

CHRIS SOLLARS

Accumulative Dissipation

essay by Aimee Le Duc

It can be difficult to hold onto things from the past. It's too easy--almost required-- to get rid of what we have, to buy a newer version, to forget that we once held onto items. In fact, our personal "historical" objects become ephemeral and seemingly invisible in the face of the ease and immeasurable speed with which we can stay in the perpetual new. Trash can be instantly removed and taken to an unnamed location. Automobiles continually reinvent themselves, leaving behind little more than a fleeting notion of status and convenience. But what happens when our waste takes shape and does not follow these rules? What happens when evidence of last year's SUV lays down in front of us, two-dimensional and limp? San Francisco performance and installation artist Chris Sollars kindly leads us to a space where we can answer these questions with a wry smile and a biting sense of hope.

We are all surely familiar with the activity of making a rubbing of a memorial, a gravestone in a church or a special place. Rubbings have a strange history in contemporary American culture; a history tangled up somewhere between sacred memorials and private gestures. Sollars co-opts the tactile act of rubbing in order to turn our attention again to the seemingly obligatory material of our culture and its ephemeral consequences by draping a white Ford Expedition sports utility vehicle with paper and creating a rubbing of the entire automobile. When he is through, what remains is the shroud of capitalism spread out for all of us to see.

In *SUV Rub*, the large paper that depicts a dusty lined and flattened car is cartoon-like in its shape and scale, making the car seem ridiculous. The rub wholly subverts the powerful symbol that is the sports utility vehicle in American consumer culture, additionally, calling into question the type of culture automobiles leaves behind.

In 2005, Sollars assembled a group of eleven people together draped in filled black trash bags and had them pile up in San Francisco's

downtown shopping district in the middle of the day. The performance, *Pile of Trash*, followed the group of larger-than-life trash bags as they moved through paths of shoppers, tourists and hurried locals. They looked like deflated elephants without faces or definable shape. Sollars is experimenting with embodying the materials we no longer recognize as valuable. His "trash people" are a manifestation of the waste produced by our lifestyle. They are the evidence, the tangible proof that part of the luxury of having so much is that it is just too easy to throw things away. In fact, throwing things out is part of the fun of consuming. However, Sollars' trash bag people know that they are the personification of our culture's waste and they aren't behaving. They are supposed to be obediently housing last year's hottest housewares as we race to buy more. They are supposed to be covering up the remnants of the people sleeping in the alley behind the four star restaurant where we just ate. *Pile of Trash* is exactly what trash is not supposed to be--very public and unavoidable.

Chris Sollars does not let us off the hook easily. We are all a part of this catastrophe of waste and forgetting, but his work gives us another chance. If our trash can become a collective of living beings, we can choose to confront it and realize its weight, its actual consequence. When an SUV can become nothing more than a simple sheet of paper we can chose to walk away from its vacant status and toward a renewed awareness of our actions and their lasting effects on this culture.

Aimee Le Duc is a freelance writer living in San Francisco.

Chris Sollars is a San Francisco-based installation video artist born in Indianapolis, Indiana. He received his BFA in Sculpture From the Rhode Island School of Design in 1998 and held a residence at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. Chris is the director and curator of 667Shotwell, a project space for artists in his home since 2001. Sollars' awards include a 2007 Eureka Fellowship Award, and a 2002 Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation Award.

Chris Sollars
Pile of Trash, 2005



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