

dad de Vida' at Wolf Fine Arts

ince 1990, Norcal Waste Systems, Inc., has sponsored a residency program for artists at the San Francisco city dump. The program is the only one of its kind in the country, and demonstrates remarkably into the creative potential of the waste stream—marrying environmentalism at a time when ourselves living in the midst of natural disasters, and found-

object appropriation has well established itself as a common art practice. For *Sociedad de Vida*, Steven Wolf selected highlights from the program, surveying the broad range of works it has inspired.

Some artists employed the dump's junk as raw material, without thematizing the context in which it was found. Susan Steinman's untitled sculpture joined a log to a tire with heavy rope, and mounted it on a painted-black chair. The piece combined organic and inorganic elements, with both industrial and everyday textures, but only for their aesthetic properties and the sense of weight and mystery their combination engendered. Similarly, Donna Ozawa's *White Study #3, Conformity*, presented white coffee cup lids laid neatly in rows on the floor of the gallery, in the shape of a rectangle interrupted only in one corner by several "missing" lids. The banality of the coffee cup lids both contributed to the piece's sublime minimalism, and cut against it with their occasional stains and cheap plastic. And William Wareham's untitled sculpture joined found metal objects into a robot-like figure, which towered over one corner of the gallery with a playful nobility.

Other work in the show, to the contrary, seized upon the residency program to address the culture and politics of pollution. In a series of three segments, Robin Lasser's video, *Dining at the Dump*, brought the opposite poles of the consumption/waste cycle into nauseating proximity—basically eating where we shit, and shitting where we eat. In the first, she stood in the aisle of a grocery store eating Twinkies off of a conveyor belt with letters printed on their wrappers spelling "sanitary fill," as if they were delivered directly from the dump. In the next, she stood behind a conveyor belt at the dump, unwrapped packaged food, took a bite from it, and put it back onto the conveyor belt: half-eaten along side its empty wrapper. With heavy trucks moving trash behind her, Lasser—in her role as consumer—locked like just another cog in an industrial process, devoid of gratification, and serving no end. In the final segment, slices of bread were thrown up out of a huge garbage pit, where men and trucks moved over mountains of trash. Sandwiches then were laid out in rows on a ledge over the pit, and the top slices of the sandwiches were pulled back to reveal letters written with mustard on slices of bologna, spelling "B-O-T-T-O-M-L-E-S-S P-I-T." In light of her conflation of consumption and pollution, Lasser presumably meant both the pit of garbage and the nit of the consumer's appetites in each



a screening of the video at the end of White's residency. In the video, a swarm of flies spells out the Coca-Cola logo. White drinks from a Coke bottle. Stop-motion footage shows him go from bald and shaven, to bearded and hairy. The images split and split again, creating a field of his face, undergoing the repeated process of growing his hair, and shaving it off. A baby's mouth reaches for a slice of orange. And then White appears, surrounded by pigeons in San Francisco's Civic Center, and dressed in a bird costume constructed with slices of white bread covering his face and body. An old lady pinches off a piece of the bread and smiles after eating it. Two dogs fight over the last scraps of meat on a bone. Where appetite seems almost entirely artificial in Lasser's video (as a mere by-product of industrial processes), through his string of associations, White presents a more poetic study of life and its aftermath. His video isn't apologetic, but also refrains from merely denouncing pollution as an evil. Rather, he presents waste as something we must live with—if not necessarily accept in its current form.

Still other work in the show drew from the dump as a site of discarded memories and meanings. Sharon Siskin's *Now Serving One*, combined a broken "now serving" digital display, with a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*, and an empty wrapper for Calvin Klein's "One" cologne. The piece asked after possibilities of redemption in a world commodified of kitsch commodities

the mind. Dee Hibbert Jones's *Talisman's Letters to an Unknown* offered viewers the opportunity to browse fragments from a series which they had found at the dump, installed into a cornucopia whose screen was the body of an old television. As discarded refuse, took on a heightened significance—as if it had not merely been thrown away but the correspondence passed away or ceased about one another. It was ultimately too life to be celebrated for its properties, but its frequent experimental attention to meanings nevertheless



From top: Mike Farruggia, *Sociedad de Vida*, 2005, mixed-media wall construction; Michael Kerbow, *Collected Thoughts*, 2005, mixed-media sculpture; Hector Dio Mendoza, *Untitled*, 2005, Styrofoam, at Steven Wolf Fine Arts, San Francisco

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