society and the Postmodern City*, David B. Clarke argues that the central core of urban living is consumerism.

[Image 72 - Richard Estes] American artist **Richard Estes** depicts the city as a narcissistic place where, everywhere we look, we see reflections of ourselves as consumers.

[Image 73 - from *26 Stations* - Ed Ruscha] Rural areas by contrast come to feel like non-spaces, serving as transit corridors between cities, or production zones supplying urban consumers with produce and products. The very term nature has limited meaning now because very little is natural anymore.

[Image 74 - Isabelle Hayeur] Living in a narcissistic and hedonistic environment which reflects the values of private industry and business, consumers find themselves adopting prefabricated styles.

In her series *Model Homes* (2004 - 2007), Canadian photographer **Isabelle Hayeur** examines urban sprawl. The following text is taken from the artist's website:

Whereas, in the 60's and 70's the growth of the suburbs was related to the fantasy of a "return to nature," contemporary suburbs are more and more removed from urban centres and their growth has an invasive aspect that tends to marginalize city life and eliminate rural life.

It is a mode of habitation that forces dependence on the automobile and the oil industry. The daily commute into and out of the city is a major source of traffic congestion and pollution.

Vast tracts of land are now placed in the hands of developers, whose vision is inspired by the strategies of commerce. [Image 75 - Isabelle Hayeur] Developments usually have no connection to the original context of the sites where they are built, they are amalgams of cultural, imaginary and borrowed identities.

[Image 76 - Isabelle Hayeur] The housing in these places is full of grafted-on symbols and references to histories that have nothing to do with our own. We are witness to the appearance of simulated villages, a style that could be called fake-authentic, a pastiche of vanished ways of life. Some people even think that these artificial landscapes are real, leading to confusion between what is really part of our cultural heritage and what is only the market value of substitution. This generates false perceptions of who we are.

Commodifying culture and history

[Image 77 - Guillaume Bijl] The question of authenticity is raised by **Isabelle Hayeur** in terms of suburban architecture and by **Guillaume Bijl** in terms of history and tourism.

The Belgian artist has created a number of installations which can be categorized as dealing with the phenomenon of ‘Cultural Tourism’. In general, Bijl questions the artificial values of our ‘civilization’. This appears in his work as an examination of how ‘History and Culture’ are visually presented. [Image 78 - Guillaume Bijl] We belong to the generation, says the artist, which on the one hand goes to travel agencies, fitness centres, and casinos, and which on the other hand builds atomic bomb shelters. We spend our weekends visiting ‘interesting’ historical sites.

[Image 79 - Guillaume Bijl] The range of Bijl’s installations exposes not only the banality of cheap mass-tourist culture, it also focuses on more sophisticated intellectual subjects. [Image 80 - Guillaume Bijl] In these, he explores the questionable fetishist approach to historical personalities and their ‘objects’.



Guillaume Bijl



Guillaume Bijl



Guillaume Bijl



Guillaume Bijl

Substituting style for identity



Yinka Shonibare

[Image 81 - Yinka Shonibare] Yinka Shonibare's work deals with complexities of nationality and identity, of history and ethnicity, post-colonialism and today's global economy. Born in England in 1962 and raised in Nigeria, Shonibare currently lives and works in London. His sculptural installations make extensive use of dyed fabrics which became popular in West Africa after independence. But many of these textiles betray Indonesian influences, are manufactured in Holland, and are purchased by the artist in Brixton in south London.

[Image 82 - Shonibare] Shonibare lampoons the concept of achieving status by acquiring the physical trappings or outward show of aristocracy. His work implies that, despite the apparent democracy of consumer society, a tragic persistence of racial discrimination remains, embedded in the complexities of global trade and social systems.



Yinka Shonibare

Creating addictions



Dwayne Hanson

[Image 83 - *Shopper, Dwayne Hanson*] Despite daily evidence that overconsumption is destructive, consumers exhibit obsessive behaviours, from epidemic obesity to stampeding at the local bigbox store. The appetite for commodities appears to be insatiable and is fueled by availability of easy credit.

The Australia Institute reports a recent study showed that nearly two-thirds of Australians say they cannot afford to buy everything they really need, despite the fact that Australians are richer than ever, and around three times better off than their parents in the 1950s. Consumer debt and personal bankruptcies are rising rapidly. Australians are working longer and harder than they have for decades and are neglecting their families and their health as a result. [Image 84 - *Brian Ulrich*] So while they say they do not have enough money, many Australians also say that money-hunger conflicts with their deeper values and preferences. When asked whether Australian society today is too materialistic, with too much emphasis on money and not enough on the things that really matter, 83 per cent agree.



Brian Ulrich

EARTH TO EARTH ASHES TO ASHES DUST TO DUST

Lawrence Weiner



Conrad Bakker



Conrad Bakker

DEVALUE OBJECTS

[Image 85 - Lawrence Weiner] In the 1970s, in an attempt to resist the commodification of art, a number of artists no longer produced physical art objects or pieces that could easily be sold. Many turned to performance art or created ephemeral installations, others produced work outside the confines of conventional art venues. Others, like **Lawrence Weiner**, presented only a concept or idea which might or not might be realized in real space and time. Eventually, the documentation of these works became valuable and coveted by collectors. Artists themselves now acquire celebrity status in the global art world, some mocking the star system, others using it to advantage. The artist **Nino Sehgal** resists the tendency to adulate art and artists by refusing to allow any reproduction of his own image or artwork.

[Image 86 - Conrad Bakker] Other artists employ processes that devalue objects or empty fetishized goods of their glamor and worth. **Conrad Bakker** created the *Untitled: Mail Order Catalogue* whose products are crudely carved from wood and painted with oil paint. [Image 87 - Conrad Bakker] The catalogue includes items such as a “Wind Proof” Cigarette Lighter, and Flexible Comfort Clogs. The artist mailed the catalogue to some 2500 people and received several orders in reply.



Rhonda Wepler and Trevor Mahovsky

[Image 89 - Wepler/Mahovsky] **Rhonda Wepler** and **Trevor Mahovsky** empty content and value out of consumer commodities by reproducing them in cheap materials and then crumpling them into scrap.

[Image 90 - Wepler/Mahovsky] Using various types of paper or tin foil, they have applied their technique to shopping carts, funeral hearses, sailboats and [Image 91 - Wepler/Mahovsky] a 20-foot long tangle of jewelry and jewelry boxes.



Rhonda Wepler and Trevor Mahovsky



Rhonda Wepler and Trevor Mahovsky

PARODY RETAIL



Jeff Koons



Jeff Koons



Damien Hirst



Damien Hirst

A number of artists, conscious of the power of retail display techniques, deconstruct the aesthetics of retail presentation. This is an analytic approach, like taking apart a machine to see how it works, then reassembling it into something that simulates the original but does not function or produce as expected. These artists subvert the way retailers fetishize commodities.

[Image 92 - Jeff Koons] In order to “decode why and how consumer objects are glorified” **Jeff Koons** presents objects that represent eternally new, consumable perfection enveloped by a synthetic aura of security. In this way, Koons displays the longings and desires of the bourgeoisie for security and the attainment of social status. Koons, a former commodities broker, has used his marketing savvy to turn himself into a celebrity and sell kitsch as high art to major collectors.

[Image 93 - *Pharmacy* (1992), Damien Hirst] The British artist Damien Hirst created a full-sized replica of a pharmacy to explore the aesthetic design language of retail. The setting of ascetic coolness, purity, and order has a calming effect that allows customers to feel confident and secure.

[Image 94 - *Damien Hirst*] In May 2007, Hirst exhibited *For the Love of God*, a platinum cast of a human skull with real teeth covered with 8,601 diamonds worth £15,000,000. In this *memento mori*, displayed in static perfection, death is marketed as the ultimate commodity.



Haim Steinbach

[Image 95 - Haim Steinbach] For the past 30 years, Haim Steinbach has been exploring the theme of the shelf. Like a contemporary archaeologist, he uses shelves to present objects taken from daily life.



Haim Steinbach

[Image 96 - Haim Steinbach] The design of his shelves, his selection and arrangement of objects underlines their aesthetic aspects, allowing us to see them from an alienated perspective, as strange and purposeless, at times erotic.



Haim Steinbach

[Image 97 - Haim Steinbach] The artist's decision to display similar items side by side, arranged according to the objects' social or cultural connotations, is intended to provoke what Steinbach terms "psychological anxiety" and to question the nature of contemporary fetishes.



Katharina Fritsch

[Image 98 - Katharina Fritsch] **Katharina Fritsch** also arranges objects in imitation of retail presentation. However, her uncanny displays of mass produced prototypical consumer objects, despite borrowing from the language of retail, do not create a supply - they do not say "buy me". Instead, the monotonous repetition and aloof perfection of the arranged objects results in an "introspective, enigmatic aura."



Brian Ulrich

EXHIBIT WASTE

[Image 99 - Brian Ulrich] Great wealth is indicated not only by what we possess, but also by what we squander. Nature itself with its abundant output exhibits profligacy and waste, but its waste is ultimately part of a self-sustaining cycle.



Brian Ulrich

[Image 100 - Brian Ulrich] As Georges Bataille pointed out in his book, *The Accursed Share*, what we squander ultimately is energy derived from the sun. The squandering of energy is a luxury and the form it takes is waste - material that is entropic, base and devoid of value and meaning. Waste is a toxic luxury that society can no longer afford. The accumulation of garbage is an indictment of consumer society, a sign of systemic failure, impotence, and lowliness.

[Image 101 - Brian Ulrich] Photographs taken in thrift shops and backrooms by **Brian Ulrich** show how the sight of chaotic, entropic arrangements of used goods deglamorizes and devalues the shopping experience.



Brian Ulrich



Brian Ulrich



Mierle Ukeles Laderman



The Social Mirror, 1983
mirror-covered NYC Dept of
Sanitation truck



Touch Sanitation 1978-80
“Handshake Ritual” with
workers of NYC Dept of
Sanitation



Flow City

[Image 102 - Mierle Ukeles Laderman] Waste is something humans seek to conceal or eliminate. As Artist-in-Residence for New York City’s Department of Sanitation since 1978, **Mierle Ukeles Laderman** has been a force in raising public awareness about the city’s garbage, its systems and employees handling garbage.

[Image 103 - Mierle Ukeles Laderman] In 1976, Ukeles accepted an unsalaried position as artist-in-residence with the New York City Department of Sanitation. She proposed to do work that would incorporate dialogue, community participation around life-centered issues, and ecological sustainability. Ukeles focused her creative energies on a series of long term projects: *Touch Sanitation*; *Flow City* (1983-current); and Fresh Kills Landfill and Sanitation Garage (1989-present). These projects provided visitors with points of access to issues of urban waste management.

[Image 104 - Mierle Ukeles Laderman] *Touch Sanitation* (1978-1984) drew attention to the maintenance of urban ecological systems in general and the use of pejorative language to represent “garbage men” in particular. Ukeles traveled sections of New York City to shake the hands of over 8500 sanitation employees or “sanmen” during a year-long performance. Ukeles documented the workers’ private stories, fears, castigations, and public humiliations in an attempt to challenge conventional language stereotypes.

[Image 105 - Mierle Ukeles Laderman] Ukeles constructed *Flow City* (1983-current), a visitor center at a marine transfer station, as a way for people to view the transference of used and recyclable material and the labor of everyday maintenance workers. She constructed a space with three separate views of city life and urban ecology: a beautiful panorama of the city; a picture of large barges filled with trash; and a bank of video monitors with scientific data. These three perspectives provided a chance for visitors to learn more and to question consumerism and their own lifestyle choices.



SF Recycling & Disposal, Inc.



Laura Kikauka



Laura Kikauka



Laura Kikauka

[Image 106 - SF Recycling & Disposal, Inc.] Since the first collage was created in the early 1900s, artists have turned to everyday refuse for cheap raw material and creative inspiration. **SF Recycling & Disposal, Inc.** runs an artist-in-residence program which provides selected local artists with the opportunity to create art using materials they gather from San Francisco's refuse.

Artists receive 24-hour access to a well-equipped 2,000-square-foot art studio, a monthly stipend, and an exhibit at the end of their residency, but seem most excited about having 24-hour access to the materials.

During the residency, each artist talks to students and adult tour groups about the experience of turning trash into treasures. Many pieces of art from the program are exhibited in office building entries and public spaces in San Francisco. Many artists have made a permanent piece for the sculpture garden adjacent to the SF Recycling & Disposal, Inc. Transfer Station.

[Image 107 - Laura Kikauka] Artistic approaches to the detritus of everyday life are many and varied.

Laura Kikauka has the ability to bring together vast mounds of outdated electronic gadgetry, kitsch, imitations, nick-nacks, throw-offs, flawed copies and toys sorted by colour or some other common characteristic. [Image 108 - Laura Kikauka] Her installations and sculptures work best in museums and galleries where they play off the overlap of high and low art forms. All of them show a highly personal touch in the fetishistic covering of various surfaces with toys, food, commercial signage, and so forth. [Image 109 - Laura Kikauka] Her work offers "an arresting blend of slapstick humour, kitsch sentiments, party games and obscure popular music, all vying for attention in a non-hierarchical assemblage of objects that veers from extreme orderliness to a degree of chaos."



Nancy Rubins



Nancy Rubins



Nancy Rubins

[Image 110 - *Small Forest*, 2004, stainless steel and airplane parts - Nancy Rubins] Nancy Rubins, working on a large scale, reenergizes and ennobles massive detritus by holding it together in tense, dynamic compositions.



Tim Noble and Sue Webster

[Image 111 - Noble/Webster] Artists also exploit the expressive and symbolic power of waste.

Transforming personal trash into humorous portraits of themselves and their surroundings, **Tim Noble** and **Sue Webster** create a metaphor for hope rising out of poor living conditions.



Tim Noble and Sue Webster

[Image 112 - *Dirty White Trash (with Gulls)*, 1998, 6 months worth of artists' trash, 2 taxidermy seagulls, light projector, Dimensions variable - Noble/Webster] Like alchemists or magicians, they make something extraordinary out of the most humble materials. Their shadow sculptures are complemented by light sculptures made from the cheap crystal bulbs of fairground signs.

[Image 113 - Noble/Webster] The artists are inspired by the way modest illuminated signs become beacons of hope in the gloomy mist of Blackpool and other downmarket seaside resorts of the artists' native Britain. They evoke romantic dreams that transcend the squalor and bleakness of the streets that prosperity has not reached.



Tim Noble and Sue Webster
 Current and Past Works, 2003. Copperplate print, ink, photo screen by Ian Spurr, mounted 6400, light projector, 93.33 x 12.25 x 29.5 inches (238 x 31 x 75 cm)

Tim Noble and Sue Webster



CULTURE JAMMING

Public activism by individuals and citizen groups against commercialism and corporate manipulation is often referred to as culture jamming. Many culture jamming groups or individuals work artistically through performance or visual intervention.

Mess with the Messages

[Image 114 - Adbusters] The magazine *Adbusters* is the communications arm of the Adbusters Media Foundation which describes itself as a global network of culture jammers and creatives who are working to change the way information flows and meaning is produced in our society. The magazine runs “subvertisements” that make consumption uncool, particularly fashion, cars, and commercialized holidays. Adbusters conducts demarketing campaigns to unsell products and turn the power of marketing against itself. These campaigns include TV turn-off week, Buy Nothing Day, Buy Nothing Christmas and Mental Detox Week.



BUGAUP



BLF



BLF



BLF

[Image 115 - BUGAUP] **Billboard Utilising Graffitiists Against Unhealthy Promotions, or B.U.G.A. U.P.** is an Australian artistic group that modifies with graffiti billboard advertising that promotes something they deem unhealthy.

The group started in inner-city Sydney in October 1979 and has been active ever since, although the late 70's and early-mid 1980s is considered their most active period. The group aimed mainly at cigarette and alcohol advertising, often blanking out letters and adding others to promote their view that the product is unhealthy. Cola and soft drink ads were also targeted.

[Image 116 - BLF] The **Billboard Liberation Front** is a group of “culture jammers” devoted to “improving” billboards by changing key words to radically alter the message, often to an anti-corporate message. [Image 117 - BLF] They published an instructional pamphlet titled “The Art & Science of Billboard Improvement.” [Image 118 - BLF] The idea of “Billboard Improvement” is also covered in *Recipes for Disaster: An Anarchist Cookbook*.



Cutup

[Image 119 - CUTUP] **Cutup** is a group of London based artists, whose work mainly revolves around the manipulation of billboard advertisements. [Image 120 - CUTUP] Their first works consisted of removing a billboard, painstakingly cutting it up into roughly 4000 small rectangles, each one in essence a pixel, [Image 121 - CUTUP] and then reassembling the billboard. [Image 122 - CUTUP] More recently, Cutup have started other projects, such as replacing small bus-shelter advertisements with a drilled sheet of wood. The illuminating back lights that turn on at dusk reveal an image, as the many holes light up against the dark background.



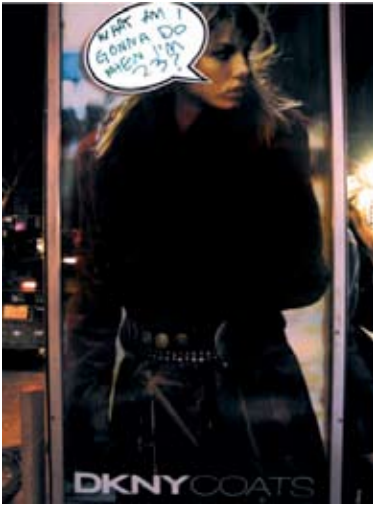
Cutup



Cutup



Cutup



The Bubble Project

[Image 123 -The Bubble Project] **The Bubble Project**, as proclaimed by its manifesto, aims to counterattack the one-sided corporate onslaught of marketing and advertisement messages which propagate public space. The project was conceived by Ji Lee, an artist and art director, who originally printed 15,000 stickers that look like speech bubbles used in comic strips. He posts these blank speech bubbles on top of advertisements throughout New York City allowing anyone who sees them to write in their comments and thoughts. By filling in the bubbles people engage in the project and transform “the corporate monologue into an open dialogue”. After time passes, the comments are photographed and posted on the project’s website. The Bubble Project has quickly gained popularity and independent efforts have sprung up in other parts of the world in countries such as Italy or Argentina.



John Fekner



John Fekner



John Fekner



John Fekner



John Fekner

[Image 124 -John Fekner] **John Fekner** (b. NYC), is a street and multimedia artist, who in the 1970s created hundreds of environmental and conceptual outdoor works consisting of stenciled words, symbols, dates and icons spray painted throughout New York. [Image 125 -John Fekner] Throughout his thirty-year career in the arts, Fekner has consistently addressed issues that involve concepts of perception and transformation, [Image 126 -John Fekner] as well as specific environmental and sociological concerns such as [Image 127 -John Fekner] urban decay, greed, chemical pollutants, mass media and [Image 128 -John Fekner] Native American Indians.



Whirl-Mart

Mess with the Routines

[Image 129 -Whirl-Mart] **Whirl-Mart** is a culture jamming ritual aimed at retail superstores. An event consists of a group of supposed shoppers who congregate at a large superstore (usually a Wal-Mart, Toys “R” Us, ASDA, or Sainsbury’s) and slowly push empty shopping carts silently through store aisles. Participants will not purchase anything and seek to form a lengthy chain of non-shoppers, continually weaving and “whirling” through a maze of store aisles for up to an hour at a time. Whirl-Marters seek to create a non-disruptive, peaceful demonstration of how ridiculous they see Western consumerism to be. Whirl-Mart activities have spread to many communities around the world including Canada, and the United Kingdom.



Improv Everywhere

[Image 130 -Improv Everywhere] **Improv Everywhere (often IE)** is a performance art group based in New York City, formed in 2001. Its slogan is “We Cause Scenes.” The group carries out non-threatening pranks, which they call “missions” in public places. The stated goal of these missions is to cause scenes of “chaos and joy.”



Improv Everywhere

[Image 131 -Improv Everywhere] For one of their scenes, sixteen IE agents enlisted the support of shop employees and created a spontaneous musical in a food court in a Los Angeles mall. Using wireless microphones and the mall’s PA system, both their voices and the music were amplified throughout the food court.

Other missions:

No Shirts - The group parodied the lifestyle brand Abercrombie & Fitch’s ads featuring bare-chested male models by having 111 “agents” enter the A&F store in New York City and remove their shirts. This drew mixed, but mostly amused, reactions from customers and staff, but store security quickly ejected the IE members. .

Best Buy - A group of 80 employee look-alikes dressed in blue polo shirts and khaki pants caused confusion at the two-story Best Buy on 23rd Street in New York.

Frozen Grand Central - 207 IE Agents freeze in time on cue in New York’s Grand Central Station. This mission became very popular, resulting in similar instances all around the world. [9] The YouTube video has over 12 million views.



The Cacophony Society

[Image 132 - The Cacophony Society] **The Cacophony Society** is “a randomly gathered network of free spirits united in the pursuit of experiences beyond the pale of mainstream society.” Cacophony events often involve costumes and pranks in public places and sometimes going into places that are generally off limits to the public. For 15 years, Cacophonists have staged “Santarchy” regaling Christmas shoppers with “improved” Christmas carols while dressed as Santa Claus, and later inviting strippers to sit on Santa’s lap (Santa Rampage), or planting Barbies and GI Joes with reversed vocal mechanisms in stores.



[Image 133 - Church of Stop Shopping] **The Church of Stop Shopping** is an activist performance group based in New York City, led by Reverend Billy, the stage name of Bill Talen. [Image 134 - Church of Stop Shopping] Using the form of a revival meeting, on sidewalks and in chain stores, Reverend Billy and his gospel choir exhort consumers to abandon the products of large corporations and mass media. Though it continues its street theatre activities, the Church also appears on stage and has toured internationally.



[Image 135 - Church of Stop Shopping] The group also preaches a broader message of economic justice, environmental protection, and anti-militarism, protesting sweatshops and the Iraq War. A revival meeting held in collaboration with the environmental group ForestEthic, at the shareholders meeting of Victoria's Secret, featured a giant lingerie model. The lingerie company publishes product catalogues at the rate of about a million copies a day - a monumental consumption of trees - and employs sweatshop labour.



The Church of Stop Shopping



Shopdropping



Shopdropping



Barbie Liberation Organization



Barbie Liberation Organization

Mess with the Products

[Image 136 - Shopdropping] Shopdropping, as coined and defined by **Ryan Watkins-Hughes** in 2004 involves covertly placing repackaged merchandise for sale in a store. The artist replaces the labels of canned goods with labels created using his own photographs and then shopdrops the items back onto grocery store shelves. The shopdropped works act as a series of art objects that people can purchase from the grocery store. Because the barcodes and price tags are left intact, purchasing the cans before they are discovered and removed is possible. In one instance the shopdropped cans were even restocked to a new aisle based on the barcode information.

[Image 137 - Shopdropping] Shopdropping strives to take back a share of the visual space we encounter on daily basis. Similar to the way street art stakes a claim to public space for self expression, the shopdropping project subverts commercial space for artistic use in an attempt to disrupt the mundane commercial process with a purely artistic moment.

PeopleProducts123 is another organization that uses shopdropping to reconnect consumers with labour by replacing product packaging with images and stories about the workers who make them.

[Image 138 a -BLO] In 1989 the **Barbie Liberation Organization** was formed. Taking advantage of similarities in the voice hardware of Teen Talk Barbie and the Talking Duke G.I. Joe doll, er, “action figure,” BLO members absconded with several hundred of each and performed a stereotype-change operation on the lot.

[Image 138 b -BLO] The BLO returned the altered dolls to the toy store shelves, who then resold them to children who had to invent scenarios for Barbies who yelled “Vengeance is mine!” and G.I. Joes who daydreamed “Let’s plan our dream wedding!” Cleverly placed “call your local TV news” stickers on the back ensured that the media would have genuine recipients to interview as soon as the news broke.

One BLO member counted up the many benefits of their program: “The store-keepers make money twice, we stimulate the economy — the consumer gets a better product — and our message gets heard.”



The Anti-Advertising Agency

Mess with the Powers

[Image 139 - The Anti-Advertising Agency] The Anti-Advertising Agency co-opts the tools and structures used by the advertising and public relations industries. The Agency's work ranges from traditional advertising formats - signs, posters, postcards, and stickers - to artistic formats - performance, installation, artists books - or some combination of the two.

Their work calls into question the purpose and effects of advertising in public space. The Agency also devises ways to engage the public in decisions about advertising. Their website IllegalBillboards.org is a watchdog for illegally placed advertising. [Image 140 - The Anti-Advertising Agency] Their campaign AddArt seeks to replace internet ads with art.



The Anti-Advertising Agency

[Image 141 - The Toronto Public Space Committee] The Toronto Public Space Committee is a volunteer group dedicated to celebrating Toronto's shared common spaces, and protecting them from political erosion, commercial influence and privatization. As advertising increasingly shows up on street furniture, garbage bins, transit shelters, public washrooms, information kiosks, one of the issues the Committee concerns itself with is the sale of naming rights to public spaces and services. The Billboard Battalion lobbies City councillors to vote against inappropriate advertising. Each Spring the Guerilla Gardeners gather in areas of the city to plant seeds and seedlings in neglected corners of public space.



The Toronto Public Space Committee



The Toronto Public Space Committee

M.E.A. 8 - Environment Aid
Lucy Orta, 2001



Lucy Orta

M.E.A. 102 - Nomad Hotel
Lucy Orta, 2003



Lucy Orta

Refuge Wear City Interventions 1993-1998
Lucy Orta, 1993-1998



Lucy Orta

18 x 7' Fine Wood, and 18' Brass (S.E.A. NY)
Lucy Orta, 2001



Lucy Orta

Emergency Art - Lucy Orta

[Image 142 - *Environment Aid*, Reconditioned military Red Cross ambulance, adhesive digital photograph, adhesive lettering - Lucy Orta, 2001] Lucy Orta's work tackles the imbalances and inequities of consumerism. This reconditioned military Red Cross ambulance was presented at the 2001 G8 Environment Summit.

[Image 143 - *Nomad Hotel* - Reconfigured military lorry, steel structure, 14 campbeds, 14 sleeping linens, armatures, diverse textiles, ladder, number plates, various surplus military objects - Lucy Orta] The *Nomad Hotel* is a reconfigured military lorry with 14 campbeds.

Orta's projects represent a kind of mobile emergency response to fundamental issues of human and natural survival - from food, water and lodging to community, culture, labour and citizen engagement.

[Image 144 - *Lucy Orta*] Orta will often involve marginalized individuals or groups in collective remedial projects such as producing *Refuge Wear* or *Survival Kits*.

[Image 145 - *Lucy Orta*] This prototype-dining trailer could be hitched to a truck and the table extended to host open-air lunches for the immigrant agricultural community of Napa Valley, California.

OrtaWater - 2011 Multiple Elements
Lucy + Jorge Orta, 2008-2007



Lucy and Jorge Orta



Lucy Orta

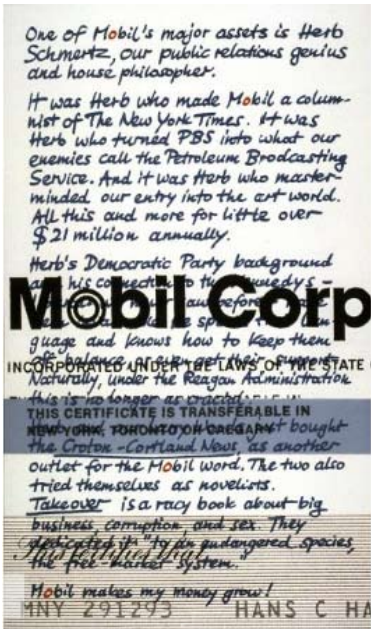


Lucy Orta

[Image 146 - Lucy and Jorge Orta] *OrtaWater* focuses on the theme of water shortage and the effects of private interests and multinational corporations have on the possibility of universal access to potable water. Using a workshop approach, Lucy and Jorge Orta involved students and artists in an open process of participation to rethink the cycle of purification, gathering and distribution of water. From everyday useful objects like containers and garments designed and adapted to transport the precious liquid, to more complex structures like boats supplied with filtering systems, the OrtaWater prototypes suggest new possibilities for a sustainable future.

[Image 147 - *All In One Basket, Les Halles, Conservation Unit* - Lucy Orta, 1997]

In French ‘Dans le Meme Panier’ refers to ‘putting your eggs in one basket, or putting a diversity of people or objects into the same melting pot. It also makes reference to dramatic changes in mass-agricultural farming versus the livelihoods of people struggling in local home-market economy. [Image 148 - *All In One Basket, Les Halles, Conservation Unit* - Lucy Orta, 1997] Following her dialogues with ‘Gleaners’, communities who salvage leftovers at the end of the weekly Parisian grocery markets, Orta commissioned a celebrity chef to transform 400kg of surplus fruit foraged from the streets into syrups, jams and preserves. Passers-by could taste the free delicacies and become engaged in an open discussion. Underlying the conviviality of this work, the subject matter expresses the deeper concerns of food surplus and the contradiction of tons of food that go to waste each week in the city of Paris and elsewhere.



Hans Haacke

Conclusion

The work of Lucy and Jorge Orta concludes this presentation as it represents a concrete and compassionate call to action against mindless consumerism and waste.

Art has gradually moved beyond the ironic detachment of the documentarists and deconstructionists. Many artists now work in multidisciplinary projects to contribute imaginative approaches to sustainable design or to envision new models of urban living. They may create platforms for free experimentation or for public reflection about a future beyond consumerism. The scale of artwork has also grown, necessitating dependence on major funding and structural support.

[Image 149 - Hans Haacke] Thus the art world is currently dominated by its institutions and systems of financial support. The German artist Hans Haacke already pinpointed the unholy alliances of art, politics and big business back in the 80s. What happens often in consumerism is that artistic critique no longer functions as a force of accountability but is co-opted by its conversion into a commodity. This remains a challenge to independent and critically-minded artists everywhere, especially since their audience tends to be wealthy, educated collectors and intellectuals. It falls to the public galleries and museums to create greater awareness of the problems of consumerism and the avenues to a sustainable society.

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