



Main Space



Xpace Cultural Centre
2-303 Lansdowne Ave
Toronto ON M6K 2W5
416 849 2864
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Indelible Discards curated by Bunker 2

Aileen Bahmanipour, Lauren Prousky, Darian Razdar, Maria Simmons, and Lingxiang Wu
February 1st - 26th, 2022

Waste (verb): a continual process of movement and transformation, of obligatory concealment, producing boundaries through their transgression and categorizing the uncategorizable.

Waste (noun): a conglomerate heap that's infinitely expanding, a muddled mass of signifiers that still casts shadows when pushed to the peripheries of space and of consciousness.

Scholarship in the field of discard studies frames waste as an ontological necessity, inextricably connected to systems of categorization, logics of exclusion/inclusion, and the passage of time. At the same time, waste is a complex construct necessarily contingent upon shifting notions of cleanliness, utility, and value. Waste is the inevitable and perpetual consequence of production and consumption of every kind and on every scale. As John Scanlan suggests in *On Garbage* (2005), waste tends to

elude fixed definition – “The act of conceptualizing garbage actually transforms it into something else.”¹

As a broad category containing a vastly heterogeneous range of materials, waste can be considered that which we seek to exclude and obscure.² This urge to invisibilize characterizes our individual, collective, historical, and systemic relationships with garbage - an ultimately futile effort. Just as defining as our desire to be rid of it is waste’s adamant refusal to truly disappear. Whether swept under a rug, flushed into a septic tank, relegated to a hard drive’s metadata, or accumulated in a landfill, discards still exist, just elsewhere.

Featuring works by Aileen Bahmanipour, Lauren Prousky, Darian Razdar, Maria Simmons, and Lingxiang Wu, *Indelible Discards* is a group exhibition exploring the affective registers of consumer waste. Residual byproducts of industrial, domestic, and digital cycles are accumulated and transformed beyond their intended lifespans and designated uses. Through aesthetic observation and extensions of meaning, these works probe structural and personal ascriptions of value, and the limits between our bodies and the matter that surrounds us.

Lingxiang Wu’s *Digital Landfill* is an ongoing interactive web project composed of visual detritus (images of home furnishings, aquatic creatures, word art, and cartoons, among other disparate materials) scraped from the corners of the internet. The accumulated image-junk is configured into a navigable landfill, a greyscale assemblage that appears to float in an endless expanse of digital space. Uncategorized fragments of images and text are scattered and merged in this abstracted landscape. In this new iteration of the project, titled *Retreat into Digital Landfill*, Wu has recorded a single-

¹ Scanlan, John. *On Garbage*. London: Reaktion Books (2005), 15

² See: Thompson, Michael. *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value*. London: Pluto Press (1979, 2017)

channel exploration of this environment, paired with a pop-up window containing the first-person musings of a digital wanderer. This scrolling text acts as an intimate narration, considering the performativity and exhaustion of digital subjecthood.

The work meditates on algorithmic modalities that sort virtual content, processes which, like physical waste management, seek to invisibilize undesirable media. Like its physical analog, digital waste is persistent – deleting rarely destroys, but merely displaces.³ Wu’s spatialized mass of digital fragments also reminds us of the physical infrastructures that enable the dissemination and storage of data and the looming materiality of the e-waste generated within contemporary technocapitalism.

Lauren Prousky’s *Big Bags* series consists of painted works on paper individually stored in the largest Ziploc bags commercially available. Clipped to clothes hangers – another mainstay of domestic organization – the bags are stored on a spiral metal rack that is more of a storage device than a functional display. More bags, suspended from the ceiling by colorful zip-tie chains, are dispersed throughout the space, free to sway and flutter in overlapping clusters. These absurdly oversized plastic bags contain comparably small collages, illustrations, and vibrant abstract compositions. Through this discrepancy of scale, the Ziplocs establish a conspicuous presence, further emphasized by their brand logos, ruled measurements, and multilingual safety warnings.

In her 2000 essay, Zoe Sofia argues that “container technologies” are continually overlooked due to the auxiliary nature of their functionality: they facilitate, employing a “technics of the unobtrusive”.⁴ Prousky’s *Big Bags* are anything but unobtrusive, overperforming their function to become perhaps even more visible than the art objects they contain. Consequently, our attention is also drawn to the material qualities of the

³ See: Volkart, Yvonne. “Aesthetic Strategies in the Wasteocene”. *Datami: Resonances* (2018) <https://resonances.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/aesthetic-strategies-wasteocene>

⁴ Sofia, 188

Ziplocs – their sheen, their transparency, and what this plasticity signifies. As observed by environmental scholar Gay Hawkins, plastic is a material defined by its inherent contradictions - by design, both durable and disposable, ephemeral and enduring.⁵ The archival function of Prousky's *Big Bags* engages in these ever-present tensions, playfully subverting normative hierarchies of plastic's value.

As a technology, containers simultaneously foreground the desire for both preservation and hygiene, isolating things from potential contaminants to extend their lifespans. Hygienism as tied to morality has long been a political framework leveraged in the service of settler-colonialism, a linkage culturally perpetuated today to obscure the extraction, colonial violence, and environmental degradation that capitalist production necessitates.

Maria Simmon's *Purity Factories* deconstructs late-capitalist hygienic tendencies by creating a microcosmic assemblage of objects that cohabit and co-contaminate. These sculptural vessels, formed to mimic the shapes of yeast clusters under a microscope, contain amalgamations of domestic objects that will continue to ferment over time. One of these ceramics contains a piece of homemade bread that Simmons covered with Purity® facial cleanser from Sephora before vacuum sealing it in plastic. Left to bob in the liquid which fills the vessel, these two seemingly opposing materials – an active bacterial culture and a cleanser advertised to remove bacteria, oils, and dirt from the skin – grow together to create alternative material possibilities. In another vessel, the artist's hair, wrapped in a plastic produce bag, has been submerged in water, slowly leaching blue dye. The smallest vessel combines expired film developer, Fuzzy Peaches, and Grand River mud, while the final vessel holds fermented garbage and plant matter floating in dirty mop water. Processes of fermentation, like container technologies, serve

⁵ Hawkins, Gay. *Accumulation - The Material Politics of Plastic*, Jennifer Gabrys, Gay Hawkins, & Mike Michael (eds). New York: Routledge (2013), 57

to preserve their constituent parts, but through amalgamation and collective transformation, rather than separation and isolation.

Similar to *Purity Factories*, Simmon's *The Urge to Suspend What Isn't Kept* meditates on mutual transformation as a kind of preservation. The work is composed of old studio experiments, including lichen, mycelium, efflorescence, mold, honeycomb, and oyster mushrooms, deconstructed and suspended in resin. Mixed with this organic matter are scraps of plastic garbage and other assorted debris. In the process of hardening, the biological materials stained the resin casts in the colours of their constituent parts. Arranged like treasured artifacts on a shelf and illuminated from below, each small vessel is a pocket of uncategorized matter, an archive of accumulative experimentation and temporal existence. Garbage is both enduring and ephemeral - the traces and residues of past experiences continue to live on elsewhere, even after being disposed from view. Simmons' conscious preservation of debris imbues it with an affective power, the beauty and melancholy of an insect trapped in amber.

Lintball is a sculptural excerpt from *Collecting Dust*, a larger body of work by Prousky which engages Mary Douglas' definition of dirt as "matter out of place".⁶ In *Purity and Danger* (1966), Douglas applies this concept to analysis of culturally and systemically contingent notions of order, purity, ritual, and taboo. Prousky's *Lintball* ammasses vast quantities of dryer lint into a solid lump, mixed with sponges, and held together with liquid rubber. The individual pieces of lint vary in shades of grayish brown, a tonal archive of innumerable laundry cycles, and closer observation reveals dirt and hair within the hybrid medley.

Dirt and hair are amongst the most primary and visible materials in Aileen Bahmanipour's *Manuals for Waste*. This series of handmade papers incorporate vacuum

⁶ Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger*. London, New York: Routledge (1966, 2002), 55

cleaner dust from both domestic and industrial sources. In place of the text and diagrams typical of instructional manuals, these pages contain only the traces of these materials. Installed in a tonal grid, the pages form a gradient that corresponds to the methodical blending of the dust into the pulp. Scraps of receipts can be seen in the darker papers, made primarily from industrial waste sourced from the vacuum cleaner of an HVAC technician, while the lighter papers made from domestic waste are woven with tangled hair. The abject quality of this matter troubles the aesthetic pleasure that this orderly composition provides, while also lending an embodied intimacy to this ambiguous archive. Together, both industrial and domestic acts of maintenance point to the habitual, rhythmic, and interminable necessity of cleaning that structures daily life: dust accumulates, and must be gathered to be removed. As Douglas writes, “Uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained.”⁷ But in Bahmanipour’s *Manuals for Waste*, dirt is preserved within an archeological index, creating a visually ordered system which elevates the aesthetic qualities of commingled and deteriorated matter.

Waste is contingent, a material record of other, more favorable items and activities. In *The Ethics of Waste* (2006), Hawkins describes containers and packaging as “transitional objects”: even before their singular purpose is fulfilled, they already look like the garbage they will inevitably become, occupying a liminal category of soon-to-be-waste.⁸ The value of packing materials is dependent on their function that preserves the utility of the items they enclose. In the multimedia print series *Enmeshed*, Darian Razdar reconsiders the temporality of cardboard packing mesh. With a sheet of this honeycomb-patterned material salvaged from a roadside trash pile, the artist created multichromatic impressions of its texture on fabric and paper. In its first pressing, the ink is highly saturated, while in subsequent pressings the ink becomes increasingly faint.

⁷ Douglas, 60

⁸ Hawkins, Gay. *The Ethics of Waste: How We Relate to Rubbish*. Oxford: Roman & Littlefield (2006), 50

Razdar layered dozens of pressings using this mesh until it eventually deteriorated. This process reveals the ephemerality of this 'disposable' material, while the resultant prints create an enduring archive of its likeness. In the creation of this work, the cardboard packing mesh undergoes a transference from the actual to the representational, an aesthetic afterlife suggesting both transience and permanence.

Materials associated with the abject – bodily waste, ambiguous and slimy masses of garbage no longer differentiable – demand to be purged from sight and mind. The obligation to similarly displace plastic and packaging waste emerges from its planned obsolescence, and perhaps its connection to our uncomfortable implication within structures of capitalist excess and its sociopolitical and environmental consequences. In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett writes that “the sheer volume of commodities, and the hyper-consumptive necessity of junking them to make room for new ones, conceals the vitality of matter.”⁹ She employs the concept of assemblage to consider the persistent power of organic and inorganic materials and their interdependent and mutual agencies.¹⁰

Indelible Discards gestures to the parallel and correlative relationship between industrial, domestic, bodily, and digital cycles of production, consumption, accumulation, and attempted disposal. Waste is both heterogeneous and amorphous, a locus of differentiation, ambiguities, and potentials. The oft-overlooked detritus of sanitation, storage, object, and image economies contain revealing traces of our activities and attachments, allowing undesirables to become archives of desire.

- Megan MacLaurin, Talia Golland, and Sophia Opper of Bunker 2

⁹ Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham and London: Duke University Press (2010), 29

¹⁰ Bennett, 302