THROWAWAY

THE HISTORY
OF A MODERN CRISIS

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EDITED BY CHRISTINE DUPONT, STÉPHANIE GONÇALVES AND EMMA TEWORTE

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ESSAYS

John Scanlan

Waste / art

Fig. 1
100 Jahre Merz
Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948)
Collage, glue paint, fabric and paper, 1920
Sprengel Museum Hannover, Hanover,
Germany

It would not be difficult to make the case that artists became interested in waste – as both a subject and a source of materials – far ahead of the rest of society, for whom discarded matter, whatever form it took, has for so long been merely the domain of the worthless, the useless and, even, the disgusting. For some art critics, this would be generalised more broadly as an interest in disorder, as seen in works – especially by European and American artists from the middle of the 20th century onwards – that suggested qualities like degradation, redundancy or the accumulation and profusion of material objects. For the purposes of this short overview, waste will be seen through a series of dualities that a number of artists have worked between. Taken together, they allow us to bring into focus a broader historical perspective on that which – whether we call it waste, rubbish, trash, junk and so on – seems to endure beyond need.

Old / new

The turn towards discarded and seemingly worthless materials in art since World War II has its origins in the 1910s and the emergence of Dada in Zurich, Paris and elsewhere. The Dadaists counted among their number an array of performers, writers and pranksters, but also artists working in the visual field. Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) invented something that would be known as the 'readymade' – a name that referred to everyday objects that were transformed into works of art by the simple act of the artist's choosing – which represented a philosophical gesture that claimed art to no longer be bound by conventions of representation or in choice of materials. This revolution was famously inaugurated by Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917), an upturned urinal signed by the artist using the pseudonym R. Mutt and presented as sculpture. Others associated with Dada were pioneers of collage and photomontage, which also brought more of the detritus of the everyday into art.

Hannah Höch (1889–1978) used words and images cut out from newspapers and magazines – materials that might have typically been thrown away after reading – to produce early examples of a visual style that would become very familiar over the 20th century (see fig. 2).

Of the Dada artists who became better known to posterity, the most notable was Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948). In the words of his former Dada acolyte, George Grosz (1893–1959), Schwitters was concerned with the art and philosophy of the 'garbage can', and to this end he would 'scavenge everything he could find in rubbish heaps, dust bins, or heavens knows where'. From the materials he collected, Schwitters sometimes made sculptural work, but more often attached scraps of card, paper and other materials to the surface of canvas. The so-called 'Merz' paintings – the name was taken from a torn piece of paper bearing the German word *Kommerz* (commerce), which Schwitters used in one of his first artworks of this kind – were not really paintings, much in the way that Duchamp's readymades were not really sculptures (see fig. 1). As Grosz recalled, 'only ordinary people who know nothing about art reacted normally and called the Dada art junk and garbage – of which it indeed consisted'. Beyond the bafflement with which those who were not acquainted with modern art might have viewed these

Fig. 2
Indian Dancer
Hannah Höch (1889–1978)
Cut-and-pasted printed paper and
metallic foil on paper, 1930
Museum of Modern Art, Frances Keech
Fund, New York, USA

Fig. 3
Bull's Head
Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)
Leather and metal bicycle seat and
handlebars, 1942
Musée National Picasso, Paris, France

works, the mere act of repositioning rubbish as something that could ascend to the opposite end of a value hierarchy – to become a work of art – was for a long time a simple heresy. But to Schwitters, there was no controversy in it: 'I simply fail to see why you cannot use old train tickets, pieces of driftwood, cloakroom numbers, wire or wheel parts, buttons, and other old junk from the attic or trash heap as material for paintings, just as you would use factory-produced paint'.

The significance of the work of Schwitters and others resided in the fact that they revealed the destructive and wasting tendencies of modernity, a subject that became a core theme of the same period, including the Weimar-era cultural critic Walter Benjamin – who would describe his work as a form of literary montage that employed 'refuse' – and poets such as T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* (published in 1922). From a number of different cultural spheres it seemed that there was a convergence on the idea that modernity, while promising the enrichment of life through material goods and new experiences, nonetheless exposed – through its ceaseless cycles of commodity production, in particular – the proximity and unavoidability of material decay and an obsolescence that seemed to lurk everywhere and which the stuff of waste represented. Even Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), master of the canvas and thus still linked inextricably to the old ways, could see that the idea of subjecting everyday objects to some kind of metamorphosis by creating sculptural collages could produce something new and compelling. His 1942 piece, *Bull's Head* (see fig. 3), for instance, was composed from the seat and handlebars of a scrap bicycle. Picasso recognised that its value as a work of art was purely contextual and possibly transitory, with the materials themselves being only

Fig. 4
Jazzmen
Jacques Villeglé (b. Jacques Mahé
de la Villeglé, 1926–2022)
Printed paper on canvas, 1961
Tate, London, United Kingdom

temporarily given this new form by his hand. 'Suppose my bull's head is thrown on the scrap heap', he said. 'Perhaps some day a fellow will come along and say: "Why there's something that would come in very handy for the handlebars of my bicycle...". And so a double metamorphosis would have been achieved'.

Younger artists such as Raymond Hains (1926–2005) and Jacques Mahé de la Villeglé (1926–2022) created 'torn papers' in the late 1940s using the palimpsest-like layered surfaces of commercial billboards, the products and events they advertised literally covered over repeatedly by what was always newer, thereby capturing instances of the continual turnover of daily life in consumer society (see fig. 4).

Disposal / reclamation

Other artists whose work can be dated back to the 1950s include César (César Baldaccini, 1921–1998), who by the middle of the decade was using materials that he found lying around on the factory floors where he sometimes worked – nuts and bolts, metal offcuts, lead, wire, pipes – and who was not just fashioning them into new forms but allowing these materials to guide his creations. One example of his work in this period can be seen in the sculpture, *The Man of Saint-Denis* (1958), a half-human-half-bird-like figure comprised of those very waste materials of industrial production. To some, it stands as a work that represents artistic concerns about post-war Europe, not least the lingering trauma of war – one thinks of mangled fighter planes and their doomed pilots – and destruction. César would achieve greater notoriety in the following decade, scouring

Fig. 5
Compression 'Ricard'
César (b. César Baldaccini, 1921–1998)
Compressed lacquered steel sheet
from cars, 1962
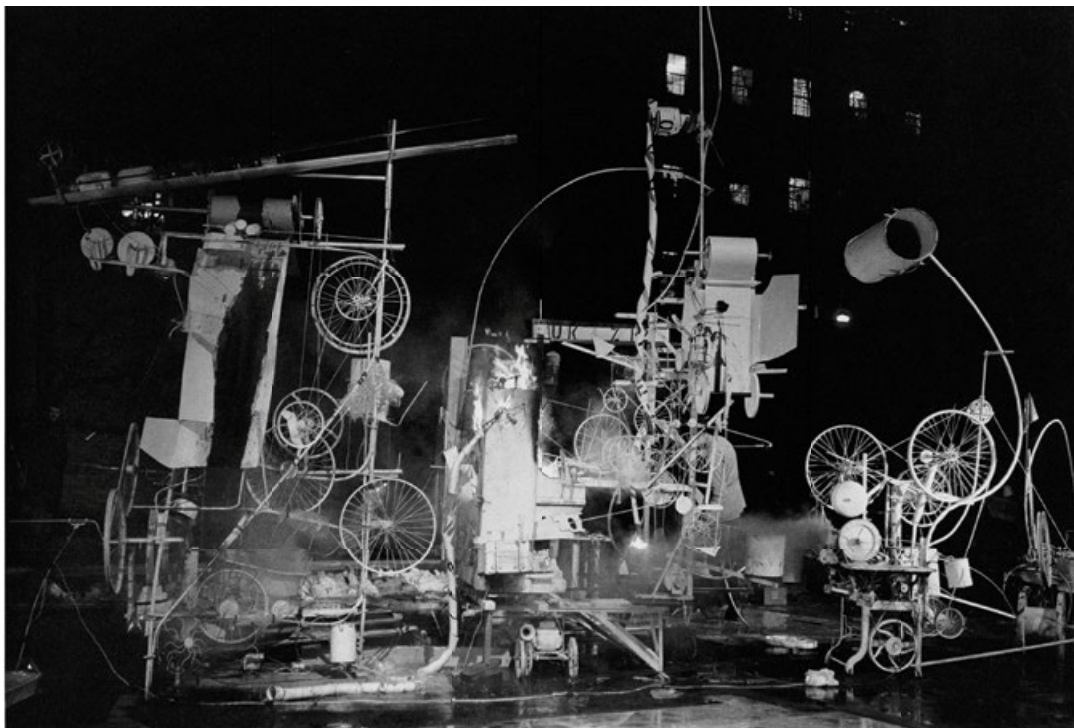*Centre Pompidou, Paris, France*

Fig. 6
Homage to New York
Jean Tinguely (1925–1991)
Installation, painted metal, fabric, tape,
wood and rubber tires, 1960
Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA

Fig. 7
Untitled (Accumulation series)
Arman (b. Armand Fernandez, 1928–2005)
Assemblage, pressure gauges in a wooden
box, 1962
Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris, France

scrap yards in Paris and producing his 'Compressions' – a series of automatic sculptures made from scrap cars (see fig. 5). These creations upset the artistic community, who, as the critic Franca Toscano wrote, 'found it galling that three crushed vehicles should be presented as art'. The cars, however, were often pressed into remarkably sleek and, as time has passed, evocative shapes or figures that transformed what were once the unwanted and discarded stuff of a society that lived off production line objects. César created monuments to the usually unseen consequences of the inescapable fact that no matter what we consumed, be it food, clothes, newspapers or cars, at the end of it all, there was always the leftover to be dealt with.

Likewise, the Swiss artist Jean Tinguely (1925–1991), a Dada-inspired maker of kinetic, self-destructive machine-sculptures, was gathering up stuff that he found in city dumps – bicycle wheels, piano parts, metal rods, saws, the limbs of discarded mannequins, toys and whatever else he could find – and constructing what Marcel Duchamp admiringly described as metallic 'suicide machines'. In the infamous 1960 performance piece titled *Homage to New York* – which in fact included a construction called the 'Suicide Carriage', which was supposed to drive itself into a pond and 'drown' in the garden of the Museum of Modern Art – a huge elaborate construction was set in motion and destroyed itself in short order (see fig. 6). That was the entire point of the work. 'Key parts of the structure will be sawed, hammered or melted', noted an advance press release, 'so that after 30 minutes the entire machine will collapse to the ground'. Tinguely had reached, in the words of Alfred H. Barr Jr., director of the Museum collections, quoted in the same press release, 'an apocalyptic far-out breakthrough' that 'clinks and clanks, tingles and tangles, whirrs and buzzes, grinds and creaks, whistles and pops' before finally falling to pieces to leave a pile of junk and scrap.

César, along with Hains, Villeglé and Tinguely, became associated with the largely French *nouveau réalisme* (new realism) movement, a name coined in 1960 by art critic Pierre Restany, whose leading figures were Yves Klein (1928–1962) and Arman (Armand Fernandez, 1928–2005). Their stated aim was to return art from abstraction and emotional expression to the real, particularly as it could be seen in the banal objects of everyday life, which could be addressed through an almost sociological concern with the panoply of waste materials or effects that were becoming evident in life. This was a realism that wanted to distinguish itself from a similar concern with the real that was evident in, especially, American Pop Art. In the work of the Pop artists, however, the real was seen through the prism of the world of abundant goods their art reflected, and which seemed to be readily available to the consumer. The artists of the *nouveau réalisme,* by contrast, developed an art of the worthless and discarded, a response perhaps more in keeping with the conditions of life in post-war France, then still lagging behind the more affluent United States.

Using glass and fibreglass vitrines or containers, Arman developed a unique approach to reusing and presenting what would normally have ended up in his rubbish in the works known as the 'Poubelles' (bins). Quite distinct from these works were others, his 'Accumulations', which in gathering together the leftovers of mass production symbolically abolished the distinctions between objects that were once either coveted as personal possessions or had some particular purpose (see fig. 7). The

forms of these works were taken as direct illustrations of the sociological intent Restany had identified as a distinguishing feature of *nouveau réalisme*: these various encased assemblages recorded something of the lifecycle of consumer objects, charting their changing status as they went, according to Jaimey Hamilton, 'from assembly lines to window displays to kitchen shelves to waste baskets and eventually to dumps'.

Matter / form

Italy in the late 1960s was the place where another loose grouping of artists began to work with the materials of everyday life. The pieces associated with artists like Jannis Kounellis (1936–2017), Mario Merz (1925–2003), Marisa Merz (1926–2019) and Piero Manzoni (1933–1963), as well as many others, to a great extent relied on the impact that materials – which might include coal, rope, newspaper, wire, rags,

Fig. 8
Untitled (Living Sculpture)
Marisa Merz (1926–2019)
Aluminium, 1966
Tate, London, United Kingdom
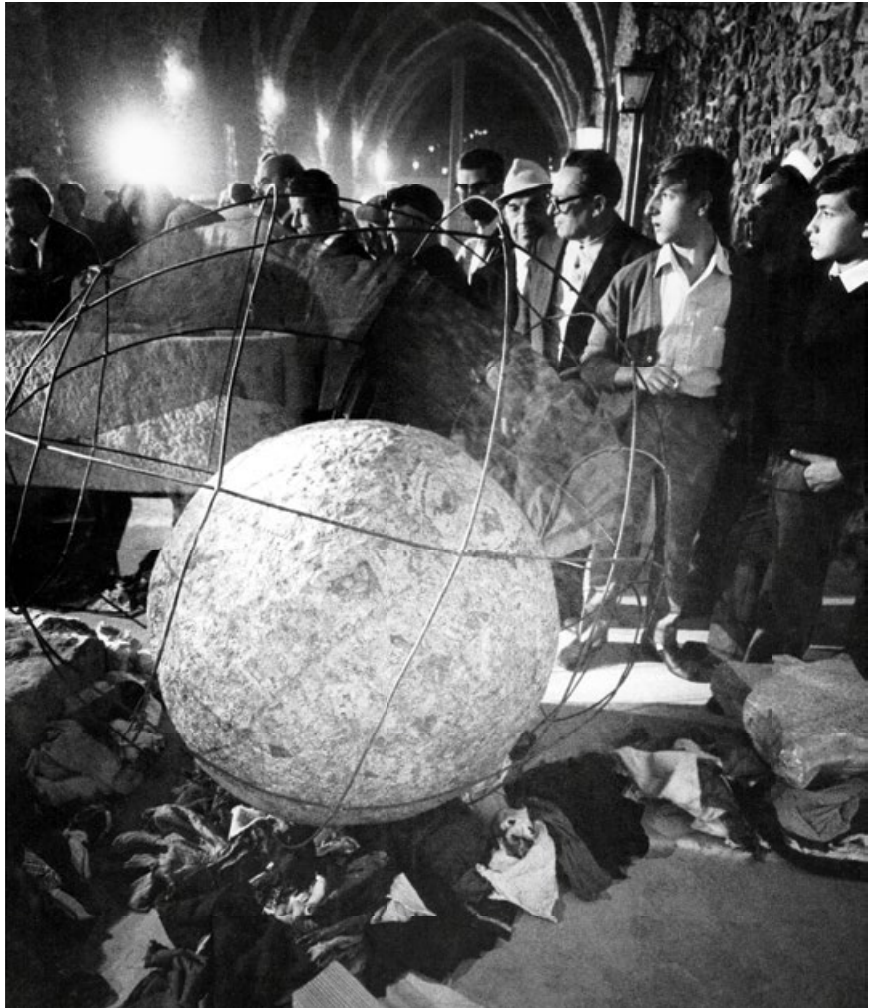
Fig. 9
Globe (Mappamondo), 1966-1968
Michelangelo Pistoletto (b. 1933)
Pressed newspaper, iron, 180 cm (diameter)
Photo shot at the exhibition *Arte Povera +*
Azioni Povere, Arsenali, Amalfi, 1968.
Photograph, Claudio Abate (1943–2017)
Collection Lia Rumma, Naples/Milan, Italy

dirt – had on the spectator (see fig. 8). In Milan, Michelangelo Pistoletto (b. 1933) rolled a ball of pulped newspapers through the streets to make a blob that sits inside a spherical wire construction (see fig. 9); newspapers also appear in numerous of Mario Merz's works, as if to acknowledge – no less than the torn posters of Hains and Villeglé did – the fact that daily life is forever being superseded and leaving leftovers. The materiality of the works, while a principal aspect of what made Arte Povera so distinctive, nonetheless exists alongside a general concern with symbolic gestures that were spread much more diffusely within a loosely constituted movement that was bound to a concept as much as it was to any particular style.

That concept – *arte povera* (usually translated from Italian to English as 'poor art') – had been defined by the art critic Germano Celant in 1967 when he brought together most of the names associated with the school for an exhibition in Genoa. He saw the engagement of a number of artists with mundane existence and their use of the odds and ends and rubbish of everyday life as characteristic of a new

approach to the everyday that stood apart from the gestures of American Pop Art. Where the latter's association with commonplace objects was often concerned with a distanced representation of consumer objects, brand names and media images, and remained, for Celant, in thrall to representation, the quotidian as it became manifested in Arte Povera had been shifted outside of the realm of cultural values and representations. It was strikingly immediate in its abolition of distance, something that was apparent in the smell of materials and the signs of age or decay. As such, this art was anti-*materialist* in the sense that it disrupted or overturned the value hierarchies that organised the world of consumer goods, but also – in Celant's words – created a kind of art 'that does not add ideas or things to the world, but that discovers what's already there'. Arte Povera, in this way, participated in what the critic Lucy R. Lippard famously described as the 'dematerialization of the object' in art during this period, a reference to the fact that there was a move away from the emphasis on certain material aspects of the work of art that had been long established by then, such as 'uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness'.

Infamous amongst the works of Arte Povera was Piero Manzoni's *Merda d'artista* (1961). The basest of materials, human waste would seem to indicate absolute worthlessness, yet Manzoni's cans looked like a product much like those *Campbell's Soup Cans* made famous by Warhol in America. Was it a joke in the manner of Dada? What if the tins did not actually contain his shit? To open one of the sealed tin cans to discover the answer to this would devalue it, so Manzoni pegged these objects against the exchange rate of gold, which may have just been enough to prevent anyone destroying their value by tampering with the seal.

These artists, often using materials more of the order of the worthless and discarded, wrote their early advocate, Celant, chose 'no longer the representative' but instead to 'live within direct experience'; their aspiration was 'to live, not to see'.

The turn away from representation is evident in the frequent use of the non-specific designation 'Untitled' in place of titles that might convey ideas or descriptive cues that could lead the viewer in a certain direction. Instead, the works would take up residence in the ambiguity of a space that was – like the materials that were often used – indeterminate or in transit between negative and positive values. As such, these artists were aiming for direct contact with their immediate environment and the world of things; both living and inert, organic and inorganic, seeking ways into a dimension of life where things endure beyond need.

Jannis Kounnelis's *Untitled* (1978) could be said to reflect a background – born in Greece, a resident of Rome – steeped in the imagery of the classical world that is so bound up in the histories of those two nations (see fig. 10). Looking to all intents and purposes as if the pieces of the work were found in the trash, this broken representation of a familiar sculptural European form could be said to hint at the fragility of that cultural inheritance, or more simply the fact that, as historian George Kubler wrote – alluding to the archaeological value of waste heaps – 'the cultural clock runs mainly upon ruined fragments of matter'.

Absence / presence

When Michel de Certeau observed in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) that 'haunted places are the only ones people can live in', he might have been writing about some of the more recent work of Kounellis. The latter's collections of worn shoes and clothes that constitute focal points within some works speak of nothing so much as a present where missing persons or the departed linger in the in-between of the space of installation. In this respect, Kounellis can be linked to examples of how found objects and waste materials symbolise the complexities of how we live with the past and deal with the perpetual transition between the states of being and ways of life that are familiar and the future that is unknown.

More transgressive and confrontational in his work, but nonetheless concerned with what is seen and unseen, the English artist Stuart Brisley (b. 1933) gained recognition in the 1970s and beyond for his performance art, which often involved creating situations that would plunge spectators into a veritable nightmare vision of the world as a kind of empire
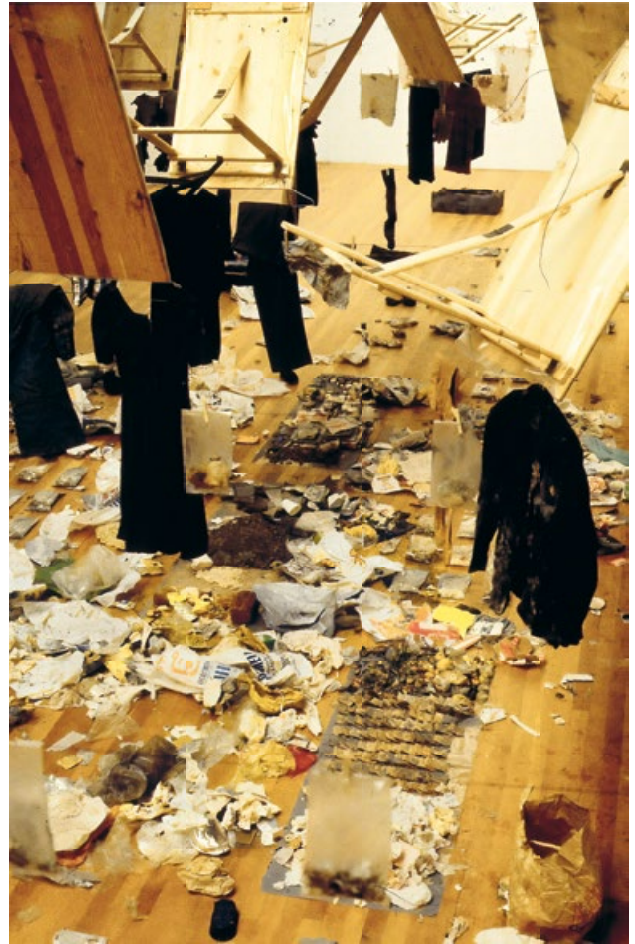
Fig. 10
Untitled
Jannis Kounellis (1936–2017)
Plaster, bodycolour and rope on iron
plinth, 1978
On loan to the Hamburg Kunsthalle,
Hamburg, Germany

Figs. 11 & 12
Leaching out at the Intersection
Stuart Brisley (b. 1933)
Performance/installation ICA, London, 1981
Photograph, Janet Anderson
Courtesy of the artist

of waste. One notable example of this work was a 1981 performance installation titled *Leaching out at the Intersection*, during which the artist would deposit bags of rubbish recovered from a waste ground near his home that had become a gathering place for homeless people (see figs. 11 & 12). Each day he would bring to the gallery a new bag of this rubbish, sifting and sorting through plastic bags of the stuff until, over the period of the exhibition, the space would be filled up: hanging from the ceiling, spread out across the floor, leaching out from that dumping ground and into the Institute of Contemporary Arts gallery (which was located less than a kilometre from both Buckingham Palace and the Houses of Parliament in Westminster). With the contents of this interstitial space where the mostly invisible homeless would gather, their presence was brought into the rather different in-between space of the gallery. As the critic Waldemar Januszczak wrote in a 1982 review of another audio-visual piece that formed part of Brisley's 'Georgiana Collection' (developed through a number of works and performances between 1978 and 1986) that *Leaching out at the Intersection* was part of, the artist used the sound of his recorded voice recounting his encounters with homeless people alongside images consisting 'entirely of human waste' to document the London that he saw on his doorstep:

The grey images which flash onto the walls around you are soiled and simple, an old shoe, muddy piles of discarded packaging […]. When Brisley realises that the decay around him doesn't stop at the edge of the rubbish tip, so do you.

Brisley's own transition from painting and sculpture in the 1950s and 1960s to performance arose from his interest in discarded items. In the early 1960s, he was gathering materials from junkyards to make sculptures, later returning what were now art objects to the same place to see if anyone would notice the difference, which they never did. He began to see it as a kind of performance.

Discarded objects also symbolise absent presences in much of the work of Polish artist Mirosław Bałka (b. 1958), whose many creations and installations seem irredeemably caught up with the European past and the devastating effects of war and the destruction of human life. Bałka's work is often composed of an array of found materials that he collects and stores at his studio in Otwock. In terms of the kinds of materials that take up his interest, it is not difficult to see an affinity between the materiality of his work and Arte Povera. Salvaged timber, dust, dirt, iron, used bars of soap (and also soap smeared on surfaces for its odour), empty tin cans and drawings almost destroyed by fire – their edges burned off and discoloured, but salvaged for display nonetheless as art – are objects given a renewed existence instead of being thrown away. There seem to be 'ghosts', as critic Richard Cork said of Bałka, 'in everything he displays'.

Bałka's work connects us not only with a past that otherwise grows more distant with every passing month and year, but acts as a means through which we might recognise a shared humanity in our attempts to negotiate the uncertainties of the present. *Common Ground* (2013/2016), for instance, consists of a collection of previously used doormats, collected from households in Kraków, where their owners were offered new

Fig. 13
Common Ground
Mirosław Bałka (b. 1958)
Door mats, 2013–2016
Mirosław Bałka / George Darrell, White Cube, London, United Kingdom

ones in exchange (see fig. 13). As objects that once sat on the threshold between two distinct spaces – and as liminal boundary markers – welcome mats are symbolic of both the separation and opening between the two fundamental 'worlds' we move between: the private domestic interior of the home and the public external space of the world beyond.

As old and no longer desired objects, the destiny of the doormats would usually be to disappear into the space of forgetting that locates our rubbish as that which is out of sight and out of mind. Here, in this installation, they are redeemed as a universal symbol of welcome, making this work perhaps more optimistic than some of his other haunted pieces. Here, the unseen is not the deadly past, but the future yet to appear; one whose contours might be shaped by how we think about the meaning of moving between worlds at a time when human migration is a key political issue shaping the present.

Life / art

Outside the National Museum in Krakow sits a strange and imposing structure. Along its sides, which comprise a regularly spaced timber frame and wire fencing, it is possible to see that it is a container of some sort, split into several levels. Extending out from the structure itself are a number of additional wooden supports, angled against the ground to offer stability to the rectangular form, helping to hold together what seems to be a massive container of junk, but at the same time ensuring that its contents are exposed to public view and, importantly, the elements. We might take this as confirmation that whatever these items are, they are no longer wanted in and of themselves.

That is because the viewer peeking through the wire fencing would see objects that looked like they had been condemned to death – ancient typewriters lie beneath unsorted papers, box folders and books, office chairs sit alongside obsolete technical machines, rusty tin cans, implements and tools, broken musical instruments and redundant media equipment – but they are here now serving some new and perhaps final purpose as a work of art. This work, by Polish artist Robert Kuśmirowski (b. 1973), is titled *Tężnia* (*'Graduation Tower')*, and the contents are leftovers from some of his earlier exhibitions and installations, works that in their own right are never less than suggestive of the decaying material world and the social construction of memory through material possessions (see fig. 14). The title of the work is taken from the traditional graduation towers that were used in Poland and other European countries to extract salt from water through a process of evaporation, which this structural form is designed to facilitate. By exposing the contents of this particular tower to the open environment, to the vagaries of weather and temperature, the idea was to place these artefacts that were no longer needed into a space where a kind of natural degradation would take place. Normally, witnessing this natural process of decay would be impossible if these objects had been buried in a landfill. Instead of salt being extracted from water, as in the traditional function of this architectural form, here, new life and purpose is derived or – we might say – extracted from these useless objects and materials. 'As in the case of graduation towers', Kuśmirowski said, 'the weather will play

Fig. 14
Graduation Tower
Robert Kuśmirowski (b. 1973)
Timber and wire, 2017
Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie, Poland

a major part in forming the final shape of the structure. The colour changes on the corroding and rusting objects, gravity stains on a freshly built wooden structure and other materials will form a unified organism'.

Within the context of post-World War II art history, Kuśmirowski's *Graduation Tower* could easily be seen as a gigantic version of the 'Accumulations' and 'Poubelles' of Arman. But more than this, it is the sheer volume of possessions amassed by one person, as if to illustrate that this – or something roughly equivalent – is what we all could create from a lifetime of accumulation. Everything is covered in a film of dust, or is cracked, torn or smashed. The ash and leftovers of cigarettes already half-consumed and abandoned fill an ashtray and indicate more clearly an absent human presence. Kuśmirowski's objects are made to look not only as if they have survived as the world has aged, but also like what one would find on entering places that had been evacuated for some emergency and never visited again.

A counterpart to the material presence of Kuśmirowski's tower is found in the 2001 performance *Break Down* by British artist Michael Landy (b. 1963). It is a singular work in which the artist brought together everything he owned within the space of a vacant store in one of London's busiest shopping thoroughfares and proceeded to destroy, in full public view and under the gaze of passing shoppers (see fig. 15a) – the glass storefront like a frame containing the performance – every last thing he owned,

Fig. 15a and 15b
Break Down
Michael Landy (b. 1963)
Performance, the artist sits surrounded
by the destroyed remains of his
possessions as shoppers passing by look
on from the street, Artangel, The Times
Commission, 10–24 February 2001

until it was all reduced to a kind of 'nothingness' that nonetheless still filled up space (see fig. 15b). The difference was that once the possessions had been destroyed and the formerly recognisable forms had been reduced to parts or ground into tiny fragments, there was no other use for them but to fill up a hole in the ground somewhere.

As a young student, Landy started out making textile works from junk materials, until the self-destroying kinetic sculptures of Jean Tinguely hit him with the force of a revelation.

Much of Landy's work from the 1990s was either taken up with the notion of throwaway culture – with waste destined for the landfill the *sine qua non* of consumer society – or it found ways to deploy junk and leftovers to devastating effect to reveal how entangled our lives become in the world of possessions. And it was the fact that such worldly goods – the stuff of life, and of every conceivable variety – became the basis on which people in consumer society had come to develop a sense of who they were, that he was driven to develop *Break Down*. The work, in this sense, was also a psychological exercise in unmaking, or detaching the self from the 'self-defining' objects that were not only possessions – which is to say, things that belonged to him – but, as it turned out, things that also in some way had him within their grip.

There was a time in recent memory when pop psychologists enjoyed a burgeoning trade in books and articles on the subject of 'de-cluttering' and, on the surface, it might seem that what Landy was engaged in was some kind of public version of that: tidying his life up and clearing away the obstacles to happiness that old material belongings represented. But it was much more than that. While Landy was able to claim – like other artists since Duchamp who turned to waste and to discarded objects of everyday life to evade conventional aesthetic considerations – that he wanted to disappear through his work, the aftermath of *Break Down*, when he was left with little more than the clothes that he was wearing, led him to a profound reassessment of his life and work.

Art, uniquely, can make us slow down and see the world we inhabit in a different light. And like much other art in general, that which began to explore waste in the last hundred years or so, which reaches an extreme in Landy's work, leads ultimately into the larger and enduring themes that have so often preoccupied artists: time, life, death and what it means to live in a world in which we are just a small part of something vastly greater. The artists highlighted here constitute a small sample of a much larger phenomenon that sees art as a conduit to the unseen side of life. By retrieving materials and objects from the sphere of the discarded or valueless, their work traversed uncharted territory and challenged audiences to likewise rethink their preconceptions about art. As we move through the decades and into the present, travelling further from the earliest examples discussed here, the materials often change – more often now they would consist of plastic waste or electronic scrap – but the idea nonetheless remains constant: it tells us not only that we are, in a manner of speaking, what we throw away, but also that in the space between life and death there is art. The artistic gesture reveals the possibility of remaking our own finite world from what we had hitherto regarded as belonging on the outside.

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We are facing an environmental emergency. Across centuries Europeans have transformed the world by producing, consuming and accumulating goods and materials. Our impact on the Earth is beyond reckoning. Rubbish is only one part of that story. But it may be the most visible, and the most tangible, part.

Throwaway – The history of a modern crisis is a multifaceted project that unearths the hidden history of waste and our complex relationship to it. This publication gives the floor to those behind the project – from curators and museum educators to the exhibition's designers, as well as true local experts on rubbish: women and men from Brussels, who collect, repair, recycle, reuse or reduce the waste the city generates every day. Academics explore how they view waste through the lens of history, archaeology, sociology, anthropology and art.

This publication invites you to take a fresh look at rubbish for yourself. If we are what we throw away, what does Europe's trash tell us about its past, present, and its future?

HOUSE OF EUROPEAN HISTORY

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