

Art of Olive Green

Towards Art, an Ethics & a Laugh

Archives

All posts for the month April, 2011

Swan Song

Posted by *getraer* on *April 29, 2011*

Posted in: MadeInUSA, Studio, The Sides of Thoughts. Tagged: hardware, local, MadeInUSA. 1 Comment

Gardening and studio work require that I make frequent bike trips to my neighborhood hardware store. I haven't shopped at Home Depot since its founder said retailers who don't support the GOP "[should be shot](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/11/19/home-depot-founder-retail_n_144863.html)," and Lowes hasn't offended so flagrantly yet but there's a guy in plumbing who tried to get me into Amway.

Increasingly I avoid the big-box hardwares for my peculiarly anachronistic local, where I shot this picture of a welding clamp so old, it's a) largely obscured by dust and b) made in the USA. The store is a partner in the [Do It Best](http://www.doitbest.com/About.dib) buying cooperative, and besides that could be [Anytown USA's corner shop](http://www.torvex.com/jmcdaid/node/982): aisle signs hand lettered on cardboard, radio blaring oldies or classic rock, and several dogs and a cat lying around. One of the older dogs is occasionally incontinent.

I bought all the store's cotton buffing wheels when I first started polishing my aluminum jewelry, because they were made somewhere in New York State, well-stitched and affordable—with wide enough bores for an angle grinder. I went through four before they ran out and couldn't get any more. Like a lot of their stock, everything has changed since those wheels were made. To recall our productive glory days, I head there and laugh at the irony of hearing Springsteen's "Born in the USA" while digging past the newer imports for dusty Yankee relics.

US-made products aren't necessarily better (though my oldest tools are Japanese- or US-made). Their quality has to evolve. Recall that we were once an agricultural country, when our first president wearing US-made clothes was inaugurated ([Madison, 1809](http://www.jud.ct.gov/external/news/Speech/Quinn_lawday.html)). And a few decades ago Japan made the junk in the "dime stores" of the West. Progress is a loaded word, but when it comes to industrial regression, I'm sure we're the world leader.

In the Do It Best, we are still number one. They find my economic nationalist peccadillo amusing. When I ruin a brand new tool in five minutes of standard use, the owner vouchsafes for the tool company that offshores its production: "They're a good name." You wouldn't want your name to be crap, but names became mere brands, which without a heritage can be (s)crapped for fleeting profit.

I remember heavy US-made tools from Sears in my father's tool box in the same thought as I do the unbroken horizon of Arizona and the forest bands that once wound through Massachusetts suburbs. At the Do It Best, the owner is still smoking in the back room, but now he leaves the door open.

Growing Paints

Posted by [getraer](#) on [April 20, 2011](#)

Posted in: Art, Earth Safe Finishes, Studio, The Sides of Thoughts. Leave a comment

What difference do materials make in the creation of an artwork? I ask myself this every time I pick up a torch, saw or handtool. Can interest in sustainable sourcing appear precious to outsiders, like the perceived effete opacity of abstract art?

One of the principal themes in William Gaddis's epic novel *The Recognitions* is authenticity—and the exploitation thereof. Tormented painter Wyatt Gwyon, who in his espousal of art is mined for forgeries, attempts an egg tempera that would render similar results to a period centuries past. He laments that the eggs available in New York City cannot reproduce the texture of a fresh country egg, something many of us will never taste, let alone paint with. This is a key distinction to him, and less so his "collectors," but does it have any intrinsic importance?

Earlier this week I tried to explain the coloring technique of my metalwork to some women asking after jewelry. I have tried dozens of explanation schemas, but "permanent," "texture" and "dyed" always figure largely. Every time I have the impression that my description is not persuasive, perhaps because what I want to say is that it's not paint, it's a pigmented porous layer of crystallized oxides, and most importantly that it is the greenest, most low-impact way to color metal. These things are of little interest to most people, but when I talk about my work they are foremost in my mind, perhaps making the other words that I say instead ring hollow.

Earth Safe Finishes (<http://www.earthsafefinishes.com/>), in association with which I write this blog, produces a wide range of sustainable art materials that I've just begun to explore. They have a market for their conscious products, but I wonder if the ideological implications of ethical materials would be disagreeable to some. Would a climate change denier appreciate ESF's goods? (Do climate change deniers paint?) Can our awareness of our materials' environmental impact affect appreciation of the finished piece? Or do toxic inputs demand an even higher bar for judging the finished work, which must offset its harms?

Wondering at your palette's provenance might be like asking the brand of wine at the Catholic transubstantiation (I once saw Gallo in the vestry) distracting from the lofty purpose at hand. Apparently one of the miracles of the blood of Christ is that even the worst plonk can become the same blood.

NYC Anarchist Book Fair & Art Exhibit

Posted by [getraer](#) on [April 11, 2011](#)

Posted in: Art, The Sides of Thoughts. Tagged: Afghanistan, anarchist, art, books, Iraq, photography. 1 Comment



([img0751.jpg](#))

(<https://artofolivegreen.files.wordpress.com>

[/2011/04/brunt.jpg](#))

RPG Attack on Kirkuk Police, reproduced in ABF Exhibit

The first thing I notice about the NYC Anarchist Book Fair is the widespread rebellion against deodorant. I flash back to college with nostalgia but for the stifling enclosure of Judson Church, and recall Nietzsche's caution that one does not go to church to breathe clean air. This is the earthy air of the human real, and anyway my own quasi-effectual deodorant free from aluminum salts is probably not so masking either.

On this Saturday, the book fair combines workshops, free child care, extensive outlays of books, zines and pamphlets, and an art

exhibit. The tables are jammed together and traffic is lively; at one end I encounter a guy who believes anarchy is a state of chaos without order or structure (and a bookseller remonstrating with him), and at the other a young man having a fiery discussion about means of resistance with another bookseller offering Kropotkin titles and excerpts, inter alia. I bought the illustrated “Abolish Restaurants” and a FAQ about anarchy from the bookseller while he insisted to another visitor that at a recent protest, he was there to fight Nazis, not cops: “At every revolution that’s made a difference, the cops stood aside.” I can’t disagree, and move on.

I learn that South End Press, a Brooklyn-based independent house, was responsible for publishing Manning Marable’s “How Capitalism Underdeveloped Africa.” It’s the only title I recognize on a table with a lot of Vandana Shiva books. This is especially moving considering that Marable died just over a week ago, barely managing to publish his 10-year magnum opus about Malcolm X. The woman at their table thinks I know who Josh MacPhee is because I’m carrying a book of his graphic art, and we have a brief desultory discussion about Facebook and Twitter before we’re interrupted by another browser.

I meet some friends at the exhibit just as the fair is winding down. The collection was memorable, but not labeled; fortunately Antonio Serna of vizKult, who had curated the show, drove us out at closing. We sit at a low table covered with photographs from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars; they include themes from “chillin drunk at the base” to “burnt haji corpse on a slab, thumbs up!” photos. Antonio tells us that this piece is called “At Ease” and it’s by Lucas Michael, using photos from a now-defunct military website where the enlisted posted all kinds of images from their travails. A small stack of CDs in sleeves offers the audience a thirdhand souvenir, and invites them to distribute the images. It’s a sobering coda to the bookfair, and we take discs to do our bit.

(<https://artofolivegreen.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/brunt.jpg>)

Where Only Land Is Wasted

Posted by *getraer* on *April 3, 2011*

Posted in: Art, Film, Recycling. Leave a comment



(<https://artofolivegreen.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/w1.jpg>) *Waste Land* (<http://wastelandmovie.com/>) gives you a bit more to think about than the average documentary by harmonizing various polar themes: art and trash, landfills and humanity, poverty and wealth. Lucy Walker captures so much pride and cheer in the *catadores* (trash pickers) of Jardim Gramacho in Rio de Janeiro, Brasil that you have to be reminded of their precarious, materially-poor existence. Artist Vik Muniz serves as native interlocutor, bringing a project of redemption to his birthplace from his Brooklyn studio.

Recycling redeems materials back into the marketplace once they have ceased to be products. Even reposing in stinking mountains, they have an infinitesimal value. When transformed by manufacturing, they remain a base currency—a new product of recycled materials will be depleted of use value and discarded again.

Muniz transcends the mundane reincarnation of redeemables and people with the immortality of art. Without spoiling its many surprises, suffice it to say that the waste stream will never just be consumer goods again, and the people never again mere untouchables.

This has a salubrious tonic for artists as well. The film fleetingly reflects on modern art via several works by artists including Damien

Hirst, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Warhol and of course Muniz. Muniz, born poor, has completed a cycle of his own. His success has given him freedom to live and work where and how he pleases, but as an adult he returns to the privation that formed him. He expresses some concern about safety amidst the drug use and slums, and then to all appearances throws himself in wholeheartedly.

The terror of childhood indigence drives many who've "made good" to turn their backs on all squalor forever. It's not my place to chide them, but the loss to their former comrades is incalculable. Besides all the heartstring concertos, there is a message about the equivalence of humanity and its fleeting works: Where once we relied on religion (and art as its very handmaiden) to elevate life and its artifacts into the numinous, Muniz and Walker document the power of secular art doing same. This is not mere redemption, but salvation.

Alchemy gives the full sense of what *Waste Land* accomplishes: not the conversion of redeemables into new consumables, not just "moving on up" the class ladder nor a self-congratulatory commercial for Muniz and activist art. We post-/moderns who think of pre-Christian alchemy remember only the elemental "lead into gold," forgetting its true aim of ultimate wisdom and transubstantiation of the mortal condition.