

# Art of Olive Green

## Towards Art, an Ethics & a Laugh

## Archives

### All posts for the month March, 2011

## Fabrication

Posted by *getraer* on *March 23, 2011*

Posted in: Self-Sufficiencies, The Sides of Thoughts. Tagged: green, military, olive green, upcycling. 1 Comment



(<https://artofolivegreen.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/tk248119.jpg>)  
Retouching leather German pilot's jacket with a 70% grey Prismacolor pen.

Clothes have long been thought to be a mere projection of your professional qualifications: “the clothes make the [man].” Today they speak volumes about one’s ethics, resourcefulness and self-determination—mostly in absentia, and in a register largely unheard.

I’ve thought this after half a lifetime of collecting workwear and international military surplus. Like workwear, surplus is tailored to fit the average service man (here, like “service revolver”) in a given position. Slender men like myself will be swaddled in excess fabric, but a man of girth could just as easily wear the same jacket. There is a democratic quality to this clothing seen at “mass” department stores like Macy’s; everything can be worn, but nothing fits. The every man cut fits no one man, and this is to say nothing of women, particularly in ethnic variations of silhouette.

But fashion now parrots the conventions of workwear and militaria, with such success that the imitation has eclipsed its origins. Yesterday I mistook a jacket in the office closet for a Carhartt because it was identical but for the rivets, which were flat, cheap and polished. Close enough, right?

This state of affairs reflects the etiolated self-sufficiency of Gen X and Gen Y. I can barely sew on a button, so I put a sewing machine on my wedding registry. It's time to learn, and Etsy has Craft Night and classes at their [Brooklyn Labs \(http://www.etsy.com/storque/etsy-news/all-about-etsy-faq-series-welcome-to-the-etsy-labs-936/\)](http://www.etsy.com/storque/etsy-news/all-about-etsy-faq-series-welcome-to-the-etsy-labs-936/) if I can't figure it out otherwise.

Most of what I've bought new in the past few years has been made outside of China/India, or military surplus. Even my suit is a union-made Hickey, albeit bought at a sample sale. A sewing machine would allow me to repurpose well-made old or ill-fitting new clothes: The cut of U.S. clothes makes me look like a scarecrow on chemotherapy. I could buy U.S. made and quickly stitch in some more continental tailoring, or do the same with surplus. Don't make what can be fixed; the world is bursting with the demi-used. Given the quality of mainstream new things and the ethical conundra behind them (e.g. child & dissident labor, environmental impacts of tanning leather, supporting scorched-earth market dynamics), I hope to offer some models of how to reclaim our forebears' utilitarian aesthetic of workwear and surplus while simultaneously learning new skills and interpreting today's tailoring. I will also test the efficacy and colorfastness of Earth Safe Finishes' dyes against the olive green that makes military surplus so unpalatable to some. Stay tuned.

## Ringston: Crops of Better Ringtones

Posted by [getraer](#) on [March 12, 2011](#)

Posted in: Life Less Prosaic, Some thoughts have a certain sound, The Sides of Thoughts. Tagged: music, reproduction, technology. Leave a comment

The jarring, abrasive jangling of the telephone has been a constant since its invention. Only when cellphones reached a certain technological maturity were we allowed to customize the sounds that disturb us, and thereby soften the intrusive blow.

Yet, how rarely people do that! Many phones continue to ring or notify at factory settings, in every case sounds so bland only their ubiquity annoys more than their content. Further, they never fail to declare brand affiliation – a commercial with every incoming call. Unless phone makers and providers will pay us for playing their jingles, we should change our ringtones.

But we shouldn't change them to the even more objectionable buggeries of "classical" melodies. *Für Elise* sounds as bad coming out of a phone as a .MID file as it does from a doorbell. It's galling that such a melody, which has already become hackneyed from overuse, should be further degraded by primitive synthesis. Player pianos at least offer the dignity of being pianos. Music boxes have small mechanical parts that, with wear and accretion of dust, produce microchanges in timbre with every iteration of the melody.

In reproduction, at every remove the music becomes less like what the composer intended. During composition, pieces were imagined in performance, in a parlor or symphony hall perhaps. The derivative process could be defended if it ever served the piece or melody. I can't think that it ever has, though car horns playing "La Cucaracha" reference the actual horns driven by air.

So, convenience and commodification have driven the factory farming of bastard song snatches. The antidote to this corrosive denaturing is, on the one hand, to craft these omnipresent tones from common intentions and electronic material *ab initio*. On the other, phones can now play compressed audio files through speakers that reproduce frequencies somewhat loyal to recorded, digitized music – so you can play certain songs and hear their subtleties, like the hiss of a brushed cymbal.

Electronic music, such as jungle/drum & bass, is constructed from synthesized material with "organic" sound, like breakbeats: small segments of rhythm often isolated from funk 45 drum solos. (I mean electronic after the theoretical pioneers like Varèse and Stockhausen.) Instrumental acoustic material is repurposed into a tapestry concerned with artistic fidelity to a scene, not commercialization – until of course it becomes dominated by market concerns and then rapidly descends into greedy self-parody in the main.

Further, the technical strictures of samplers used in the early days required that rhythmic units be brief and bear repetition. Hence, to excerpt electronic music for ringtones is obvious, even natural. Device limitations should still be heeded: the saturated synthesizers of trance, for example, strain phone speakers and sound cheap, and tiny phone speakers will never take bass.

The idea behind **Ringston** is to provide an outlet for tailored sound: either electronic music that lends itself to ringtone repurposing, or primarily instrumental/vocal music with some fidelity to the "original" when played through a phone speaker. There are selections for different situations: "Sugar" or "Sublime" are ambient enough not to be noticed in an office, except by the ear expecting them. Thus everyone's life is improved; a public service—Für Elise and everyone else.

[DOWNLOAD \(http://www.megaupload.com/?d=8LR1IO38\)](http://www.megaupload.com/?d=8LR1IO38) zip file (1.35MB) here, expand with Winzip or [Winrar \(http://www.win-rar.com/download.html\)](http://www.win-rar.com/download.html), and load mp3s into phone via USB cable or email.

**ARTIST—EDITED FROM—COMMENT**

Antiteater—I Kill Them—German spaghetti-western soundtrack (Fassbinder's WHITEY), horns, punchy guitar and some cymbal hisses (**still available**)

Polska—Summertare—A shimmery hammer dulcimer ditty from the Irish downtempo and drum&bass scientist (available?)

Ozy—Sugar—Barely-audible sweet ambient delight from Iceland's electronic craftsman (still available?)

Shock Headed Peters—Sublime Prince of the Royal Secret—Rhythm tape loop and piano improv intro from this song

Uusitalo—Social Selection—Something slinky and chunky from Finland's audio polymath (**still available**)

In Deep—Skanking—Drum&bass from the mid-90s crates, very melodic with a bit of drum seasoning

FM Einheit & Andreas Ammer—(Heretics)—The sound of the HERETICS in the excellent *Radio Inferno* (**still available**) play. Festive and ridiculous toned bell flurry.

Rikers Island—Q-Project & Spinback—Shuffly drum&bass drumwork with blurry plucked strings and a supposed sample from Rikers Island

Shock Headed Peters—Blackouts in the Clear Sky—Boozy horns and percussion loop

Seba—Valley of the Moomins—Adorable Moomins-y noise from the drum&bass classic by Sweden's sound machinist

If anyone can think of a brilliant way to allow previews for these, please comment. WordPress doesn't allow free WPAudio Player uploads anymore, and I can't figure out how to link FTPs...I'm paying enough for hosting elsewhere to pay here too. Tx!

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## Foaming at the Mouth

Posted by *getraer* on *March 4, 2011*

Posted in: Studio, The Sides of Thoughts. Tagged: ambivalence, polystyrene. Leave a comment

Categorical thinking is the bane of discernment; think "world music." Indexing says more about the indexer than what it catalogues, and this is no different when it comes to the environment.

As a byproduct of crude oil refining, polystyrene foam (EPSF, or Styrofoam™) seems rank. Recently I needed it to test with metalcasting, and found Snow Craft's plant by asking around in local shops.



(<https://artofolivegreen.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/imag0684.jpg>)

Architectural features of polystyrene foam.

The sprawling space warehouses slabs of foam the size of a bisected van or a twins' coffin. Several computer-driven hot wire cutting tables punctuate the labyrinth of stacked foam. The wire cutters are precisely heated to make smooth cuts for even the most fanciful shapes, even for artists: Sculptor [L.T. Cherokee](http://www.artmode.com/artist.asp?artist_ID=394) ([http://www.artmode.com/artist.asp?artist\\_ID=394](http://www.artmode.com/artist.asp?artist_ID=394)) buys his foam there. Fume extractor ducts suck out the emissions when cutting.

Bill, who has worked there for almost 3 decades, cycles regularly to keep fit. He's "eaten pounds" of EPS foam and plastered his lungs with it. He says it's used for soil amendments because it aerates the soil, even on food crops.

A cursory search on EPSF's dangers finds a [site](http://www.grinningplanet.com/2008/04-08/foam-cups-polystyrene-cups-article.htm) (<http://www.grinningplanet.com/2008/04-08/foam-cups-polystyrene-cups-article.htm>) that recycles information from another [site of old info](http://www.ejnet.org/plastics/polystyrene/health.html) (<http://www.ejnet.org/plastics/polystyrene/health.html>). In fact [everything I found](http://www.ejnet.org/plastics/polystyrene/disposal.html) (<http://www.ejnet.org/plastics/polystyrene/disposal.html>) was from the same period, in the mid-late 90s when we stopped heating up our takeout in Styrofoam because it would "give you cancer." That doesn't seem to worry John Boehner (tanning beds? smoking?), who [helped bring Styrofoam back to Congress' cafeteria](http://legalplanet.wordpress.com/2011/03/01/boehner-tweet-on-plastics-sums-up-republican-disdain-for-the-environment/) (<http://legalplanet.wordpress.com/2011/03/01/boehner-tweet-on-plastics-sums-up-republican-disdain-for-the-environment/>).

Farrah Khan of Toronto's Naturopack says, "You can't take a styrofoam container and make it into another styrofoam container." Food-grade items require a purity that only virgin source materials can promise. But you can make it into all kinds of architectural items. If we required to manufacturers to take responsibility for their foam, [as Germany does](http://www.bmu.de/english/waste_management/doc/3432.php) ([http://www.bmu.de/english/waste\\_management/doc/3432.php](http://www.bmu.de/english/waste_management/doc/3432.php)), would that improve its cradle-to-cradle profile?

After the food alarm, there is probably a lingering sense in the public that EPS foam is bad. But EPS can be buried without liners in landfills—its soil aeration helps decomposition of other materials, unless of course it catches fire.

In the mid-90s I was told by a local ice-cream truck using Styrofoam cups that it "burns as clean as natural gas" when properly processed—admittedly rare. I want to believe that not everything compromised should be discarded.

When I burned it in the studio with a soldering iron and a butane-heated hot knife (*with respirator*), it still stank. I bought a hot wire cutter from [The Compleat Sculptor](http://www.sculpt.net) (<http://www.sculpt.net>) that's less fume-y. Yet, things we categorically hate might only need appropriate handling from us to be harmless, even helpful. As an artist, I'm forced to ask: to what extent can personal responsibility manage the hazardous?