

# MAMMUT

ISSUE #1 · FALL 2008 LEAVE THE LAND ALONE



LEAVE  
THE LAND  
ALONE?

## MAMMUT #1

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Mammut is a biannual magazine about art and the natural world. Moving beyond 1970s-era art categories such as earthworks or land art, Mammut explores all forms of creative production that have a relationship with nature, landscape and environmentalism—or what we call ecological aesthetics. This first issue includes a few regular features and a special section of essays, artwork and projects that in our opinion, examine or respond to the little-known Bruce Nauman “earthwork,” a text piece that simply says “Leave the Land Alone.”

Mammut is named after the extinct American Mastodon or *Mammut americanus*. This name reflects our geographic focus and interest in art from cave painting to contemporary art. An outgrowth of our own investigations into issues of sustainability and environmentalism in cultural production, we hope that Mammut will become a sourcebook for readers seeking to understand the intersection of art and nature.

—Matthias Merkel Hess and Roman Jaster

Editors: Matthias Merkel Hess and Roman Jaster  
Design by Roman Jaster

Matthias Merkel Hess has studied environmental science, journalism and art, and is currently working towards an MFA from UCLA.

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Gretchen Nash is a designer from Saginaw, Michigan. She recently graduated from the graphic design department at the California Institute of the Arts, where she constantly experimented with the integration of handmade and digital elements in her design work. Currently, Gretchen lives and works in Los Angeles.

## Confronting the Planet: An interview with Katie Holten

BY MATTHIAS MERKEL HESS

Katie Holten makes drawings, sculptures, books and organizes public events that often have an environmental message. Actively showing since the late 1990s, she represented Ireland at the 2003 Venice Biennale and in 2007, had a solo show at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis. This fall, she has a solo show at the Nevada Museum of Art in conjunction with the museum's Art + Environment Conference. Holten was born in Ireland and now splits her time between New York and Ardee, Ireland.

**Matthias Merkel Hess:** I've noticed a lot of eco-focused shows recently. Do you think that is curator driven or a response to the work artists are making?

**Katie Holten:** One reason for the recent proliferation of eco-focused shows is that a lot of people working in the arts are genuinely concerned about 'nature' and the 'environment' and it's more acceptable to organize these shows right now as it's a topical subject.

But I do think that another reason is that some people seem to be jumping on the bandwagon. Climate change and environmental issues are topical. For some people it seems to be about being trendy.

**MMH:** Do you worry that eco-art is getting to be overhyped?

**KH:** Yeah. I worry that the prevalence of eco-focused exhibitions will be counter productive, as viewers will become desensitized and switch off.

**MMH:** You've done a lot of work with weeds, both as real plants and drawings. As an artist who has done projects around the world, do you begin to feel a certain kinship with weeds, which as you've noted, are really just plants that are out of place?

**KH:** The short answer is yes. I've always had itchy feet, it's part of who I am. The first time I rented an apartment was when I moved to New York in September 2004. Before that I'd been traveling pretty much non-stop since my time in Berlin in 1997.

I grew up in rural Ireland (in County Longford age 1-10, and County Louth age 10-19). Growing up in the countryside gave me a strong connection to the land. I was always outside—walking in the fields, climbing trees, trying to get lost, and weeding in the garden. I've always loved weeding. Weeds are just plants growing in the wrong place; a rose growing in a potato field is a weed. There's something beautiful about weeds—how they manage to find a place and make it their own. The similarity to refugees/migrants is obvious. But for myself, personally, I guess I have always identified with the weeds.

**MMH:** You work in a variety of ways, including drawings, objects, gatherings, pamphlets, installations and plants, but you are known as an environmental artist. Is this label accurate and does it end up closing doors or opening them?

**KH:** Although my work has always been about 'environment,' I think I've only been labeled as an 'environmental artist' in the last year and a half. Of course labels can be convenient, but I think it's silly. I don't like these catchphrases, they tend to simplify things. I've also been called a 'nomadic artist,' a 'conceptual artist,' and 'The Weed Lady!' I'm all of those things, none of those things and a lot of other things as well. People are more complicated than this.



Katie Holten. *Globe*, 2006.  
Ink and acrylic on moulded newspaper.

I feel that maybe I've been pigeonholed and of course that'll close doors. I'm concerned with environmental issues. I think there are fundamental misunderstandings of the 'environment' and 'landscape' (the environment is our surroundings and that can be apartment buildings and offices in Manhattan, not only meadows, forests and whatever else people tend to think of as 'nature'). I don't want to preach or be didactic with my work, but I want to make people curious and maybe think a bit more about these fundamental issues. Incorporating actual growing plants in my work is a simple way to begin dealing with these questions.

**MMH:** I'm really curious about the earliest self-published, limited-edition books listed on your website, *BLIP* and *Shithole*. What were the contents?

**KH:** *BLIP* and *Shithole* are very important for me. I made them when I was still a student in Berlin in 1997. It was a crazy time. These little booklets were a way for me to gather material together and present it in one place that I could then give away to people. I'd always been a printed-matter geek and made little comics when I was a kid. But it wasn't until I made these that I realized I could combine all these interests. *Shithole* was made to accompany 'The First Movement of the Shithole Symphony.' It's a long story, but it was a sound piece that I drew and it was performed by two musicians that I met in Berlin. From what I can remember *Shithole* contained photos and texts and it was about 8 pages, black and white photocopied.

**MMH:** How do you negotiate your growing gallery and museum career with your past as sort of relational/project/ephemeral-action type artist? Does the white box merely provide a larger launching pad for your ideas?

**KH:** Working with commercial galleries came about in a roundabout kind of way, and very organically. An artist that I met while on a residency at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in 2002 decided to open a project space in Düsseldorf as a way to expand her practice. She invited me to make a project for her space, which she called VAN HORN. One thing led to another and soon VAN HORN was a commercial gallery participating in the art fairs and doing that circuit.

My first solo museum show was in the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis in 2007. I was initially invited to be part of a group exhibition curated by Shannon Fitzgerald and one thing led to another and I ended up being invited to have a solo show.

In a way that's how my entire career has been—one thing leads to another. Kind of like Fischli and Weiss's video *Der Lauf der Dinge*. There's some kind of underlying plan that makes it all work, but it's more or less left to chance. You never know what's going to happen next.

When I moved to New York I had my own space for the first time—a simple thing like a desk and a wall meant that I could get large sheets of paper and draw on them, rather than living in sketchbooks and making work in situ. So I started a series of drawings on paper. They weren't very large, only 22 x 30 inches, but for me that was huge. An object. And then I was in a city, Manhattan, surrounded by shops and shoppers. I started making real objects. So in a way, I had 'things' that I could give to a commercial gallery.

Pretty soon after I arrived I got the feeling that no one in New York was interested in the kind of work that I do. It's a pretty cruel place—everyone seems so consumed with ambition and delusions. Chelsea can be depressing, like a chicken factory. The galleries are packed in there, churning out eggs for the market. Even the artist-run spaces participate in art fairs and seem to show the same artists. I hated New York for a while and organized *CLUSTER*



Katie Holten. *The Best's to Come*, 2007–2008.  
Ink and acrylic on newspaper, wood, and  
chicken wire, 3 x 3 x 3 m.  
Installation view at the Villa Merkel, Esslingen,  
Germany, June 8–August 5, 2008.  
Photo: Die Arge Lola, Stuttgart

for Participant Inc. in the Lower East Side. It was a way to just blow off steam and invite people to take part—the kind of project that I was used to doing in Europe.

**MMH:** In 2004, you said that randomness, failure and research were essential to your work. Has your thinking about this changed in the past few years?

**KH:** Not really. My friend, the painter Helen O'Leary, likes to quote Beckett: "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."

Over the last year or so I've been making drawings from memory. Trying to draw the world map from memory and cities. They are obviously a little wonky and 'failures.'

I've always been an amateur—making explorations in different fields (math, physics, botany, architecture, gardening...). I've always been interested in working in-between different fields. Most people are quite specialized at what they do—we live in a world of specializations. I have always preferred to investigate many different areas, as they're all related.

**MMH:** Your recent sculptures have become larger and more elaborate (such as *The Best's To Come* a 10-foot diameter globe), while still being handcrafted with recycled materials. What have you learned from making these and from the critical reaction they have received?

**KH:** *The Best's to Come* was made especially for the VAN HORN gallery space in Dusseldorf. I'd been making a lot of small globes and we thought it would be interesting to make one huge globe that would fill the gallery (so the viewer would have to confront the planet—it would be right there in their face). The piece was basically the largest sphere we could fit inside the room. I couldn't have made it on my own and a local artist, Maren Klemmer, devised a structure that the two of us constructed over two weeks in the space. It was pretty intense and strange to construct such a large object. Although I have worked collaboratively on various projects, this was the first time I'd had someone work with me on making an art object. I'm very hands-on. All my work is made myself. I haven't had studio assistants until this year and rarely have assistants help me install. It's always been important for me that I construct everything myself.

Then in 2007, I made a life-size tree, complete with roots at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis. It measured 5 x 4.5 x 4.5 meters. This is the largest thing that I've ever made and the most complex.

It was fun to make such large objects. But then the problem is storage. Everything else I've done has been so temporary, ephemeral or small enough to sell. These things are more complicated and take up a lot of space. This is where the galleries come in—they're able to help me deal with all these problems.

My projects always take on a form that I feel best expresses what it is I'm dealing with at the time. I think these large, bombastic pieces were a reaction to the political climate at the time. They're like loud screams. Maybe now that there are so many 'green' shows popping up I can stop screaming and get back to smaller-scale works.

For more information, visit [katieholten.com](http://katieholten.com).



Katie Holten. *Globe (III)*, 2006–2008.  
Ink and acrylic on molded newspaper, c. 9 x 9 x 9 in.  
Installation view at Klemens Gasser & Tanja  
Grunert, Inc., New York.  
Photo: Martin Seck

*Rockscans*

BY MAEGAN HILL-CARROLL



(above) *Rock VIII, 2008*

(right) *Rock VII, 2008*





(left) *Rock III, 2008*  
(above) *Rock VI, 2008*

I am interested in places where wilderness and city intersect. These landscapes of transition illustrate our complex relationship with the natural environment. *Rocks I-VIII* are pieces of slag, aggregate and stone that have been collected from sites of transition across Canada and the United States. Scanning the rocks using various backgrounds and techniques fully removes them from the natural world. They become abstract microcosms of the changing surfaces of the earth.

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Maegan Hill-Carroll was born and raised in Winnipeg, Canada, where she completed her BFA at the University of Manitoba. She has traveled across North America photographing transitional landscapes. She currently lives in Los Angeles, where she is an MFA candidate in photography at UCLA.

**“The Oxbow National Park” in Iowa**

BY MATTHIAS MERKEL HESS

Severe flooding along the Iowa River in 1993 and 2008 is a reason to redefine our relationship with this river and welcome frequent flooding rather than attempt to contain the river with dams and channelization. This proposal suggests that sections of the river can be turned into a national park with a variety of uses including tourism, hunting & fishing, wildlife reserves and flood prevention. Building upon previous conservation efforts, The Oxbow National Park would be Iowa’s first national park and a new way of understanding and living with the Iowa River.

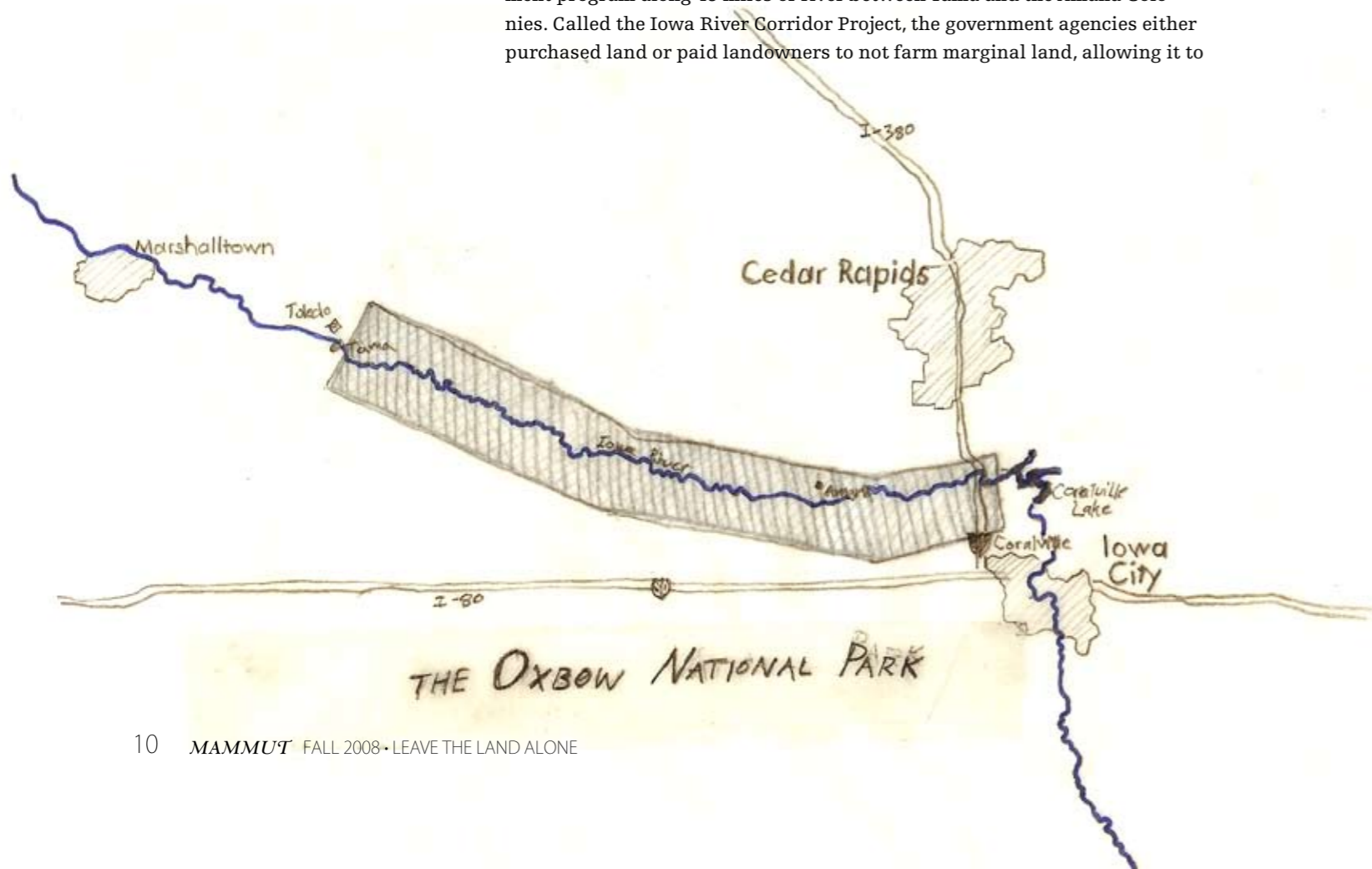
**BACKGROUND**

The Iowa River is a 300-mile-long tributary of the Mississippi River that flows from North-Central to Southeast Iowa. The river is a source of drinking water, recreation and a conduit for treated wastewater and agricultural runoff. In some stretches, the river has been channelized and as shown by satellite imagery on Google Maps, agricultural land frequently abuts the riverbanks.

The river has a number of dams, most notably the Coralville Dam completed in 1958 and managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Initially authorized by the Flood Control Act of 1938, the Coralville Dam spillway has been overtopped only twice: in 1993 and 2008, allowing an uncontrolled amount of water to head downstream towards the towns of Iowa City and Coralville.

The 2008 flood damage has not been tallied, but the river crested just short of the 500-year floodplain in Iowa City, causing damage to homes, farmland, businesses and 20 buildings on the University of Iowa campus. The 1993 floods crested a few feet lower and did not damage as many buildings, but still resulted in millions in damage payments for structures and crop losses.

Following the 1993 floods, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) initiated a floodplain management program along 45 miles of river between Tama and the Amana Colonies. Called the Iowa River Corridor Project, the government agencies either purchased land or paid landowners to not farm marginal land, allowing it to



A map of Iowa highlighting the Iowa River and Cedar River watershed. The Iowa River is to the south.



Thomas Cole, *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow*, 1836

return to marshes, sloughs and bottomlands that act as wildlife preserves, natural water filters and storm-water reservoirs. Various government agencies now own 12,000 acres in this area and a total of 50,000 acres are under management.

**THE OXBOW NATIONAL PARK**

In 1836 Thomas Cole painted *The Oxbow*, which illustrated the confrontation between wilderness and civilization in the Connecticut River Valley. The Iowa River valley (and almost every other river in the United States) have echoed this conflict between human development and the natural world. The name of the park is inspired by this painting and by simply recognizing that rivers are too strong for us to control completely. By welcoming bends in the river and oxbow lakes that result from a change of course, we could redefine how we coexist with a river.

This park could be proposed for almost any river in the U.S. but a few salient points stand out for using the Iowa River Valley. Namely, the two severe flooding events in the past 20 years, the already-in-place Iowa River Corridor Project, and the need to replace the farm economy that surrounds the river. Tourism is one option to replace farming in flood-prone bottomlands.

Iowa has one of the lowest percentages of land owned by the state and federal government, but as evidenced by the usage of state parks, there is a great demand for these public spaces (see sidebar). In addition, the National Park Service only manages two parks in Iowa, The Effigy Mounds National Monument in Northeast Iowa, and the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site in Eastern Iowa. Recognizing this lack of public parks and the subsequent name recognition that comes with a National Park is one reason why the Iowa River Valley needs to become more than just an area managed by the FWS or NRCS.

As a restored natural area, the park would offer additional protection against flooding by acting as a natural sponge. Also, an increased buffer between agricultural areas and waterways would help filter and improve the quality of water in the river.

In addition, a National Park could encompass a wide variety of uses including:

- » Hunting and fishing
- » Scenic trails and campgrounds
- » Wildlife restoration of prairies, forests, aquatic and riparian areas
- » Bird watching
- » Reintroduction of animals such as bison
- » Interpretive tours of historical and natural areas

**THE FUTURE**

This proposal, while very general, recognizes the power of National Park branding and usage that would inevitably result from improved access along the Iowa River. As 2008 shows, years with heavy rainfall will result in widespread flooding causing property and crop damage. Moving cropland and structures out of the floodplain and turning the area into a park is a way to make a transition toward a model that includes economic, recreation and natural interests. We can’t fully control the river and should instead celebrate the variable courses and oxbows it will take because surely, it will flood again.

**PUBLIC ACCESS**

- » 1.04% of Iowa’s land is parks, forests or grasslands owned by the state and federal government, which ranks 49 out of 50 states.<sup>1</sup>
- » 70.8% of Iowa is cropland, the highest percentage of any state.<sup>2</sup>
- » The National Park Services owns 2,713 acres in Iowa. Only Illinois (13 acres) and Rhode Island (5 acres) have less. In 2006, 225,179 recreation visits were recorded on those 2,713 acres, putting Iowa at 45th in NPS visits.<sup>3</sup>
- » Approximately 0.2% of Iowa (68,000 acres) is state parks and recreation areas. In 2005, 13,580,000 visits were made to these areas, which put Iowa at 16th in number of visits to state parks and recreation areas.<sup>4</sup>
- » In 2005, travelers in Iowa spent almost \$5.5 billion, which ranked 33rd out of 50 states in tourism spending.<sup>5</sup>

1. National Wilderness Institute, 1995.  
 2. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Conservation Service, Summary Report, 2003.  
 3. U.S. National Park Service, Land Resources Board, 2006.  
 4. National Association of State Park Directors, 2006 Annual Information Exchange.  
 5. Travel Industry Association of America, Impact of Travel on State Economies, 2005

Mammut co-editor Matthias Merkel Hess grew up in Iowa City and is a sixth-generation Iowa. He is a graduate student in art at the University of California, Los Angeles.



LEAVE  
THE  
LAND  
ALONE

## Leave the Land Alone

BY ANDREW BERARDINI

I can see it now. A little plane high in the stratosphere, winging its way across a creamy blue sky, big sky country kind of sky, Montana or New Mexico or some place that people sometimes call “God’s Country,” and we wait looking up, our heads tilted back at uncomfortable angles, one hand forming an impromptu and ineffective sun visor. Or maybe we aren’t waiting, maybe we’re buying groceries or washing our car, drying it with a soft old t-shirt, or we’re hiding behind the wood shed, tucked into a tiny ball, weeping. The plane putters along, an insect on the vast expanse of the heavens. Then we see the smoke. The first letter comes shooting out the back end of the little plane, the smoke triple its wingspan. And the letters each twice as tall as the Empire State Building. The little two-banger aircraft swoops and climbs, cutting the letters across the firmament, spewing its terse words over the landscape.

We stop what we’re doing, steal glances at the sky. We wait a moment to see what it’s saying. We let our chocolate chip cookie dough ice cream sweat in our brown paper bags, we let the droplets dry and mar the fine finish of the glossy acrylic contours of the car, we look up from our tears, waiting for the word, yearning for a message, this message from a benevolent God, on how to live, why to continue on. Breath is held. And the little airplane putt-putts a little too slowly, the letters taking just a little too long, the faint of heart look away and just try to glance up ever twenty seconds or so as they drive home, especially before the ice cream becomes just a plain old cream.

But the whole affair is ephemeral, the first letter already dissolving while it’s being written and only faint as the finishing toot posts a period at the end of statement. A declaration that if read one way seems plaintive, a cry in child’s voice during an anti-littering commercial drive; or read another, as an authoritative edict from on high, Big Brother, or maybe the tightlipped paternalism of just plain old dad, exasperated but strong, telling us in not-so-many words to knock it off.

What does it say?

Stretched across the sky it says one profoundly simple if not tearjerkingly, roll-on-the-ground funny one-liner, especially for anybody who’s spent a little time with Earth Art and, of course, has a good sense of humor.

It says: “Leave the Land Alone.”

Simple. Four simple words. The only problem with this vision is that it doesn’t exist. A work of fiction. As far as I know or can tell from my research, this piece was never pulled off. The great unrealized piece by Bruce Nauman. In a 2005 publication of the artist’s writings the editor’s had this to say about *Untitled*, 1969:

Nauman wrote this humorously terse proposal piece for an “earth art” exhibition (there is no record of specifically which

one) in 1969. Nauman’s instructions, which he recalls may have been telegraphed or otherwise mailed to the exhibition’s organizers (the original text has been lost), were to be executed in skywriting. The piece, however, was never realized—perhaps for lack of funds or because it was not taken seriously.

I reprint the editor’s note in its entirety because it does everything an editor’s note shouldn’t. It is vague, unknowledgeable, full of what-if’s and half-remembered recollections. And furthermore, it describes a piece that was never realized.

Bruce Nauman’s *Untitled*, 1969, or, as it is known by its more delightfully common epithet, “Leave the Land Alone” is probably the best piece of Land Art to come out of the whole misunderstood movement of hard-headed idealists and hallucinatory desert wanderers. Earth Art or Land Art—it’s called both by those who like things in boxes—has enjoyed a recent foray into fabulous acceptability, which to paraphrase Shaw, perhaps did not go through its intervening period of appreciation. Perhaps it’s the same with Bruce Nauman—one feels like such an ass to join the institutional chorus of professional accepters and chime in for art that by its very nature is unacceptable, if you actually thought about it.

For Earth Art to fall into this travesty is hardly a sad moment for yours truly. Though I’ve oohed-and-awed along with the rest of the art tourists in appreciating big things plunked in far-flung and inhospitable landscapes, something always smacked of megalomania to me in these pharaonic structures built for eternity.

One of my own few brushes with some of the more monumental of the desert monuments was with James Turrell’s Roden Crater. When I was commissioned to write a piece about it for an Italian newspaper, Turrell’s studio insisted on being paid an exorbitant sum of money to use any picture and furthermore to have final edit on any text. I didn’t know Quakers to act like such militant control freaks. Instead, I received pictures through another avenue and added a note to my piece about Turrell’s studio’s attempted chiseling.

Although Turrell’s work has easily entered museums despite all his attempts to get out of them, he’s only a second-string hero for young artists. The grand prophet of the movement turned out to be Robert Smithson, who’s regular writings in *Artforum* have been rebound together and probably serve as the most common book on artist’s bookshelves. Smithson’s hallucinatory, almost incomprehensible, and startlingly beautiful writings on his practice make the short-lived artist the thing of legend for an academia looking for a hero with ready-made theory. Especially if read like one might read John Ashberry’s poetry, like listening to music, the babble and occasionally hard-edged abstraction thrown into Smithson’s writing make it sound something between an old-fashioned sculptor scratching away at a hunk of marble next to a burbling brook, but not far from the sound of crashing metal in an accident on a nearby freeway.



All this talk of Land Art is a way to get back to Nauman's unrealized skywriting. With four little words he punctures all of the self-seriousness, admirable or not, of Land Art. In a way, Land Art is one of the last great stands of modernism, that a single individual could radically alter the landscape, that the old traditions had failed and artists needed to "make it new," and though Modernism took many different paths, it also had its spiritual dimension. Though these monuments do what monuments only do so well, instill in you the strange power of its size and scope, our current generation of artists prize the opposite, a case made in "Unmonumental," the inaugural show in the New Museum's sparkly new building.

It would be hard for contemporary artists to be so bold about using landscape as a blank canvas as did Smithson and Turrell, to be radically shaped for the whims of art. But Land Art was born when gas was cheap, the EPA was yet to be inaugurated, and the modern environmental movement was merely in its infancy. No one, once again for better or worse, can act so cavalierly about nature, about landscape, anymore. To do so would appear like all the corporations and robber barons who got us into this particularly nasty environmental conundrum in the first place, starting with pesticides like DDT and ending in our moment with global warming. Landscape, especially for Americans, is still one of those topics that can and maybe should still be an important part of our ways of seeing.

The scions of Land Art aren't radically altering the landscape with giant desert temples or twisted jetties, but in more subtle gestures, sometimes not touching the landscape at all. Though it walks the line between art and science project, the Center for Land Use Interpretation in Los Angeles, started by artist Matthew Coolidge, doesn't bother or attempt to alter the landscape, but rather it studies how we, humans, have already done so. In the CLUI database alongside Smithson's Spiral Jetty, Turrell's Roden Crater, and Nancy Holt's Sun Tunnels (all in Utah) are also the Topaz War Relocation Center, a WWII Japanese internment camp, and Iosepa, a Polynesian Mormon start-up town that moved there to be closer to the center of the church, but failed and disappeared after a breakout of leprosy sent most of the community packing back to Hawaii. CLUI, in its indexical and archival mission, teases out all of the ambiguous moments of human interaction with landscape, under a mandate that gives Earth Art and internment camps the same weight. Other young and youngish artists working with nature or the landscape all seem to exist in his borderland between art and science experiment, many of which are based in Los Angeles, from Andrea Zittel's Hi-Desert Test Sites to one of Fritz Haeg's Edible Animal Sundown Studio Estates. If artists are using land these days, they do so with the environmental and sustainability movement at their backs.

All of these acts, interventions, and indices are still humans altering landscape, this time without solely aesthetic purposes but with a healthy dose of activism. For me, sometimes these often humorless gestures err on the side of science experiments and just plain activism (rather than art that plays with activism) and I'm brought back to Nauman's unrealized project. Leave the Land Alone. A plea, an order, a simple declaration. An ambiguous joke and a serious comment, just as bad-ass and monumental as any of the hardheaded Land Artists of the '70s, and environmentally savvy as any of the current crop. Still unrealized, Nauman's four words can satisfy everybody with a carbon footprint of zero.

Andrew Berardini has written for *Art Review*, *Artforum*, *Paper Monument*, *The Phillip Review*, *La Stampa*, *MOUSSE Italia*, *Afterall* and *X-Tra*. He has taught at the Southern California Institute of Architecture and is an editor for *Check-In Architecture*. For more, visit his blog at [theexpandedfield.com](http://theexpandedfield.com).

## Natural Pool, Hot Springs, South Dakota

BY MANYA FOX



This image was taken on a road trip to South Dakota in late fall of 2007. I am attracted to how water is used, especially to fit the desires of American's leisure time. I am also attracted to the name of the town—Hot Springs—and how that name connotes a history of entertainment and recreation having to do with the hot springs. This image is part of a larger project having to do with the American landscape, people's desire to commune with nature, and the visual disconnect between the fantasy of nature and the reality of what it looks like.

*Natural Pool, Hot Springs, South Dakota*, 30" x 40" C-print, 2007

Based in Los Angeles, Manya Fox has been photographing subtle complications in the American landscape since the age of 15. She received her BA in photography from Bard College and her MFA in photography from UCLA. In the past year she has been in group shows in New York, California and New Mexico. She continues to focus on issues surrounding the American experience.



## Proyecto Península II

BY JOSUÉ CRUZ

*Proyecto Península II* is the continuation of an expedition initiated in 2000 that consisted of walking the entire coastal zone of the Baja California Peninsula (more than four thousand kilometers) to make a photo and video registry of the nature and forms of life of its settlers. The project was reinitiated in 2008 in order to produce a new registry that serves as a comparative parameter for changes in the last eight years, to document the impact that these changes have had on the ecosystems and groups of population that inhabit the region, and to obtain more documentation than can be spread in different forms of media.

The principal themes are the relationship with nature, the culture of conservation of these natural spaces, and our identity with them.

We have walked for two months, covering 700 km and seven out of 35 stages of the route. We have encountered gorgeous natural landscapes with a great wealth of flora and fauna, of which a large number are endemic—unique to the planet and perhaps the universe.

The greatest obstacles are rough roads, fatigue, thirst, and temperatures in the sun of more than 65 degrees Celsius.

The cultural wealth of the state includes communities of the first settlers like Cacapá and Juanak (the people of the river), the languages, the styles of life next to the sea, and the coastal fishermen. Also, there are the

great border cities such as Tijuana, Tecate, Mexicali and Ensenada, places where a great culture originates that is a mix from many states of Mexico and of the United States. Very singular places, by their proximity to the United States they have many social processes like migration, trans-culturalization, commerce, etc.

When I walk among the stones, on the sand, among the shrubs, in the desert, the beach, and the mountain, I feel the creation of the universe. Lamentably, our new lifestyle destroys all of nature. It has to change, it has to return—it is not necessary to go by the way that only fits humans, because before arriving the journey will be over for us.

Translated from Spanish by Matthias Merkel Hess

Proyecto Peninsula II Participants:

JOSUÉ CRUZ DEL CORRAL, a visual artist, studied at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. He lives in La Paz and dedicates his time to activities with the environment, conservation and documentation.

ALFONSO CARDONA is a documentary photographer of the Baja California peninsula.

MARIANA LEDESMA is a student of alternative tourism at the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur. She is interested in the flora of the peninsula.

The project is funded by governmental and nongovernmental organizations, including the Fondo Nacional Para la Cultura y las Artes en el Programa a Fomento y Coinversiones Culturales, El Instituto Sudcaliforniano de Cultura, Instituto de Radio y Televisión Canal 8, La Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Baja California de Baja California Sur.

## Other Towers

BY ISAAC RESNIKOFF

*Other Towers*, from which these images are excerpted, is a book which repeats a single and obvious visual idea (a thing, taller than wide, repeated twice = twin towers) over and over. The examples presented here come mainly from a botanical garden, but the project includes buildings, body parts, artworks, clouds, furniture, etc. The repetition is a post-traumatic stress disorder, but it is also wishful thinking—a naive optimism repeated till it's true.

*Other Towers* will be completed in the fall of 2008.

Isaac Resnikoff is a Los Angeles-based artist. His work, which is political, sculptural and wholeheartedly American, is generally made out of wood. As such, his contribution to *Mammut* is a bit of an aberration, but in a good way. He will receive an MFA from UCLA in 2009, and is represented by Fleisher/Ollman Gallery.



## Santa Ana River Trail Native Food Project (SART-NFP): A Proposal

BY LISA TUCKER

Biking to work along the Santa Ana River Trail has given me time to consider some of its quirks. The entrance I take is on Waterman Avenue in San Bernardino, with a path that winds around the 215 and 10 freeways and along a rather barren, sandy bed. I'm amused by the concrete tables and benches for picnickers where I have yet to see anyone sit because the climate is so hot, dry, and windy. In fact, the whole trail feels like the arid desert, with an occasional stream of water appearing and then disappearing into the rocks. None of the benches are near the few trees along the path—just miles and miles of sandy, predominantly plant-free soil—uninviting furnishings within an inhospitable terrain.

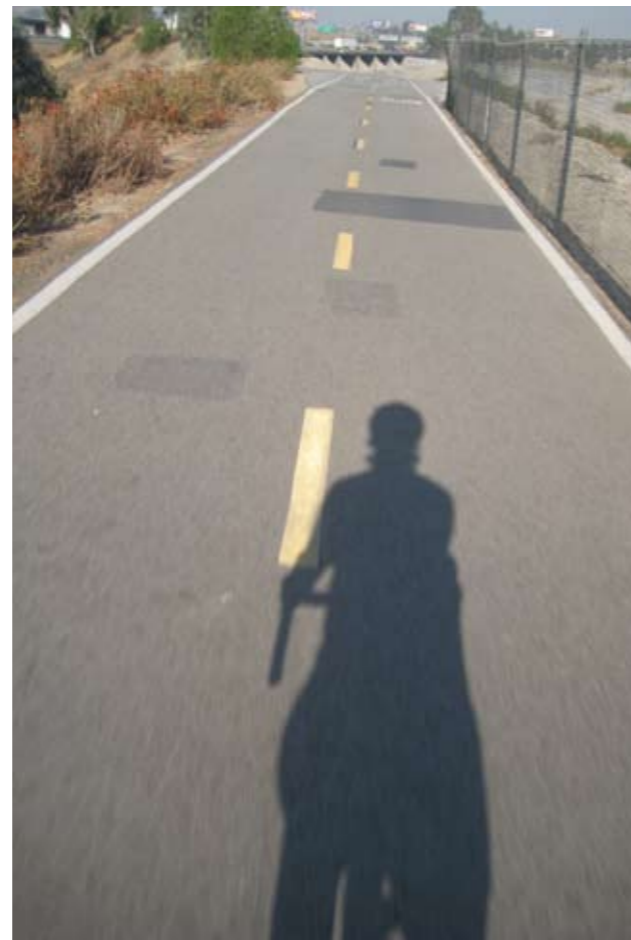
### OTHER INHABITANTS, OR JUST PLAIN "THE OTHER"

The homeless who live in or near the Riverbed are another curious presence. They usually clear out by 6 or 7 a.m., but periodically I ride early enough to meet some of them. One morning on the way to work, I was reminded of the homeless folk who attend art openings at the gallery and museum where I work in Downtown Riverside. Since security officers have been hired for receptions, I haven't seen as many of the downtrodden, but when they come there are a few who line their pockets with cubes of cheese and other buffet fare. Why would someone who gets free food from community services want squares of cheddar? There are two reasons, assures my social-worker husband. First is the thrill of taking something that is not yours, or, in this case, taking more than is socially acceptable. The other is variety. I pondered the luxury of food diversity. I never want to see edamame again after buying an industrial size box from Costco three years ago. I'd imagine it's the same for those who rely on soup kitchens, though doubtful it's edamame they despise. Riverside and San Bernardino County food banks and soup kitchens don't have the resources to keep large quantities of refrigerated goods stocked, which means less fresh milk products, fruits and vegetables. Food found on the shelves is most likely processed, dry packed or canned, according to Catherine Mailliard, director of family outreach at the Community Food Pantry. At present it's been hard for local pantries to keep up with

demand for even the non-perishable items. Donations are down and the number of residents receiving food stamps in San Bernardino and Riverside counties rose considerably this year. Food stamps are rarely adequate and many recipients rely on the generosity of other organizations in addition to what is provided by the county.

### PROPOSAL

Contemplating the empty picnic tables, rarity of vegetation along the bike path, and need of novel fresh food, I devised a plan. Why not plant gardens of native edibles and trees along the trail? I enjoy plant propagation and could easily harvest seeds and clone existing California flora to plant. Even more interesting to me is the notion of a guerilla garden, enlisting the help of cyclists and those who live along the river. An unauthorized reclaiming of county land by those who live or use the site in order to bring back native growth, which will in turn feed those in need, has the makings of something positively transgressive. The project could begin as soon as the lack of heat allows seeds to germinate and we get some fall or winter rain. A plentitude of native plants in other locations will make the process practically cost free, which also appeals to me. Romantic scenes of nearby residents and cyclists sitting at shade covered tables, eating fresh greens floods my mind, until I question why there are so few plants and trees to begin with.



### SCARY FOOD

The river has a complicated history, necessitating pause when thinking about growing food in the area. First of all, it's a dry riverbed most of the time due to the Seven Oaks and Prado dams. Secondly, western Riverside County contains an industrial liquid waste dump just above the river in the Jurupa Mountains. Between 1956 and 1973, 34 million gallons of hazardous waste was deposited in what is called the Stringfellow Acid Pits. In the past, when the area flooded, the waste ran into the river. On March 6, 1978, rainwater containing acids and thirty known carcinogens flowed down Pyrite Street, under the Pomona Freeway, onto Glen Avon Elementary School, and then out to the Santa Ana Riverbed. There are stories of elementary school children playing in the foam generated by waste materials, making beards for their faces and throwing toxic fluffy snowballs at one another.

Although my portion of the trail is north of the industrial waste site, it meanders through a Riverside County landfill on one side of the river with refineries on the other, not to mention the affected water table. Feeding those in need is good. Poisoning the hungry with carcinogenic *nopales* is bad. To avoid this conundrum, the second portion of the proposal includes do-it-yourself soil/water testing and plant tissue testing. Within the site for each garden will be a display with test results. As I ride through to work, I will collect samples, record the data on-site and also on the project website (<http://sartfood.blogspot.com>). I'm working with a chemist to develop a reliable DIY system, as well as hoping to use resources at local colleges and universities. Once a week, the plants will be tested to determine their level of safety in regard to specific toxins previously found in the riverbed. This could be safer than the food offered in local markets, which have no testing system in place.

### WHAT MAKES THIS ART?

The practice of molding the environment has its roots in earthworks, and collaborating with non-art entities is an important component of socially-engaged art. Affecting the environment both physically and socially appeals to me on a conceptual level as an artist. The changes made to the river trail create the artwork, along with the process of building and maintaining the gardens by local cyclists and other residents. Attention drawn to the contamination of the site will be part of the project as well. The California College of the Arts in Oakland calls this "new genre" public art, where the community and formal art practice overlap. I see it as a type of performance that works better in the out-of-gallery spaces. This type of work usually annoys people who try to define it as either activism or art. It's really a hybrid activity, involving those inside and outside the art establishment. Writings by University of California San Diego critic and art historian Grant Kester and "new genre public art" programs like CCA underscore the changing perception of art. The Santa Ana River Trail Native Food Project is part of this evolving geography.

Lisa Tucker has shown at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, High Energy Constructs, Raid Projects and in 2007 received an MFA from University of California, Irvine. During her studies, she organized the conference, Bioneering: Hybrid Investigations of Food.

### Riverside County Food Stamp Recipients

May 2007 > 31,017

May 2008 > 40,590

### San Bernardino County Food Stamp Recipients

May 2007 > 46,123

May 2008 > 57,962

Source: Riverside County Department of Public Social Services and San Bernardino Transitional Assistance Department

## Mine Pigment Drawings

BY EBEN GOFF

While living in Butte, Montana, Eben Goff collected rocks from the abandoned mines around the city, crushed them into pigments and used them to make drawings on paper. With a color palette mostly derived from iron oxide, his series depicts the crumbling, eroded landscapes of the mines. Using the local material is a simple gesture of connection to a land with many layers of history, including its most recent as a copper mine.

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A Seattle native, Eben Goff moved to Butte, Montana in 2003 as the city's first artist-in-residence. He will receive an MFA from UCLA in 2009. —MMH



(top) *Mine Pigment Drawing #5*, 2006



(bottom) *Mine Pigment Drawing #2*, 2006



## Designing the 4th Street Bikeway

BY JOSEPH PRICHARD

Los Angeles is a car town, a generally agreed-upon truism that few Angelenos would think to dispute. In the popular imagination the act of driving itself defines the city. As the British architectural critic Reynar Banham once famously said “I learned to drive in order to read Los Angeles in the original.” While such a comment is not without warrant, a strictly auto-centric understanding of Los Angeles leaves out a lot. In her essay *The Fifth Ecology*, Margaret Crawford argues that the car in Los Angeles is more than just a method of getting from A to B, it “functions as a medium, transforming our experience of the landscape we are traveling through... the automobile distances us from the world outside our sealed capsule while restructuring it and abstracting it.” Of course the automobile not only separates us from our environment, it wreaks havoc upon it. As gas prices soar, air quality worsens, and perpetual gridlock descends on our city, more and more people are awakening to the fact that something has to give.

Imagine a Los Angeles where the car is no longer the dominant mode of travel, a place where people interact with their environment rather than just speeding through it, a city where cycling, walking, and public transportation are seen as viable methods of transport. For many people this city already exists. The Los Angeles MTA boasts the third-largest ridership of any American city and LA’s cycling community is a small but vocal group. Despite all this, rehabilitation of Los Angeles’s auto-centric mind-set remains a daunting goal. Large-scale institutional change, even under the best of circumstances, is a slow, incremental process. Faced with such a Herculean challenge, it’s easy to lose hope. Small efforts, however, are already starting to chip away at the car’s hegemonic hold on Los Angeles. These are not attempts at large-scale urban restructuring (although those are under way as well) but rather small personal undertakings aimed at changing the way people think about transportation and the urban environment. It is in this light that the 4th Street Bikeway Project should be understood.

The project began with the simple goal of encouraging bicycle use in Los Angeles. Instead of merely exhorting Angelenos to take up cycling, I wanted to create something that would make such a move easier and more enjoyable. To do this I focused on the role of signage. Effective bike route signage needs to accomplish two goals: make motorists aware and mindful of cyclists, and provide useful navigational information. LA’s current bike signage takes on the first problem (with mixed results). It all but ignores the second.

For the project I picked an existing bike route as a test case. The Fourth Street Bikeway is a five-mile stretch of road that winds through several LA neighborhoods

paralleling the major traffic artery of Wilshire Boulevard and passing numerous public transportation hubs. There are a fair number of signs noting its status as a bike route but several important aspects of the route remain unsigned. The plan was to create a new signage system for this route that would fill in some of those gaps, ideally making the route a safer and more attractive option for cyclists. This system would not be a replacement for current signage but rather an added layer of information on top of it.

What I hoped to achieve was not just the design of an improved signage system, but also the creation of an open framework that would allow cyclists to expand the system autonomously or even replicate it elsewhere. I began with three broad goals in mind:

- >> To challenge the notion of LA as an auto-dependent city and encourage cycling as a practical mode of transportation.
- >> To provide a new way to experience Los Angeles.
- >> To create tools that empower average people to reshape the urban environment.

From the outset it was clear that community participation would be crucial to the success of the project. I hoped to involve LA’s cycling community in determining what information the new system should communicate and how that information could be most effectively presented. I organized a series of three workshops with LA cyclists (recruited through a project blog and appeals to local cycling groups) in which we engaged in a series of form-generating exercises to help answer these questions. Through these exercises, ideas were developed in the workshops that I then translated into refined, finished pieces of design. These pieces were brought back into the workshop environment to spark further discussion and the process was repeated. Working collaboratively we mapped the route, prioritized and structured information, created and tested sign prototypes, and finally arrived at the structure of a new signage system.

The system that resulted from these workshops broke information into four categories each with a corresponding sign type:

- >> **Caution**—designed to alert motorists to the presence of cyclists, and warn bikers about hazards.
- >> **Navigation**— provides basic navigational information such as route destination, distances to major cross-streets etc.
- >> **Connections**—attempts to integrate the route into the larger transportation web by pointing out connections to public transit and other bike routes.
- >> **Points of Interest**—highlights sights of potential interest such as bike shops, restaurants, and post offices.

For each set of signs I designed a prototype for permanent route signage. More importantly I also designed a set of templates that could be downloaded from the project's website and used by bikers to create simple route signage on their own. These templates ranged from small signs that could be printed on standard 8.5" x 11" paper to larger stencil templates. The series of icons I designed for the system were also put into a free typeface that cyclists could download to create new types of signage as the need arose. To provide an additional set of tools I created a newsletter that contained cut-out sign templates, a route-map, pull-out posters advertising the project, and articles explaining the new signage system and the process of its creation.

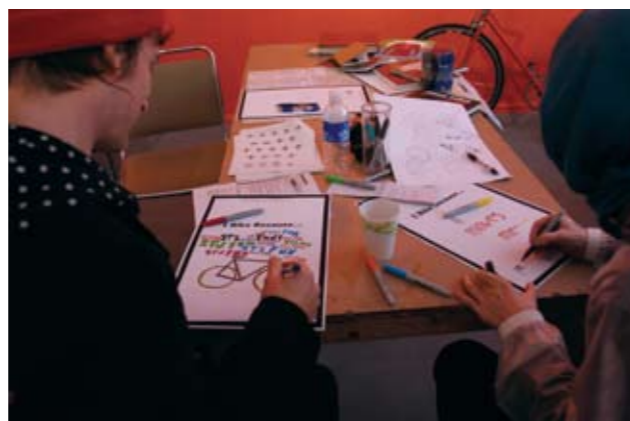
At this moment the 4th Street Bikeway project is still in its infancy. The creation of the signage system and tools for its dissemination are only the first steps. Much still needs to be done to publicize the project, test its effectiveness, and encourage cyclists to continue the process of implementing and expanding the system. The ultimate success or failure of the project will be determined by its collaborative nature. If the tools I've created do not prove flexible or useful enough then the project will quickly fade away. No doubt revisions will have to be made to the framework as the project moves from the realm of the theoretical to the pragmatic.

Clearly an undertaking of such modest scope is not the cure for LA's auto-mania. But in providing the tools and opportunity for Angelenos to pick up a bike and start reshaping their urban environment, I hope this project will be seen as a small step in the right direction.

For more information visit [4thstreetbikeway.com](http://4thstreetbikeway.com) and [semioticsoftheride.blogspot.com](http://semioticsoftheride.blogspot.com).

Joseph Prichard is a graphic designer, typographer & contrarian living in Hollywood, California. He holds an MFA in graphic design from the California Institute of the Arts and a BFA in film from the USC School of Cinema/Television. He wishes he had more time to ride his bike.

Thanks to everyone who assisted in this project, especially the workshop participants, the CalArts graduate graphic design faculty, Self-Help Graphics, The Bicycle Kitchen, The Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition, Lowell Abellon & Marie Massa.



(from top to bottom)

Workshop participants discuss ideas for signage. (Photo: Lowell Abellon)

Workshop participants brainstorm ideas for publicizing the Bikeway. (Photo: Lowell Abellon)

Two examples of the downloadable templates that enable cyclists to create their own signs.

A selection of icons from the 4th Street Bikeway signage system.

## Flight

A SHORT STORY BY NATALIA JASTER

Noelle doesn't like the look of the man. His red t-shirt reeks of sour yogurt. A grape juice-like birthmark is nestled at the center of his chin. His teeth are sharp as filed nails, and yellow. He curls his knuckles a lot. He walks with a limp that seems more hostile than sad. Strange thing is, while her father talks with him, the farmer's gaze pins Noelle every few minutes as if she's the one who can't be trusted.

It is Wednesday. Noelle missed the bus again and had to call her father from the parking lot at school. His office is nearby, but that's not the only reason she dialed his number. Her mother grunts, makes her inconvenience known, complains to a higher degree about other drivers, when she's taken out of her day. But her father mostly stays quiet. Noelle prefers silence in the car. That his office is close by is a good excuse and a good tactic to use on a man who feeds on logic.

They'd traveled the same route as the school bus because it was the most direct.

Her father is a lawyer. The farmer is a client who called about two miles into the drive home. "Gotta make a stop," her father had said. And that was all.

It is not a detour, however. The farm is located along the bus route. Noelle had recognized the place from the times she'd passed by it on the way to school.

At the top of a small hill is a green house with a white front porch. A glossy truck and an ancient, lopsided—flat tire?—sports car sit in the driveway. At the hip of the house is a maypole, or Noelle thinks it's a maypole. She stares at the post, also painted white, and the brown streamers.

A large dog with cream fur sleeps soundly beside the maypole.

There is a spot near the house where a square patch of dirt sits exposed, with brick framing the spot. Noelle thinks it might be a small garden. A little space for a person who is not a farmer to plant a few seeds, tulips or some herbs. But she sees the patch has been unused since it was made. Abandoned, she guesses. And maybe a waste of time for this strange man with the reeking shirt. A man who seems to have much more to look after.

At the western foot of this hill is a white box of a building. A barn, a factory, a warehouse—it could be any of these. The windows are close to the roof, too high for anyone to look out of, and there is a set of wide double doors at the heart of the box. A wire fence branches out from the sides of the building, winding around the place and surrounding an outdoor area Noelle can't see because of the shrubbery tangled into the strips of metal.

Near the fence is where they'd parked and gotten out to meet the man.

The sun pinches Noelle's back. The air is clogged with a gooey texture that sticks to her arms like adhesive

on the back of a stamp. A fly twitches. Noelle hears *boc, boc, boc* coming from inside the white box. And something else roaring from in there too. It is like a motor, or a drill welling into the ground, or a saw biting into the stomach of a tree. A worker in bleach-spotted pants comes out of nowhere, carrying a chicken upside down. The chicken pelts out sharp noises like a round of bullets while its wings flap, its body quivers. The man dissolves into the double doors.

One time, when she was a child, she hung upside down like that. On the monkey bars, to see how long she could. Her nose bled.

"Sometimes he has to snip their beaks off to get 'em to stop pecking."

She catches the farmer looking at her again.

Her father's chuckles are quick and short. "She won't understand," he says. And Noelle thinks it would be nice if her father covered her shoulder with his arm and pulled her close to him. But perhaps fifteen is too old for that.

Her father tries to bring the conversation back to its original purpose—something about weekend visitations. Noelle steps away. She wants to inch closer, see what's going on in the building and behind the wire-gated area.

"You gotta get 'em to stop pecking. Otherwise they'll hack each other up."

"She won't understand."

Noelle ignores her father. She locates a lump of white by the fence and kneels. The chicken's wings are crushed, balled up like foil. The head is gone, bitten off by something that must have dragged it there. Blood cakes its feathers. Noelle plucks one and puts it in her pocket for a souvenir.

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It is dawn, and so Noelle's parents will not wake up and catch her. The back of the house faces an expanse of land. Somewhere beyond the thicket of trees at the back, a fence dictates the property line. Noelle likes that you can't see that fence from the back door.

She locates the sycamore at the far point of the yard, where the trees start. The sycamore is tall, with a slim backbone and a head of branches. Going up, the branches become more compact. Noelle grabs a bough and digs her nails into the bark. It feels like the skin of an avocado. She tries to lift herself up so that her heels rise from the grass. She bends her elbows and thinks, *it has to start with getting your feet off the ground*. Eventually she will graduate to climbing the tree, spreading her arms, possibly jumping, and then gliding.

The quilt of her face tenses. Her veins protrude like carvings on a wooden table. Her arms begin to weigh and she lets go. She examines her hands. Leaves from the branch are tangled in the nest of her fingers. Red welts stain her wrists. She fears she will stay wanting like a flag tied to a post, rippling without progress.

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It is half past eight. Breakfast time. Noelle is expected to set the table. She lays out the teal placemats and white porcelain. She picks the silverware, reverently, from the case her mother keeps in the sideboard. Her father and brother are used to this, so they say nothing, but her mother asks why she goes to such trouble all the time. Breakfast is a simple meal, with simple food. Today, it's a course of sunny-side up and cinnamon buns. But Noelle believes that things can always look a little nicer.

The family closes in on her.

Her father, with his narrow nose aimed down like the leg of a compass to which the rest of his face follows. He, who believes it either *is* or *isn't*, you *are* or *aren't*.

Her mother's hair is a viney hedge of Color Bliss #35 in Cabernet Red, the curls around her face tight and static as if regularly stored in a freezer at night. She is a combination of long fingers and a ginger-ale complexion. She frowns at the table.

Frustration shoots through the knobs of her younger brother's face. He shoves away the drinking glass and asks for his plastic cow cup.

It is as if something sails down from its aerial view to swell in Noelle's throat, some blast or comber that tells her not to expect fanfare. And as the chairs spring back, this message settles down in the center of the table, narrowing her into silence, separating her from them, as a curtain separates a room from the outside world. Noelle scrapes the icing off her pastry and thinks, *if I can get my feet off the ground, I will leave them.*

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Noelle reads about the chickens in the farms. The ones whose eggs sell at 1.99 per dozen. She reads how six of them are sardined into one crate. She reads about the chicken that gets slashed as it tries to move, and how it doesn't matter to the farmers because the chickens are not there to be slaughtered. To get one last egg out of a chicken, the animal is denied light and food for a sustained period of time. This does something to them that helps induce egg laying. If they want the chickens to mature faster, they give them hormones.

Noelle thinks of the brown eggs her mother bypasses at the supermarket. Those cartons—3.50 per—say things like *cage free*. There are also white eggs for the same price, with the same pronouncement, but she keeps her attention on the brown eggs because the difference is more noticeable. The last time they went shopping, her mother bought chips for three dollars and cereal for five.

Down in the kitchen, where her mother is cooking dinner, Noelle sets the book on the counter. She is going to ask why they don't buy the brown eggs. But the mother is slicing vegetables and holding her breath and not looking up. So Noelle carts the book back upstairs and keeps reading.

She sits on her bed and turns the pages. She thinks how things might be different if farmers didn't clip the

chickens' wings to prevent them from getting their feet off the ground.

What things can fly?

Noelle once asked this question, but she hadn't wanted easy answers. She'd said this quickly.

Her mother had hesitated, then admitted she favors pens instead of pencils because the ink dashes across the page and it looks as if each letter, particularly S and Z, are ready to launch. While she'd said this, she had been fixing her hair in the bathroom mirror. "That's like flying, isn't it? Gosh, that's poetic."

Her father had said the new lawnmower makes a mean trip across the front yard.

Her brother had turned away from a video game and said stones fly if you throw them. Then he screamed for her to get out of his room.

Noelle had considered her family's thoughts on flying, but nothing except those stones her brother had mentioned gets off the ground. She was unsatisfied, but she didn't ask the question again. And they didn't offer more answers.

Noelle knows about planes and seagulls and slingshots and balloons and kites—it would be nice to be able to say she was born under a sky of kites. In this moment, she wonders if there is anyone in the country who can say that. If there is, she would like to meet that person. Then she closes the book and thinks of the farmer curling his knuckles and the chicken sounds coming from inside the building and that remark about getting them to stop pecking and the putrid red shirt.

The feather she took is still in the pocket of her jeans, in her closet, on the floor, beside the cable sweater with the stain on the left sleeve, and the knit gloves that haven't been used since winter break.

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Her father needs to pick something up at the office. He takes Noelle with him.

The building is three stories high, so it is a short trip in the elevator, but Noelle uses the brief time to press her fingers against her reflection in the doors.

*She was here.*

Her father tells her to stop. Someone has to clean the elevator. "A good man. Hard worker. Comes on Tuesdays." Today is Saturday.

She wonders why he brought her. Is she supposed to make herself useful? Carry something to the car? She poses the question. Her father examines a field of paperwork. His face is a cold bulb of frustration. "You ask too much." And she wonders if someone at home requested for him to take her, just for the hour.

Noelle says, "It's time we buy new eggs."

Her father says she needs to talk to mom about it. His eyes turn on and off like a faucet, depending whether he's looking at her or not.

He is not looking at her.

The elevator pings. The doors open. They step into the corridor.

Noelle explains about the brown shells from the farms where chickens live happy lives even with clipped wings. Where they waddle and stretch their feathers.

Her father tucks his paperwork under his arm. He insists that nobody knows if that's true. "Especially you."

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It is the middle of the night. The house creaks, so she tiptoes, hanging onto the stair railing to anchor her weight better. In the hallway, there is a side table with legs that taper off at the feet and stab the floor. On this table, keys rest on a ceramic plate. Her father's truck is parked in the driveway. It's white and old. It's inappropriate for the office, he often says, but he keeps it around because it's practical and there's no reason to get rid of things.

Her father gave her a lesson a few months ago, but then he stopped after the first day, rubbed his temples and said he was tired. Said she should learn the road rules and the difference between switching on the windshield wipers and the turn-signals first. Said there was still a year before she had to take the test anyway. He'd gotten out of the car, leaving her sitting and staring at the dashboard.

The keys are jagged and cold against her palm. She crushes them into her pocket so they won't make noise when she leaves.

But first, she heads for the garage and the red toolbox her father empties, wipes down, and reorganizes on weekends. Nuts, nails, and bolts sit in the top drawers, while the heavier tools are in the bottom. She plucks a bolt cutter from the pile.

In the driveway, Noelle thinks of the route the bus takes to get to school and then starts the pick-up. Two lanes stretching in opposite directions split the road. For the first few blocks, she cannot find the lights, and then she does, near the steering wheel. The car makes sounds



Illustration by Caroline Oh

that frighten her. The gas pedal is hard to control. The car is always either too fast or too slow.

In the headlights, the pavement looks smooth and grainy. She thinks, *this must be what the ground looks like from the air*. The notion relaxes her, and she decides driving too slow is better than too fast. She lifts her foot gently from the pedal.

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When she sees the farm, recognizes the fence-up area, she douses the lights. The truck clatters across the dirt. She squints at the outline of the house on the hill. The ribbons on the maypole are drooping. She remembers they were brown.

The double doors feel more important than the railing where she found the dead chicken, so she checks them, but they are locked. She presses her ear against the building, hears a few distance *bocs*, but mostly just silence. Her palms begin to sweat. She rubs them against her thighs. The summer is about to start, and it is balmy even at this time of night. She wishes she hadn't bothered with socks.

She lands on the ground and rests, squeezing and unsqueezing the front pouch of her backpack, using this time to make a decision.

When her hands are dry enough, Noelle rises, treads across the dirt, and finds the railing. She removes the bolt cutter from her backpack. It takes her an hour to prune through the wire. The coarse greenery scratches her arms as she pushes through. Twigs slap her face. One of the straps on her bag gets caught and she has to thread her fingers through the mess to untangle it. For a moment, she doesn't like nature very much.

She pops out of the enclosure and into a hall of egg crates, all of which are empty but seem ready to be filled. A large fan with a note posted on it stands in a corner. Noelle remembers the noise coming from inside the building, that it had been like a motor or a drill, but now she wonders if it wasn't as bad as she'd thought. Maybe still a roar, but also maybe like a coarse rotating hum, something that would come out of a fan like this. She steps forward to read the note, but then notices another door leading into the white building. The knob twists in her fingers, and the door opens. She swallows.

Inside, rows of pens tail off into shadow. She can't make out how far they stretch in the dark, but there are so many. Feathers and feed litter the floor. The smell of the hens is thick like syrup. In the pens, wings rest against swollen bellies, nestling there, as if somewhere in those planets of flab lay pockets. Buttressed in puddles of their own decay, they try to loll themselves to sleep.

Noelle doesn't cry, even though she'd expected to, even though she'd brought tissues with her. Instead, her chest opens like a mouth and something flows out of her and then fills her up with a different weight. One that makes her anxious. The spot between her collarbones tingles. Her skin grows sensitive to the material of her

shirt as it flits against her. Her breath stretches thin as an eyelash. She thinks, *this is what you feel when you get your feet off the ground.*

She runs her fingers along the cages. One chicken, wedged between two other birds, thrusts its beak through the wires to try to stab her knuckles. Noelle jumps back, hand pressed to her stomach. The tip of the beak is cut, but it still scares her. She wants to coax the chicken, to make it understand. She decides this cage will go with her, but it will be the last one onto the truck and the first one she unloads when she sets them free.

She is not strong and doesn't feel like a hero as she tries to life a crate. The chickens stir, but that is the extent of the commotion. There is little room for commotion anyway. The cage is small, the chickens fastened so close together that they might've been sewn to each other like a set of stitches.

The cage is too heavy for her, but she doesn't know how else to gather the hens and store them securely in the truck. She gives up and lifts the latch, thinks of the man with the bleach-spotted pants, and pulls two hens out by their legs. She carries them upside down, outside the building and through the gash she made in the fence, gasping and apologizing as the animals twist their bodies in the air. She has to stop twice before she reaches the truck. She loads the hens onto the back of the vehicle, holding up her palms to block them in case they try to jump off. They dart from one side of the pick-up to the other in uncertainty.

Noelle goes back for more. The hens bump into one another as they stomp around the truck. As she finishes loading the sixth chicken, she feels pride at clearing a whole crate. She sighs, and then chokes.

She hadn't counted on the barking. Somewhere out there, a salivating hound tied to a post shoots up off its hind legs and howls. Its chain clinks against metal in a rhythm that suggests it is running from one end of its station to the other. Inside the building, the chickens wake up, set into a frenzy of *bocs*. Up on the hill, a light illuminates from the house. A window whips open and then slams against its sill.

Noelle remembers the chicken with the aggressive beak. She rams the back of the vehicle shut and dashes through the opening in the fence. The hen attempts to peck her again so that she drops it and the crate's door swings open. She swipes the animal from the floor, and it is wild against her as the rest of the chickens spill to the ground and scatter like marbles. She tucks the chicken in the crook of her arm and plows across the dirt. *The aim is to get your feet off the ground.*

Sweat beads at her nape. She sprints, and it feels like coasting, wheeling with the current. She thinks maybe this is as close as she and this hen will get.

A screen door whines open and then thumps against its frame. A slit of light appears on the ground, moving with the tempo of pounding feet. More barking, and then

a shout. She stops concentrating, so she stumbles, falls. The animal drops from her arms. Then comes the sound of a pop shooting across the landscape, and the chicken hobbles, the outline of its wings flare, and its silhouette collapses. Noelle crawls to the bird and cradles it. Its body is a plump sack in her lap.

She thinks, *but this isn't how it's supposed to be.*

\*\*\*

The farmer leads Noelle to the house.

At some point up the hill, Noelle discovers a familiar object. Although she can't see color very well in the dark, she recognizes the lonely brown streamer from the maypole. It is a single piece, lying on the ground, apparently torn from its origins. She wants to ask how it got there, but she has a feeling that it isn't the time to speak.

For now, she imagines a scenario. She imagines that, long ago, a strong wind—an unexpected summer storm, maybe—ripped this little ribbon from the maypole and sent it careening across the landscape. It flew. It hit the rooftop, then bounced off a tree, then bounced off someone's head, then hit the side of the house. When it landed, it was a battered strip of fabric. Now, it rests in the dirt, unnoticed.

When they step inside the house, the farmer pushes Noelle into a chair at a dining table. The chair is made of wood. It has a comfortable seat-cushion trimmed with navy cotton ruffles. She notices that it has no stains. A cracked but dainty purple vase holds a bunch of wildflowers. She wonders if this man is in love.

The farmer is wearing that red t-shirt again, but now it doesn't smell like yogurt. His limp is still there. He presses his fists against the table and leans his beefy frame forward. His angle reminds her of something about to launch from a cannon.

"You think you know more about these animals than me?" he asks.

The curtains on the window are the same navy color as the seat cushions. Noelle holds her backpack tight to her chest. She asks where his cushions and curtains come from.

The farmer straightens. "You used a tool. That's burglary. You owe me for a whole crate-load and six feet of wire." He picks up the phone.

Noelle interrupts him, tells him about the dead bird without a head that she found near the fence, from the something that dragged it there. The farmer stops dialing. He asks why she didn't mention it back then.

"I didn't think you'd bury it."

The man's expression folds in on itself. He hangs up. Noelle asks him if he's in love, and does his love take him seriously. And what's the story of the maypole? And does he know that a streamer is missing? Does he want her to show him where it is? Can maypoles be repaired? And why doesn't he give the chickens room, let them roam, feed them well? Does it hurt when he clips their

wings? And why wouldn't he bury them? And what's he going to do with the chicken he shot?

The lines around the farmer's eyes crinkle. His lips jog. And then, "You better not ever come back here." He leaves the room, comes back with a shovel, and hands it to her.

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Noelle tries a different tree. A live oak. Its leaves are smooth and without points. The bark has deep ridges, easier for her fingernails to land in. Her interest drifts to the internals where sinuous branches plow in and out of each other's way with the fluency of a zephyr. The nearest bough is a head too high for Noelle to reach. She decides to climb. She skims the spine of the oak until she finds an adequate test spot. She balances her weight, seizes the branch above her, flexes her arms, raises her heels.

A rock strikes her hip. Her brother is staring up at her. She does not think she can explain this to him. She tells him to go away, and then parries the next stone. She says that she is doing something important.

He slaps his knee, says, "No one takes you seriously, you know."

If he were up here with her, she would consider pushing him. She would watch him fall, arms flaying, mouth pried open at the force of his wails. But she reminds herself that he is nine, that she loves him, and that he can't fly.

He throws another rock. Dodging it causes her arms to buckle. She looses her hold on the branch, and the drop is languid. An awareness of soaring. Then the ground springs up at her, smacks her hip and shoulder.

Her brother skids to a halt beside her. He kneels. He says something she doesn't hear. Her elbows are scraped. But she is not hurt. For a moment, she thinks it worked. And then she recognizes that it wasn't her feet.

Her brother repeats himself, and Noelle tells him she is fine. He does not ask for more information, but runs off, leaving her sprawled like a picnic, and leaps toward the house, toward other worries, other occupations.

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It is a ten-minute bike ride to the grocery store. The wind pushes against her like a gale, perfect for flight. It is easier than driving the truck.

\*\*\*

It is early. Breakfast time. Noelle doesn't bother setting the table with special trimmings. She collects the everyday flatware. She disregards the place mats. She sets the milk carton down instead of filling the glass pitcher. She finds the plastic cow cup for her brother. The regular utensils aren't like the silver ones, but this is fine with her.

When her family comes down, scratching their heads, her mother with an aspirin, her father with a newspaper, her brother with nothing, they stare at the table. Except for the situating of the forks and knives, there is nothing to impress them.

Noelle shows her mother the carton of brown eggs. They will have the 1.99 dozen, but she won't. She tells them this.

They don't laugh, but they look like they want to, each one of them. They believe she is joking. They assume she will set the table like she always does, once she has time to think things through. But then they grow worried. Noelle usually takes a long time to think things through. They begin to wonder how long she has been preoccupied with these brown eggs. They take inventory of all those moments she mentioned them. *Why, what, where, when, how.*

How often did they actually answer her? None of them can remember.

They wait for her to issue more questions, but none come because Noelle has left them, retreated to the kitchen. Questions spring to their minds, but neither her mother, nor her father, nor brother dare to voice them.

Noelle's mother follows her into the kitchen and watches silently from the doorway as Noelle claims a frying pan for her eggs. She places a second pan on the counter for the other eggs, for her family, then picks up a wooden spoon. The flame murmurs gently beneath the pan. Noelle thinks of the chicken that fell from her arms and wonders about its eggs, who ate them and whether they appreciated the taste. Behind her, she hears the refrigerator door being opened and then closed. Slippers moving slowly, tentatively, toward her, then landing at her side. The hiss of a second flame emerges from the burner next to hers.

In the dining room, her father contemplates the cracks in the plates and why the farmer hasn't called him back regarding his bill for the hour they spoke and why Noelle didn't at least get out the placemats.

Her brother pokes at his cow cup, considering whether he is getting too old for things like cow cups and whether Noelle's arm is better.

And before the family sits down, Noelle takes a quick moment to retire to the bathroom and wash her hands.

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Natalia Jaster is an author of coming-of-age fiction, a freelance writer, editor, and proofreader. She received her Master's in Creative Writing from California State University, Northridge. Her short stories have appeared in *The Northridge Review* and as part of Lisa Anne Auerbach's *Tract House* project for the exhibition *Cottage Industry* at the Contemporary Museum in Baltimore.





(top) Modular wheat paste posters that reveal information about the process of recycling.

(above) Screenshot of the website waystowasteless.com showing labels that suggest both practical and absurd new uses for objects.

(opposite page) Still frames from a short public service announcement featuring all the crap that we buy but don't need.

## Ways to Wasteless

BY COLLEEN CORCORAN

*Ways to Wasteless* is a website targeted at young people who are just starting out on their own and learning how to live in the world. If they want to live less wastefully, this website not only gives them helpful information but also a set of functional tools. It's a whole campaign that includes videos, labels, instructions, stickers, wheat paste posters, and other resources available for download from waystowasteless.com

As both a designer and a human being, I am interested in the magic contained in everyday objects, the stories and histories they carry and how we come to think of them as either treasured or ephemeral. How do goods or materials that have all played some (often intimate) role in our lives come to be so nonchalantly discarded? How can we change the way people think about consumer goods and manufactured materials, so that they learn to value them more?

This project deals with our preconceived notions about everyday consumer goods. It asks us to reexamine the way that objects come to be classified as waste. These examples from the Ways to Wasteless campaign show different ways that narratives can be attached to objects to recontextualize them, inviting the audience to re-examine their relationships to their things.

### 1. WAYS TO WASTELESS PSA'S

A series of videos that combine live-action narratives with animated information graphics to demonstrate simple ways to waste a little bit less. The narratives play out between consumer goods and the people who use them. (<http://waystowasteless.com/videos.html>)

### 2. GIFT TAGS FOR GIVING AWAY THINGS YOU DON'T WANT ANYMORE

These tags are designed to be used when getting rid of something unwanted, whether it's left on the street, sold in a garage sale, given to a thrift store, or regifted to someone for a special occasion. The tags attach narratives to the objects about their previous lives, facilitating a relationship between the former and future owners.

### 3. LABELS FOR TAKING ALONG UNPACKAGED FOOD:

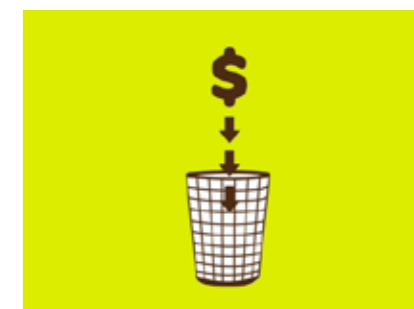
Designed to be both functional and funny, these are a set of labels for labeling food taken to go. Some of them are funny and some are functional, allowing people to date and label leftovers.

### 4. WHEAT PASTE POSTERS TO REVEAL WHAT'S IN THE TRASH

A modular system of posters, designed to be pasted on dumpsters and trash cans to both reveal the types of materials that end up in the trash and to remind people what materials can and can't be recycled or thrown away. The posters are available online in pdf format and can be downloaded and printed on 8.5x11 paper, for people to put up in their own communities.

After I finished the website, I wasn't entirely sure how it was going to live in the world. I showed it to a group of high school students during a workshop and noticed their extremely positive response to the videos, labels, and interventions. Young people are already very engaged with the issues *Ways To Wasteless* addresses, and I think the site can function better as an educational tool in a classroom, rather than an actual social marketing campaign. The kids responded to the humor and ambiguity in the content and the interactive (and even subversive) tools that allow the information to be less didactic.

Colleen Corcoran is a graphic designer living and working in Los Angeles. She received her MFA from CalArts in 2008 and has since been sleeping, meditating, and looking for mountain lions.



ways to wasteless #7:

**Gift tags** for giving away things you don't want anymore.



I thought this could be **TRASH** but maybe **SOMEONE ELSE** can use it.



waystowasteless.com

Something **USED** or unwanted looking for a **New Home**

waystowasteless.com

I thought this could be **TRASH** but maybe **SOMEONE ELSE** can use it.



waystowasteless.com

Something **USED** or unwanted looking for a **New Home**

waystowasteless.com

Something **USED** or unwanted looking for a **New Home**

waystowasteless.com

I thought this could be **TRASH** but maybe **SOMEONE ELSE** can use it.



waystowasteless.com

Something **USED** or unwanted looking for a **New Home**

waystowasteless.com

I thought this could be **TRASH** but maybe **SOMEONE ELSE** can use it.



waystowasteless.com

this was one of my **FAVORITE THINGS** but i outgrew it. **MAYBE IT WILL FIT YOU**

waystowasteless.com

this was one of my **FAVORITE THINGS** but i outgrew it. **MAYBE IT WILL FIT YOU**

waystowasteless.com

this was one of my **FAVORITE THINGS** but i outgrew it. **MAYBE IT WILL FIT YOU**

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waystowasteless.com

These gift tags attach personal narratives to unwanted objects.

