

Consumption Junction

*I wanted to speak
the beautiful language
of my century.*

Guy Debord
Mémoires (1959)

Consumption Junction

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Inside front cover: *Santiago Mostyn, The Miss Rockaway Armada, 2006, c-print*

CONSUMPTION JUNCTION 9

by James Voorhies

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GREENCOLUMBUS



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There is currently an extraordinary surge of interest in the state of the environment, intertwining green consciousness and terminology with every aspect of modern life. Global and personal issues—transportation, technology, water, paper, electricity, clothing, food, housing, and

Consumption Junction

James Voorhies

sanitation—are carefully scrutinized by us, by our neighbors, and by governments and activists. With this rising interest in preserving the environment, a multinational corporate response has crept into the consumer mindscape to offset—or assuage—anxieties over our global impacts. These companies, combined with an increasing number of green organizations, labels, and certifications have contributed to ecologically conscious ways of living and pushed the environment to a public forefront. A new lexicon of terms like eco-friendly, prefab, eco-chic, cage-free, hormone-free, bio-diesel, carbon offsets, bio-plastics, renewable energy technologies, sustainable design, natural, and organic challenge consumers. They work to define these references and determine which products and services are

genuine and which are simply marketing strategies implying environmentally conscious consumption. It is a 21st-century oxymoron—environmentally conscious consumption—since buying, building, driving, eating, washing, drinking, using, and tossing away anything has detectable repercussions on the environment.

Indeed, since the green cause has dominated the cultural landscape, it has produced a modern, almost paralyzing predicament of contemplating how to live life with the least amount of harm to the environment. The onslaught of information, products, and resources inform but also confuse even knowledgeable consumers as they sift through various possible ecological impacts triggered by common purchases and habits. cursory research reveals how significant damage to the environment can be found in what we assume are harmless routine acts and mundane objects. Take, for instance, carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere from burning coal for electricity to check email; toxic chemicals that seep into groundwater from fertilizers used for growing the cotton in our shirts and underwear; and pollutants associated with packaging and freighting California strawberries all the way to our breakfast table—not to mention coffee from South America. To make it more staggering, consider plastic water bottles that will *never* bio-degrade, wasteful incandescent lights we flip on at night (fluorescents come with their own set of problems from mercury released into groundwater due to improper disposal), and the extraordinary number of

How do you
live an effective,
environmentally
sound life?

trees used to produce newspapers we read each morning. In fact, an entire Sunday edition of *The New York Times* takes about 63,000 trees to produce.¹ And the Toyota Prius may use less gasoline and produce less emissions compared to other cars, but fifty percent of any automobile's lifetime carbon footprint is created simply during its manufacture.

So when you can't check your email, put on a shirt, eat fruit, drink coffee, grab a bottle of water, turn on a light, read the paper, or even purchase an earth-friendly Toyota without causing some kind of harm to the planet, how do you live an effective, environmentally sound life? This unprecedented consideration of our effect on global ecologies, added to the ongoing parade of new eco-friendly products and materials creates a conundrum that puts conscious consumers in frustrating predicaments and brings novice environmental do-gooders to their knees. I am reminded of Jonathan Franzen's essay "My Bird Problem" in *The New Yorker*. He describes this very dilemma, confronted with analyzing the impact on planet Earth through infinite cause-effect scenarios:

To worry about the Kleenexes and paper towels I was wasting and the water I was letting run while I shaved and the sections of the *Sunday Times* I was throwing away unread and the pollutants I was helping to fill the sky with every time I took an airplane came naturally to me. Every time I washed out a peanut-butter jar, I tried to calculate whether less petroleum might be used in manufacturing a new jar than in

heating the dishwasher and transporting the old jar to a recycling center.²

The common thread in these situations—Franzen’s peanut-butter jar, the strawberries, the cotton shirt, water bottle, and Prius—is the insatiable consumer appetite that identifies contemporary society. We’re too rich. Egregious waste, over-indulgence, and an everything-is-disposable mentality are part of a constant cycle of over-consumption. That said, today’s environmental activism isn’t expressed through the marches, happenings or events that defined 1960s unrest. Our activism is communicated in the things we buy and how we live. We essentially express our support for a better environment by reinventing excess through a collective of mass consumption of organically certified and socially accepted green products, actions, and services meant to ease our conscience. Activism through consumerism becomes the uncomfortable juncture and unfortunate paradox in which we now find ourselves. We need to spend less, buy less, eat less, drive less, waste less, dispose less, and think more.

Consumption Junction seeks to make us think more about these issues and other topics related to the general impact humans make on the earth. It is a nudge toward discussions—or at the very least poignant reminders—about unkindly or merely thoughtless acts against our environment. It certainly doesn’t seek to provide concrete solutions to these perplexing situations, but the artists, designers, performers, writers, and thinkers in this

Activism through consumerism becomes the uncomfortable juncture and unfortunate paradox in which we now find ourselves.

exhibition are sensitive to concerns of this worldwide environmental movement and ecological crisis. They share a conceptual language that addresses a range of topics from excessive spending, pollution, and urban infrastructure to alternative transportation, suburban sprawl, and recycling. More importantly, they use that language to make us contemplate these issues a little more deeply. Frequently blurring lines between art and civic action, participants from a wide geographic range express concern about current conditions of consumerist activity and address problems of mass consumption, encouraging positive change through education and action. Some of them demonstrate that grassroots efforts can indeed be viable solutions for tackling global concerns, while others use innovative problem solving to raise awareness about consumer waste, bicycling, and the built environment to prove that individual and community initiatives are invaluable. In this exhibition, conscious consumerism pushes aside collective consumption through insightful cultural criticisms and whimsical, imaginative alternatives set somewhere between reality and fiction.

This heightened level of collective consumerism first took hold during the Cold War as United States and European governments encouraged anti-communist models in a new era of the independent consumer. Early criticism about a growing mass consumerism by the French writer, filmmaker, and political agitator Guy Debord is the historical benchmark from which this exhibition takes its cue and its



Guy Debord
The Society of the Spectacle, 1973
stills

point of departure. In 1957 Debord founded the collective Situationist International in Paris. He and the Situationists believed that consumerism was inextricably linked to a declining culture marked by commercialism and materialism and an insatiable appetite for image stimulation. His 1967 book *The Society of the Spectacle* is a rant against a contemporary society fueled by new technologies, media, war, advertising, and governments. According to Debord, “The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.”³

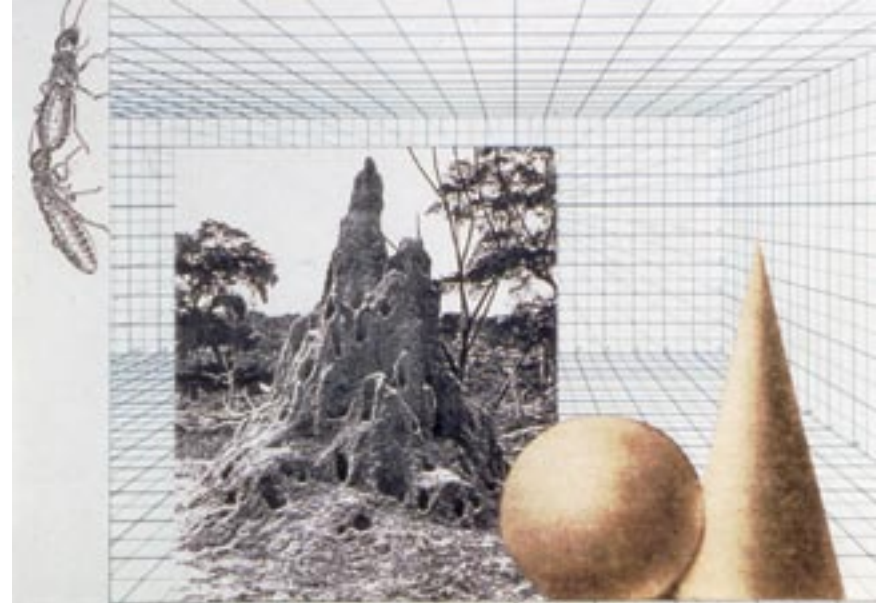
This statement and others from Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle* are visually presented in his 1973 film of the same title. Made entirely of found footage with images Debord extracted from their original contexts, the film emphasizes the absurdity inherent in acts of conspicuous consumption. Charged with theoretical criticism on the degradation of society, his essay and film are retaliations against mass consumerism and image culture. In the film we hear Debord rapidly recite theses from his book and quotations from Marx, Machiavelli, Tocqueville, Chateaubriand, and Shakespeare (to cite just a few) over rapid-fire clips of factory workers, submarines, political and news footage, missiles launching from aircraft carriers, aerial photographs of bombs falling to the earth, missions into space, nude women, scenes of leisure and vacation, construction of massive concrete buildings, cities on fire, minorities in turmoil, models fixing their hair, luxury automobiles coming off assembly lines, and exchanges on the stock

market trading floor. Short sequences from classic films such as *Battleship Potemkin*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *Rio Grande*, and *Confidential Report* are also used, adding to the chaotic overdose of culture image. In one clip of fashion models parading in front of a camera Debord tells us:

Understood in its totality, the spectacle is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production. It is not something added to the real world—not a decorative element, so to speak. On the contrary, it is the very heart of society’s real unreality. In all its specific manifestations—news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment—the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing model of social life.⁴

Today the power and the influence that the media and commercial industries wield over our consuming habits have come to form the standard spectacle of society. Advertising and television seduce the public by modeling ideals of what our lives should be and look like, determining our notions of art, fashion, design, and culture. Recent generations were raised on and hypnotized by television, watching *Sesame Street*, *The Price is Right*, evening sitcoms, *Dallas*, *Love Boat*, MTV, and after-school specials. *Schoolhouse Rock* paved the way for education-cum-entertainment with its catchy programming like *Conjunction Junction*. Those jingles continue to resonate with us today. Debord’s statements of 1973 are even more relevant in our world of easy access information

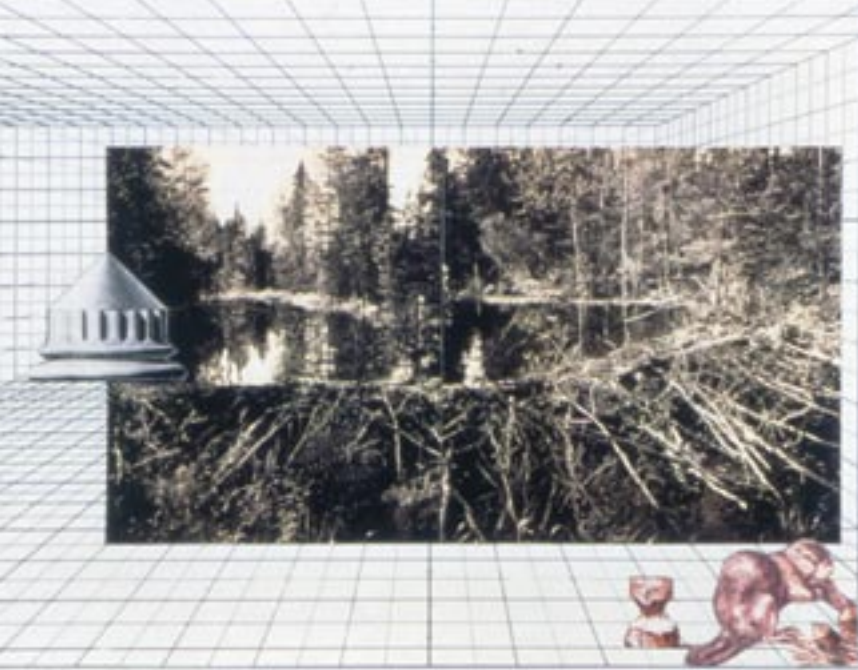
Schoolhouse Rock paved the way for education-cum-entertainment with its catchy programming like *Conjunction Junction*.



and constant streams of new entertainment and communication technologies. YouTube, MySpace and the iPhone add to television’s spectacular imagery to create a sense of “unreality” and an imaginary “model of social life,” propelling this cycle of mass consumption to new heights.

A different kind of model of life is the subject of Komar & Melamid’s plan for collaboration with the animal kingdom. The mysterious, genetic-based building practices of termites and beavers are central to the Russian duo’s collages *Architectural Fantasies* (1998). This project proposed collaboration between the artists and beavers and termites to create outdoor installations that sought...

...a symbolic dialogue between the expressive organic forms of beaver dams and termite towers and the elemental geometric forms discovered by ancient cultures, particularly the Egyptians and ancient



Greeks. Throughout the history, artists and thinkers from Plato and Pythagoras to Goethe and to Cézanne have postulated the existence of certain ideal geometric forms underlying the apparent chaos of the visual world. We believe these essential forms also pattern the remarkable organic creations of animal architects. This approach to art will become a symbol of the ecological co-existence of different forms of life, different minds, and different creativities.⁵

On one hand, this project examines building practices naturally inherent in both humans and animals and a reliance on basic geometric forms for their housing. On the other hand, it emphasizes the ecological efficiency of beavers and termites in their use of local materials as well as their ability to integrate a built environment

into the natural landscape. Beyond the enormous size of termite towers in relation to the tiny insects, the tower, or termitary, is a fascinating feat of engineering and a model of sustainable design. Termites use local soil to create thick walls that keep in moisture and block out heat while intricate systems of ducts circulate fresh air that enters through little ventilation holes on the surface of the structure. Their intake and outtake systems rely completely on temperature and gravity. Digging as far as 125 feet into the earth termites find underground sources of water to cool the tower. While termites have undeniably mastered sustainable design, beavers build valuable ecological structures that reduce erosion, increase biodiversity, and help develop new wetlands. The dams keep springs, rivers, lakes and wildlife in balance.

Komar & Melamid's "animal architects" represent ideal ecological and aesthetic intersections of the built and natural worlds. The creative forces that lie beneath their genetic make-up encourage a critical review of our own approach to building with local materials and particular attention to the nature around us. Reconsidering costly imported materials and designing architecture more seamlessly integrated into nature reduce disorienting tensions of the modern architectural experience. The beavers and termites have it figured out.

Swirling disorientation defines environments in works by Nicola López, which are inspired by the visual assaults and frictional elements of contemporary society with which we attempt to rec-



oncile. She uses prints, drawings, mixed media, and installations to examine haphazard approaches that humans use to create incongruous infrastructures. These works portray chaotic and unstable tangles of pipes, televisions, wires, freeways, airplanes, and communication devices to

Nicola López
Monument II, 2004, from the series *Monuments*
Monument IV, 2004, from the series *Monuments*
 intaglio prints

conjure a sense of fragility, an edge of the world on which we precariously teeter, or one that has already fallen. Her prints from the series *Monuments* (2004) are post-apocalyptic scenes, suggestive of very recent collapse—smoking and reeking of smoldering electrical parts. Recalling Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville* (1965) when a city is controlled by a super-computer, these scenes are devoid of physical human and natural presence, inhabited by anthropomorphic stacks of televisions, satellite dishes, freeways, and communication wires; the only things that appear to still work, or be alive, as dust settles and another kind of civilization develops under another set of conditions.

Nicola López
White Noise, 2006
 ink, graphite on paper



While some of her prints are made using woodblock and intaglio techniques, processes synonymous with invisible networks of buried infrastructure beneath the earth's surface, López's mixed media collages are made with Mylar, paper, pigment, and graphite and convey fantastic architectonic perspectives, emphasizing manufactured environments and human interference. This kind of illusory perspective in *White Noise* (2006), for example, thrusts the image into the realm of the spectator, forcing us to confront a curious, almost three-dimensional space. An abrupt cut-off in communication is inferred by the title and imagery while an austere background suggests a sense of isolation and dislocation. All communications have been disconnected and gadgets on which we have come to rely do not serve us here. Debord's spectacle has exploded (or imploded) and reached its demise in López's works, encouraging us to evaluate our excessive accumulation of materials, reliance on technology, and ill-considered urban and suburban planning. Under these layers there is a landscape that an animal kingdom did once inhabit, a hidden history of what once was. *White Noise* is a kind of Wellsian fait accompli.

Amy Chan considers the ecological history in regions of the United States currently being engulfed by the confluence of suburban sprawl, consumerism, and the environment. Paintings in the series *New Ecosystems* call to mind a sort of warped futuristic tour of an Audubon guide. Chan scours field guides, atlases, and encyclopedias for sources of wildlife

Paintings in the series *New Ecosystems* call to mind a sort of warped futuristic tour of an Audubon guide.



and topography that are (or once were) iconic identifiers of particular areas of the United States. The birds, desert iguanas, conifers, streams, and Native American burial mounds featured in these paintings are uncomfortably juxtaposed with looming man-made intrusions, Wal-Marts, mega-malls, and housing developments. In *The Sonoran Desert* (2006) we catch a glimpse of a red-tailed hawk, an armadillo, a yucca plant, and an owl living alongside a new McMansion, monolithic, built of imported materials, with a pitched roof (an architectural style for cold weather regions), windows closed, airtight, air conditioner running, on a patch of bright green grass in the harsh conditions of the desert. This familiar but shocking juxtaposition defines suburban desert developments and reminds us of the lack of foresight and negligence applied to

Amy Chan
The Sonoran Desert, 2006, from the series *New Ecosystems*
gouache on panel



planning warm weather communities.

Today, as regions in the United States face serious water shortages and drought, irresponsible water usage continues. For example, homeowner associations in Southern Florida are particularly stubborn in their denial of a water shortage crisis, forcing their residents to maintain a lawn of a specific shade of green grass. If homeowners do not keep their grass watered and green to code they receive disparaging letters and fines from the association.⁶ As Chan's practice emphasizes, humans are more stubborn than animals in their unwillingness to adapt to their environment and disregard for former and current occupants of such regions.

Warnings about the consequences of poor regional planning have long been voiced by theorists, architects, filmmakers and critics like Walter Benjamin,

Jean Baudrillard, Frank Lloyd Wright, Jean-Luc Godard, and Lewis Mumford. Debord, in fact, calls to mind Mumford in the book *The Society of the Spectacle*:

We already live in the era of the self-destruction of the urban environment. The explosion of cities into the countryside, covering it with what Mumford calls "formless masses" of urban debris, is presided over in unmediated fashion by the requirements of consumption. The dictatorship of the automobile, the pilot product of the first stage of commodity abundance, has left its mark on the landscape in the dominance of freeways that bypass the old urban centers and promote an ever greater dispersal. Meanwhile, instants of incomplete reorganization of the urban fabric briefly crystallize around the "distribution factories"—giant shopping centers created *ex nihilo* and surrounded by acres of parking space; but even these temples of frenetic consumption are subject to the irresistible centrifugal trend, and when, as partial reconstructions of the city, they in turn become overtaxed secondary centers, they are likewise cast aside. The technical organization of consumption is thus merely the herald of that general process of dissolution which brings the city to the point where *it consumes itself*.⁷

While Chan's examinations of the ecological pitfalls of suburban malls and developments coincide with concerns over rapid and ill-planned urban growth raised by Debord, Mumford and Godard,

Dan Graham brings one of these malls to telling life in the eight-minute video *Death by Chocolate: West Edmonton Shopping Mall, 1986–2005* (2005). Recorded in one of Canada's largest shopping malls, Graham's deadpan footage of mass consumerism and mall culture in action is a bleak reminder of exactly what happens in these temples of commerce. His use of video allows for an uncensored, raw portrayal of reality and his choice to display it on a television monitor embeds the imagery within an apparatus closely aligned with a capitalist vehicle of advertising. The installation as a whole situates the mall experience within this broader context of consumerism controlled by far-reaching corporate and media interests.

At once humorous and insightful, the video is an entertaining theater of bacchanalia as consumers stuff themselves full of the good life. Although familiar to all of us, these scenes of mall culture, extracted from context and put immediately before us, are particularly absurd and embarrassing. Even the title, *Death by Chocolate*, although an actual reference to a chocolate retailer in West Edmonton, implies over-consumption and consequential demise as shopping becomes the number one cultural pastime.

The television monitor is an important component that influences our reception of Graham's footage and represents the artist's ongoing interest in the reflective quality of glass. The screen plays a dual function here of reflection and superimposition of the viewer's body and gaze, uniting both audience and image by

At once humorous and insightful, the video is an entertaining theater of bacchanalia as consumers stuff themselves full of the good life.



Dan Graham
Death by Chocolate: West Edmonton Shopping Mall, (1986–2005), 2005
video stills

erasing distinctions between self and commodity. In commenting on the corporate impetus behind use of large windows in retail shops, Graham writes “The glass used for the showcase, displaying products, isolates the consumer from the product at the same time as it superimposes the mirror-reflection of his own image onto the goods displayed. This alienation, paradoxically, helps arouse the desire to possess the commodity.”⁸ Although a statement originally associated with aspects of shop windows and displays, the concept is applicable to an analysis of *Death by Chocolate* as Graham employs advertising’s own strategies in a form of the consumer’s critical self-reflection and symbiotic relationship produced by fusing monitor, audience and video image. Graham leaves it up to us to contemplate this and decide if what we see inside the television monitor along with our reflection is wonderfully alluring or makes us cringe. The “spectacle of society” has never felt so strong as it does in this work as he reveals that collective mass consumerism introduced in the 1950s is alive and well today in a theme park culture that congregates in air-conditioned, artificially lighted, and unnatural environments to spin away time.

Ester Partegàs uses drawing, photography, sculpture, projections, and installations in a practice that examines societal and economical issues of excessive consumption. Her works in the series *We the People* forego direct references to specific commodities for wider considerations of consumers’ attitudes and behaviors. Populated with the same kind of people



who acquire more by unconscious habit than necessity featured in Graham’s *Death by Chocolate*, Partegàs extends the notion of shopping as entertainment out of the mall and into the city streets. These large-scale prints aggrandize routine, quotidian acts of schlepping along bags of merchandise. Her figures ambulate catatonically, without direction, heads and shoulders obscured by bright sprays of color as if entangled in masses of nebula. On the sidewalks lie garbage bags with all the unwanted material and packaging collected during these modern day hunter-gatherer sessions. While the series title *We the People* recalls the very first words of the United States Constitution that express a collective rallying cry for social and economic stability, her subtitles such as *Experience Life* (2007)

Ester Partegàs
Migraines, 2007, from the series *We the People*
inkjet ultrachrome archival print



and *Migraines* (2007) comment on connections between commerce, materialism, and human satisfaction.

Experience Life features shoppers with bags bearing the Macy's logo, creating an army of consumers marching forward in step, united under the banner of retail shopping. In this work and others from the series, a white patch on which phrases are prominently placed across the surface resembles a kind of price tag. But, the cost is cultural rather than monetary, wryly commenting on the deterioration of those early constitutional ideologies and today's rather volatile bedfellows of economy, credit card debt, and personal lives. The full titles then suggest America's substantial role as a progenitor and facilitator of collective consumerism,

The increasing homogenization that defines consumer practice looms large in these works, everyone buying the same things from the same stores.

which has spread to broader global habits that equate happiness, love, and security with products and constant spending. The increasing homogenization that defines consumer practice looms large in these works, everyone buying the same things from the same stores. Partegàs questions if we experience life in all its glory through emotional connections to materialism and these quests for and ultimate possession of commodities we love and need so much.

While Partegàs's prints are populated with headless zombie consumers, Scott Massey's photographs from the ongoing series *Crepuscule* are without actual representations of people; however, human interventions of the natural landscape are omnipresent. *Crepuscule*, meaning dusk or twilight, or the period just before decline or destruction, describes the subject of Massey's works. The photographs were taken in Southwestern British Columbia at night using only ambient light to document fringes of development. These points at which artificial lights of suburban parking lots and movie theaters extend into diminishing parts of the rural landscape emphasize how difficult it is to escape a man-made world. The title of each work, such as *144th Street at 68B Avenue* (2006) and *200th Street at 88th Avenue (Colossus Cinemas)* (2006), designates the exact location documented. As street numbers reach into the hundreds we infer there is a network of streets that radiate from an original city center, suggestive of massive urban sprawl. *144th Street at 68B Avenue* documents the early stages of a subdivision as trees are removed, cement curbs poured,



and water and electric lines buried. In this photograph human intrusion even goes beyond the landscape and into the sky as airplane exhausts slowly dissolve above, creating an “x” that symbolically stakes claim to that part of the sky.

In addition to considering the reach of artificial light into the natural landscape, the rate of suburban development that occurs in rather short intervals of time is also central to these photographs. The transference of time, connecting the present, past and future, figures prominently in the installation of the *Crepuscule* works. Although unable to remove exhibition of the works from an institutional



or gallery context, Massey has purposely dispensed with all framing devices by directly attaching the photographs to the gallery wall. An absence of frames combined with the large-scale format (40 x 40 inches) of the photographs allows a more immediate experience of the images. In this sense, the works serve as portals that connect present and past as the recently taken images document quickly vanishing landscapes. Or as Massey states, “with the furious pace of new housing development, the time gap is witnessed over the span of a few years and sometimes even months, instead of centuries. As such, it is possible to revisit the sites of the *Crepuscule*

images and witness the incredible change over such a short period of time today. It is for this reason that the absence of framing devices is important.” Just as Eugène Atget rushed to document city streets of nineteenth-century Paris spared by Baron Haussmann’s demolitions, in a different century and a different world, another photographer sensitively documents disappearing landscapes as natural worlds are plowed under by human interventions.

In 2005, working much further south than Scott Massey in Canada on the outskirts of Monterrey, Mexico, the international collective Learning Group established an ongoing program called *[Collecting System]*. Learning Group is four geographically far-flung members—Brett Bloom of the United States, Julio Castro of Mexico, Rikke Luther of Denmark, and Cecilia Wendt of Sweden, all members of other artist collectives. As such, their vast contacts and experiences bring together a wide range of interests and resources to investigate issues related to social conditions, public and private space, the environment, and urban networks. Their intent is to create dialogues about relevant topics in places in which they find to work.

The Monterrey project is one of three *[Collecting System]* projects organized to educate and to stimulate discourse about how enormous quantities of material are produced and discarded each year. (Moriya, Japan [2004], Chicago [2005], and Monterrey are documented in *[Learning Book #001]*.) In Monterrey, they also addressed issues related to public and private use of land. For *[Collecting*

While some bottles were turned into plastic granulate for building materials, others became actual building blocks.



System] participants gathered PET plastic bottles, containers considered valueless by local recycling authorities. They sorted the bottles; calculated technical data on size, shape, and strength; and conducted a series of workshops and experiments to determine the best way to turn these



unused bottles into construction material for a dwelling. While some bottles were turned into plastic granulate for building materials, others became actual building blocks, strategically wired together and stacked on top of one another to become primary support matter for interiors of

Learning Group
[Collecting System] in Monterrey, Mexico, 2005
photo documentation from [Learning Book #001]

walls eventually covered with a veneer of concrete.

In Monterrey public land is available for constructing dwellings, but the state increasingly hires private companies to build homes on common land which allows these companies and the state to determine the aesthetic look of housing in an area. If a new dwelling doesn't conform to surrounding structures it can be demolished. Because [Collected Material Dwelling #002] was built without permission on public land it was covered with a thin veneer of concrete to help it blend in with surrounding dwellings and prevent it from being torn down in a peripheral zone undergoing new building regulations. This building cost one-tenth of a standard concrete structure and provides greater versatility, having six sides that allow for subsequent expansion. [Learning Poster #003] was posted around the area to provide instructions on how to make cost-effective and long-term structures using this approach.

Taking the concept of building with local materials to new levels, [Collecting Systems] simultaneously capitalizes on unused objects for reuse in daily local life and emphasizes creative solutions for the piles of manufactured waste that end up in local landfills. In addition to confronting issues of recycling, in Monterrey the project took on problems related to labor and property rights, particularly relevant as that region faces consequences of urban planning networks rooted in private interests.

Across the Atlantic, Réanim products developed by Parisian-based col-



The fluorescent green objects are made of metal, resin, or translucent plastic and act as bandages for damaged furniture.

5.5 Designers
Réanim Crutch, 2004
mixed media

lective 5.5 Designers also seek to recycle and bring new life, in this case, to broken or discarded furniture. The fluorescent green objects are made of metal, resin, or translucent plastic and act as bandages for damaged furniture. The distinctive shade of green not only brings to mind the subject of environmentalism, but also the green of pharmacy signs throughout France. *Réanim* are for mending and include adjustable metal crutches for tables or chairs, plastic graft rings to connect a motley of objects, and elastic bands patched on seating for broken chairs or stitched across doorless cabinets. These devices are accompanied by installation instructions to help users tackle the task at hand. The project represents an intersection of ingenuity and creativity that reduces costs of replacing broken furniture, but also

revitalizes the concept of longevity in a society that accepts shoddy construction and disposable materials.

Established in 2003, 5.5 Designers is made up of Vincent Baranger, Jean-Sébastien Blanc, Anthony Lebossé, and Claire Renard. Recent graduates from ENSAM, a design and engineering university in Paris, their practice makes innovative designs available at affordable costs.

5.5 Designers
Réanim installation, 2005
Galerie Gilles Peyroulet & Cie, Paris





At international furniture fairs, fundraisers, and museums from New York and Montreal to Paris and Milan, their presentation of *Réanim* extended beyond just inanimate displays of furniture. At these events, the 5.5ers first trolled thrift stores and sidewalks for furniture in distress or poor health. Returning with a collection of patient-objects, the foursome donned white lab coats and got to work as aesthetic surgeons measuring, drilling, cutting, and suturing forlorn cabinets, tables, and chairs, resuscitating the once deemed unusable detritus.

5.5 Designers
Réanim hospital performance, 2005
 Galerie Gilles Peyroulet & Cie, Paris

Adding a sense of humor to the sometimes hyper-serious atmosphere at places like international design fairs and spotlighting value in otherwise valueless objects, 5.5 Designers and *Réanim* comfortably meld high design with the utilitarian.

Tim Rietenbach takes a thought-provoking and somewhat humorous look at the fusion of commerce, holidays, and religion. *Praying Hands* (2007) is a fifteen-foot site-specific installation of plastic holiday lawn luminaries connected and stacked to form the shape of a set of praying hands. From Old Master depictions, kitschy bric-a-brac, and bronze bookends to tattoos, jewelry, and t-shirts, the image of hands clasped together in prayer has become an iconic representation of worship, devotion, and praise. These hands have been drawn, stamped, carved, cut, sculpted, painted, cast, woven, and airbrushed in

Tim Rietenbach
Praying Hands, 2007
 research documentation



the marketing machine of popular culture, comparable to numerous incarnations of Che Guevara, yellow ribbon bows, Mao Tse-Tung, camouflage, and the Christmas tree. Rietenbach's practice is occupied by this decrease in value through overexposure and the means with which familiarity obscures origins and shrouds meanings; specifically the ways in which the human condition is consumed and manipulated by authority and death.

Praying Hands is a vast network of illuminated plastic figures—Jesus, Joseph, Mary, Santa Claus, and other nativity and holiday imagery in various shapes and sizes, painted black—twisted and tangled to form a set of bony hands clasped together. The dark skeletal form of the hands suggests a futility in the act of worship. The enormous scale and spectacular image of these illuminated hands, a ubiquitous symbol of Christian faith, is a critique on the close ties between religion and consumerism. Rietenbach's installation is a reminder of the power religion wields in our economy as these tacky luminaries appear like clockwork in retail shops, business windows, and on suburban lawns each November through December, signaling an onslaught of holiday shopping. Dispensing with philanthropic activities, praying as an act of devotion has been replaced here by desires and hopes for material gain, instead of religious salvation. Religion is no longer immune to consumer excess but rather contributes to and fuels it at the expense of losing its own value in a voracious circle of self-consumption.



Tim Rietenbach
Praying Hands, 2007 (components)
mixed-media, site-specific installation

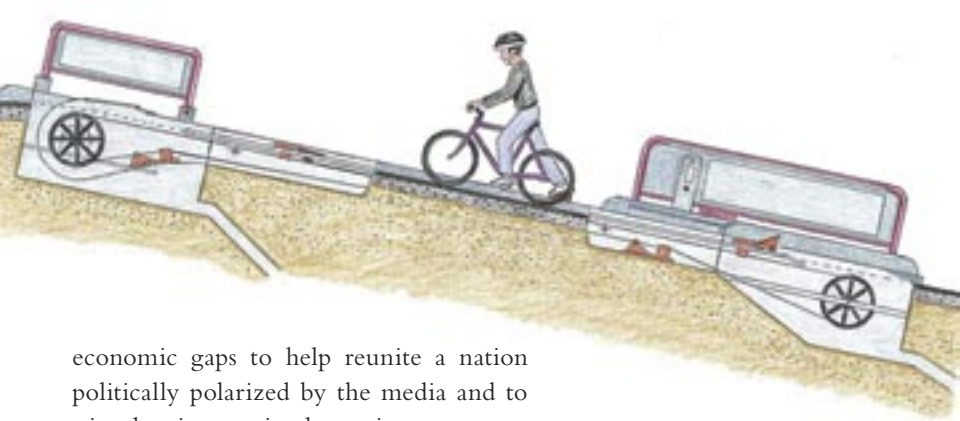
The Miss Rockaway Armada is

a collective of approximately twenty-five artists, performers, musicians, writers, and activists whose mission is centered on an annual trip down the Mississippi River on a large flotilla constructed out of recycled materials. Based mostly in New York, but with members living in Seattle, San Francisco, Minneapolis, and Boston, Miss Rockaway (the name is based on a 1920s beauty pageant at Coney Island) seeks to raise awareness about social and environmental issues, all while having fun. In their inaugural 2006 trip, the collective built a boat from discarded wood, two Volkswagen Rabbit motors converted to bio-diesel, salvaged metal, foam, screws, and a whole lot of found objects. The fleet of three plywood rafts and four small barrel boats was eighty feet long when connected. It traveled from Minneapolis to St. Louis taking along all the necessities, including a stage for performances, a kitchen, sleeping quarters, and a Ferris wheel operated with bicycle gears. Powered by energy sources, such as bio-fuel, solar, wind, and human muscle, the project combined social intervention with activism, talent, spontaneity, and ingenuity to raise awareness about alternative energy sources and social divides.

During this trip, the crew stopped in small river towns like Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin and Winona, Minnesota to host musical and theatrical performances. Interacting with local folks through these events and organizing mini how-to workshops such as screenprinting and music classes, the collective transcends socio-

The fleet of three plywood rafts and four small barrel boats was eighty feet long when connected.





economic gaps to help reunite a nation politically polarized by the media and to stimulate interest in alternative energy.

While members of Miss Rockaway Armada use alternative energy sources in their ongoing Midwest adventures, Design Management AS thinks of creative solutions to increase the use of alternative transportation in Trondheim and elsewhere in the world. Trondheim is the third largest city in Norway with a high population of students, most of them bicyclists. In response to a troublesome hill that prevented easy commuting between the center of town and outlying residential areas, Design Management built Trampe in 1993. Invented by Jarle Wanvik, Trampe is the world's first bicycle lift. It uses ski-lift technology that includes a surface rail and underground cable. Bicyclists start at a station at the base of the steep hill Brubakken. They place their right foot, leg stretched backward, onto a soft-start plate. Balancing their left foot on either one of the bicycle pedals, they transfer their weight to the right foot on the plate. When ready they insert a key card and push the start button. Comparable to operating a ski-lift, bicyclists are slowly, steadily, and safely guided up to the top of Brubakken. Trampe has increased bicycling by more than 40% and assisted over



220,000 cyclists since its installation.

With its impressive network of bicycle routes, signage, and infrastructure, Trondheim uses the kind of smart—and considerate—planning that could be incorporated more frequently in urban environments. Trampe is a significant component of this infrastructure and represents how solutions to promote bicycling can be figured out on a local level. But, all cities don't need a Trampe to do this. Bicycling as a reliable and safe form of alternative transportation can be supported through city-designated bicycle lanes and “Share the Road” signs that ultimately provide safer commutes and encourage more cycling. American cities please take note.

As we become increasingly aware of the dire cultural and ecological predicaments caused by acts of over-consumption, Guy Debord's words in *The Society of the Spectacle* seem all the more urgent at this moment in time marked by globalization, war, political unrest, and rapid climate change. Mass consumerism has seeped securely into a collective practice leaving obvious environmental, social, and cultural traces. Art has the power to engage viewers, influence public opinion, and inspire action. Participants in *Consumption Junction* exercise all of it and, here adapting a quote by Debord, choose to use it to speak the beautiful language of this century at a critical point where excessive consumption and the environment meet.⁹

ENDNOTES

1 Alex Shoumatoff, “An Eco-System of One's Own,” *Vanity Fair* (May 2007).

2 Jonathan Franzen, “My Bird Problem,” *The New Yorker* (August 8, 2005).

3 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 12 and quoted in film.

4 Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 13 and quoted in film.

5 Komar & Melamid quoted online at *Russian Utopia: A Depository* (<http://www.utopia.ru/english/item.phtml?id=312&type=graphics&sortby=view&start=0>).

6 “Struggling Over Water. Florida Faces Vanishing Water Supply.” *National Public Radio, Morning Edition*, June 15, 2007. (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=11097869>).

7 Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 123. Debord quotes from Lewis Mumford's *The City in History. Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961).

8 Dan Graham, *Dan Graham: Video-Architecture-Television: Writings on Video and Video Works 1970–1978*, ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 1979), 72.

9 This is the last line in Debord's collaged *Mémoires* (1959). He clipped it from *La Solitude* in *Le Spleen de Paris* by Charles Baudelaire. See Tom McDonough, “*The Beautiful Language of My Century*.” *Reinventing the Language of Contestation in Postwar France, 1945–1968*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007).

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Amy Chan

New Ecosystems, 2006
The Middle West with Burial Grounds
Coastal Redwoods
Tallgrass Prairie
The Utah Desert
The Sonoran Desert
Eastern Coniferous Forest
gouache on panel
20 x 26 inches each
Courtesy of the artist and Bernard Toale Gallery, Boston

Ohio Flood, 2007
acrylic on wall
site-specific installation
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Guy Debord

The Society of the Spectacle, 1973
downloaded from UbuWeb and transferred to DVD
88 minutes

Design Management AS, Trondheim, Norway

The Bicycle Lift Trampe, built 1993
photo documentation and video
Courtesy of the designer

Dan Graham

Death by Chocolate: West Edmonton Shopping Mall, (1986–2005), 2005
video
8 minutes, color, sound
Courtesy of Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

Komar & Melamid

Architectural Fantasies, 1998, from the series *Collaborations with Animals*
four computer print collages
11 x 17 inches each
Courtesy of the former Komar & Melamid Art Studio Archive

Learning Group

[Collecting System] in Monterrey, Mexico, 2005
documentation of *[Learning Book #001]* and *[Learning Poster #003]*
Courtesy of the artists

Nicola López

Monuments, 2004
Monument I
Monument II
Monument III
Monument IV
intaglio print
14 1/2 x 12 inches each
Courtesy of Caren Golden Fine Art, New York

Strange Skies, 2005
woodblock and silkscreen on paper and Mylar
84 x 96 inches
Collection of Nancy and Stanley Singer

The Sky Is Falling, 2006
mixed media on paper
30 x 30 inches
Collection of Nancy and Stanley Singer

White Noise, 2006
ink, graphite on paper
44 1/2 x 44 1/2 inches
Courtesy of Caren Golden Fine Art, New York

Scott Massey

Crepuscule, 2006–ongoing
72nd Avenue at 144A Street
144th Street at 68B Avenue
80th Avenue at 176th Street (Burnaby Lake Nursery)
144A Street at 70A Avenue
93B Avenue at 165th Street
200th Street at 88th Avenue (Colossus Cinemas)
FujiFlex print with UV lamination
40 x 40 inches each
Courtesy of the artist

The Miss Rockaway Armada

slide installation and sculpture
photographs by Santiago Mostyn
Courtesy of the artists

Ester Partegàs

We the People, 2006–ongoing
Experience Life, 2007
Was It Love, 2007
Migraines, 2007
Millions Can't Relax, 2007
inkjet ultrachrome archival print
44 x 50 inches each
Courtesy of the artist and Foxy Production, New York

Tim Rietenbach

Praying Hands, 2007
mixed-media, site-specific installation
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

5.5 Designers

Réanim, 2004
mixed-media installation
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the designers

Amy Chan
Guy Debord
Design Management AS
Dan Graham
Komar & Melamid
Learning Group
Nicola López
Scott Massey
The Miss Rockaway Armada
Ester Partegàs
Tim Rietenbach
5.5 Designers

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