Article

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HOW CAN CONTEMPORARY ART CONVEY COMPLEX SCIENTIFIC IDEAS AND INFORMATION?

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Humans have been a driving force behind climate change and extinctions for hundreds of years. Since the first steps out of Africa, man has been wreaking havoc upon the environment. As technology advanced in the Industrial Revolution, populations boomed, and consumption and demand went up. As a result we have been pillaging the natural world with little thought of the future. Our throwaway society, with its convenience products, is raising its head from the waters of our oceans and spilling onto our shores, as global warming, pollution, species extinction and ocean acidification begin to show in every corner of the world. The alarming facts that illuminate what is happening now and what is to come are generally presented in scientific reports and the media in numerical form, which can alienate the individual. The numbers are so large that it seems impossible for one to make a difference. I hope to challenge this idea and bring statistics to individuals using art, specifically sculpture, so they may reach an understanding and realisation may be reached.

In this article, I will explain some of the many ways contemporary art addresses the problems associated with the human practices of consumption, disposal and pollution. I will examine how artists have interpreted, incorporated and represented statistics in their art. Theoretical frameworks applied in this essay include those of representation (specifically, depiction of mass and numbers), phenomenology, and the abject.

To contextualise the artworks, I will first analyse the science behind them, focusing on the largest environment on earth: the one beneath the waves. I will explore how artists work through information in order to convey it visually to a wide audience. Artists working with conservation and pollution in their practices include Chris Jordan, Aurora Robson, Daniel Webb, Tan Zi Xi, and Tara Donovan. Each use their work to convey statistical data and facts about pollution and consumption; they create immersive spaces and intricate sculptural work that is both abject and beautiful. Some of these artists only use one of these conventions to produce work whilst others cross over and touch on more than one strategy. I am analysing them in these frameworks to understand better what is effective in their artworks, to identify and use these ideas in my own practice.

Plastic affects our environment and wildlife in many different ways; research now suggests that entanglement and ingestion are only the tip of a much larger problem (Parker & Olson, 2018). The impacts of plastic on our environment are complex and difficult to convey. I want to explore how artworks can bridge this vast informational gap.

It is challenging to try to control the interpretation of an artwork, as every viewer will see each work differently and come to their own conclusions. However, I believe it is possible, as an artist, to help people to 'see'. Jane Norman argues that "Communication with an artist must be through his work. It must be direct, not diluted by verbal translation" (Norman, 1970, p. 191). This means that in order to educate, the work must first attract attention and

interest, especially when conveying ideas to the general public who often do not have the confidence or education to interpret artworks.

PART ONE: THE FACTS

Nature has been knitting polymers since the beginning of life. Every living organism contains these molecular chains (Freinkel, 2011). Humans selectively used some of these naturally occurring plastics, including ivory, turtle shells and cow horns, but these became scarce as the market expanded. In response, John Wesley Hyatt, in 1869, made a plastic called celluloid created from a natural polymer: the cellulose in cotton. Although not a synthetic plastic, this was a breakthrough; developed to make consumer items like billiard balls, combs, buttons and piano keys. In one of Hyatt's pamphlets it is stated that "As petroleum came to the relief of the whale," so "has celluloid given the elephant, the tortoise, and the coral insect a respite in their native haunts; and it will no longer be necessary to ransack the earth in pursuit of substances which are constantly growing scarcer."

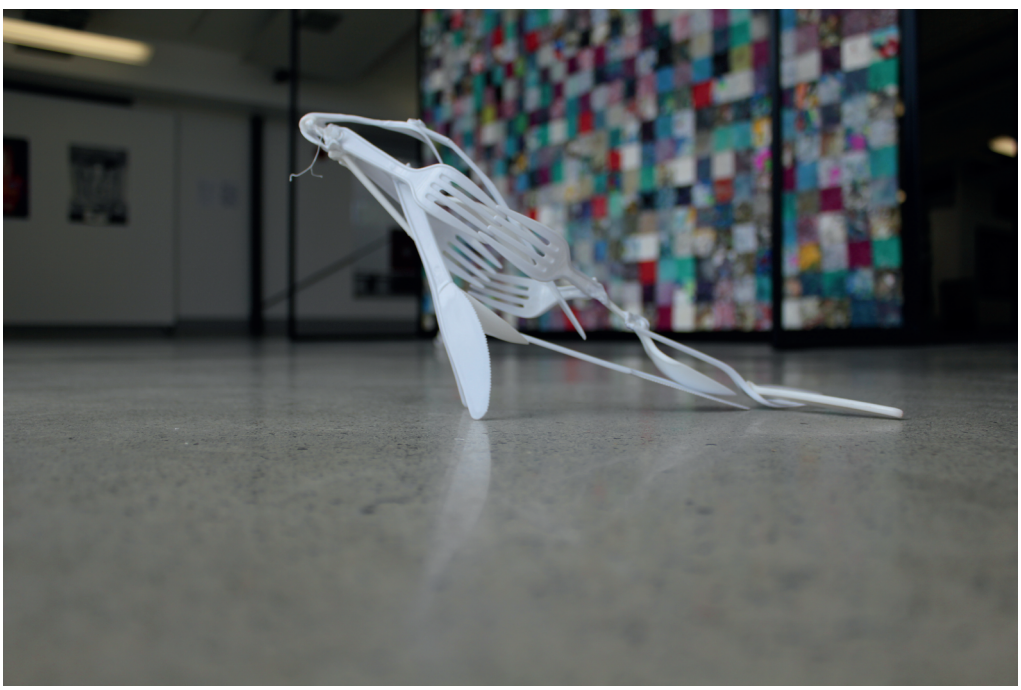

Figure 1. Cutlery whale. Image copyright Riach (2018).

Synthetic plastic is a recent invention that has only been commonly found in our society for the last 70 years (Knight, 2014). Plastics' vast variety of uses, and cost effective production have enabled this product to become commonplace in almost every home, country and habitat on earth. The first synthetic plastic, derived from fossil fuels, was Bakelite, invented in 1907 by Leo Baekeland. The plastics industry was driven by the two World Wars to create a range of useful, durable materials. After the Second World War, the industry turned to the market and manufactured products like Tupperware®, available to the consumer in 1948. Plastic is now used to make almost

everything from packaging to clothing and carpets.

Plastic has infiltrated much of our lives, but it is now apparent that plastics are not the solution previously thought. The blind use of plastic has had disastrous consequences on the environment. Questions are now arising about how something sold as disposable can be made of a product that is all but indestructible (Leeson & Ruxton, 2016). Yet many people still do not see the consequences of this material, thinking that once the material has left their direct sight it goes away. There is no such 'away'.

Plastics leach chemicals immediately after production, do not biodegrade, but photodegrade and once broken into small 'micro-plastics' gather other chemicals, especially in the ocean (Katsnelson, 2015). Ingested by wildlife, the toxins are released and stored in tissue, and enter the food chain, (Katsnelson, 2015) resulting in bioaccumulation and bio-magnification. This contamination causes many health problems including cancers, immune system deficiencies and child developmental issues (Leeson & Ruxton, 2016). Society's huge appetite for plastic is poisoning us. Animals at the top of the food chain are experiencing severe consequences of this chemical build up, with mothers potentially killing their young by feeding them poisoned milk from their own poisoned bodies (Attenborough, 2018).

Hideshige Takada, a geochemist at Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology in Japan, discovered organic pollutants, such as polychlorinated biphenyl (PCSs) and dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT), at one million times more their normal concentrations in plastic debris than naturally in seawater (Katsnelson, 2015). Plastics cause injuries to seabirds and other sea animals by damaging and blocking their internal organs "but in recent years plastic and 'micro-plastics' chemical hazards have emerged as a major issue" (Otake, 2016, p. 1). Takada and his team studied the short-tailed shearwater's ingestion of micro-plastic: high concentrations of the flame-retardant poly-brominated diphenyl ethers (PDBEs) were shown in the bird's adipose tissue (tissue that stores fat) (Katsnelson, 2015). Ecologist Mark Browne "says this was a game changer because up until this point everyone thought that these particles would just be ingested and pass out the other side" (Katsnelson, 2015, p. 551).

Researchers first reported finding small pieces of plastic in the ocean 40 years ago but it was not until 2014 that Richard Thompson, a marine biologist at the University of Plymouth, showed evidence of a truly microscopic plastic which he categorised as 'micro-plastic' (Katsnelson, 2015). The most common micro-plastics in the ocean are microfibres, thousands of which are released after every wash of synthetic clothing (Scheer).

Matt Savoca, an ecologist from the University of California Davis, has researched the smell of ocean plastics. He discovered that floating particles grow algae that produce dimethyl sulfide (DMS) when eaten by krill; this smells like food to tube nosed seabirds (such as the albatross) in the great expanse of the ocean (Savoca, 2016). When Chris Wilcox, Erik Van Sebille, and Britta Denise Hardesty, University of California, performed a spatial risk analysis they found that about 90 percent of seabirds were ingesting plastic today which is expected to rise to 99 percent by 2050 (Wilcox, Van Sebille, & Hardesty, 2015).

'The Anthropocene' is a concept that helps us to reflect on how humans have influenced their environment so much so that we have left, and will continue to leave, a permanent mark on the planet which is recorded in the strata or planet's surface (Moore, 2000). The term was first used by Eugene Stoermer but formalised and popularised by Paul Crutzen in 2000 to describe a new geological era. Part of the Anthropocene is the sixth extinction which plays a large role in my practice. I am interested in our manipulation of, and interaction with, the environment.

Plastics are something every living being encounters every day, designed to be used once and thrown away, yet ironically designed to last centuries as they are non-biodegradable. I would like to start a conversation about what remains; what will survive, and what legacy we will leave. Currently there are 41,415 species on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, and 16,306 of them are endangered species threatened with extinction. In the last 500 years, human activity has forced over 800 species into extinction (Kasnoff, 2018), including the Panamanian golden frog, great auk, yangtze river dolphin, Tasmanian tiger, dodo, passenger pigeon and western black rhinoceros, to name only a few (International Union for Conservation of Nature , 2018).

History tells us what happens when things change too fast. There have been five mass extinctions before, and we are now on the cusp of another, caused by us (Kolbert, 2014). I am interested in our relationship with our environment and the question of what has led humanity to believe we are separate and better than nature. Our constant desire for a solution to environmental crisis, despite the lack of real action on the part of individuals and societies, is what drives my work. I aim to educate others and ask hard questions about what current habits are leading us toward: cataclysmic events in which the world will survive, but evidence of our existence may only remain in the materials we leave behind. We will all live for a 1000 years in the plastic cup and disposable spoon we threw away.

My art practise centres on the global issue of plastic pollution, in relation to the state of our environment and climate change. I use plastic as a symbol of our creativity, development and technical advancement, as well as the society we have created, one that demands and thrives on convenience, our 'throwaway' society.

PART TWO: ARTISTS' RESPONSE

How numbers, mass and consumption are portrayed

Numbers and statistics can be used to create a visual impact of mass and consumption, helping the viewer to understand how much a number truly represents. We might believe we understand statistics presented to us in daily life, but what we really comprehend of large numbers is 'big'; the difference between thousands, millions and billions becomes abstract and incomprehensible (Dvorsky, 2016), such that the implications of the numbers are lost. Some artists are tackling this problem by using visual strategies to represent the numbers.

David Buckland, an artist, film director and writer, says "We intend to communicate through artworks an understanding of the changing climate on a human scale" (Miles, 2010, p. 20). Buckland's project *Cape Farewell* (2003) brought together artists and scientists to see climate change in action, in the hope that art will be inspired by the experience and provide a more compelling visual interpretation of graphs, diagrams and incomprehensible numbers.

Buckland's aim is to translate information in a way that bridges the barrier of raw statistics to one of understanding. Chris Jordan, Aurora Robson and Daniel Webb have similarly translated data and statistical numbers into art. Timothy Morton in the *Ecological Thought* states that "studying art is important, because art sometimes gives voice to what is unspeakable elsewhere, either temporarily - one day we will find the words - or intrinsically - words are impossible" (Morton, 2010, p. 115). I believe art can help people's understanding of greater problems, by addressing them in a way that people can visualise, and giving people something more tangible than numbers and statistics.

Photographer Chris Jordan's *Running the Numbers II: Portraits of global mass culture* (2009 - current) is a series of photographic works depicting statistics about consumption and pollution. The images range from wildlife photos to historic artworks, each created with a different pollutant material. Hundreds of thousands of different plastics and materials construct images that do not resemble the unique material; they become a spectrum of colours and patterns. These works depict the amount of something within a specific time and from a specific place. "Numbers our brain just doesn't have the ability to comprehend, we cannot make meaning out of these enormous statistics, so that's what I'm trying to do with my work, take these statistics... and translate them into a more universal, visual language" (Jordan, 2017). One work from this series, *Whale* (2011, Figure 1.), is based on a photograph by Bryant Austin, which depicts 50,000 plastic bags, equal to the estimated number of pieces of floating plastic in every square mile of the world's oceans (Jordan, 2018). Jordan's images resemble paintings or prints. It is not until the image is zoomed in on that we can see the medium that was invisible upon first inspection. Through this realisation, the viewer becomes aware of how much these numbers truly represent.

Sculptor Aurora Robson's work, *What Goes Around, Comes Around* (2008, Figure 2.), is a 9,000-bottle installation commissioned by the Bank of America. The work is made of interwoven plastics, collected from the bins of the

business. "It is intended to illustrate connectivity and the reciprocal nature of matter and energy, while raising awareness about human impacts on the environment and our discreet power as consumers" (Robson, 2007). The work resembles molecules and atoms, showing the changing energy and manipulation of matter that occurs all around us. Robson has chosen to portray our impact on the environment by manipulating a material we rely on, plastic. The plastic waste from the site encourages the employee/viewer to see that their one bottle adds up when combined with others. Collectively, the individual objects no longer have singular meaning but a more powerful one. This is conveyed to the consumer: one might not make a difference but together changes can take form.

Daniel Webb's work, *Everyday Plastic* (2018 Figure 3.), is a collection of all of the artist's waste over a year. The work is 13 metres wide by four metres tall and contains 4,490 pieces of plastic; 60 percent is food packaging, 93 percent is single-use plastic, eight items are biodegradable and just 56 items made from recyclable materials. The process of making this work was itself educational for the artist (Barton, 2018). The work captures a snapshot in the artist's life and truly shows the scale of consumption in a household, bringing to light what we do not see and putting it in perspective. It has the potential to attract people who recognise materials consumed in their daily lives. The work is a signature or mark of an individual, and viewers may respond by thinking about how their own 'signature' might look.

Each of these artists explores numbers, mass, and consumption in different ways. Jordan's large photographs illustrate incomprehensible statistics, Robson uses social connections to make people aware of a problem, and Webb depicts an ordinary year in his life, to show an individual's consumerism.

One of my works depicts me struggling to hold up a bag of found ocean plastics (Figure 4.), this work is responding to data compiled from shearwaters, where one 90-day-old chick was found dead with a gut full of plastic, accounting for 15 percent of the bird's body mass (Leeson & Ruxton, 2016). The bag of plastics weighs 8.25 kg which is how much plastic would be in my stomach if I was this sea bird.

I have used raw statistics and combined it with the human body to show how much plastic was really inside that chick. The mass appears much larger when it is held in reference to a body especially as people can 'enter' the photograph and place themselves in the image, which in turn reveals the 'crushing' situation.

The use of immersive art environments and spaces to produce phenomenological responses

Immersive art spaces that result in a phenomenological experience can convey messages as the work, the mind and body become interwoven (Bishop, 2005). Each person's prior experiences will determine how they look at and interpret the work and their physical response. Impacts vary with each person but, as discussed previously, the physical, visual depiction of numbers can become something that helps people reconsider their life choices. The physical experience of being immersed in an environment can produce a different effect than that of a photo; ideas and issues become tangible and real. Buckland says "personal responses are more engaging than government reports or scientific data, and that imaginative narratives are needed to humanize a remote form of nature … artists can successfully tackle this subject, making points succinctly and powerfully" (Miles, 2010, p. 21). Tan Zi Xi, Aurora Robson and Tara Donovan have produced art works that create phenomenological, immersive spaces.

Tan Zi Xi's installation work, *Plastic Ocean* (2016. Figure 5.), is composed of 20,000 plastic items suspended above and around the gallery space, encasing and immersing the viewer, creating an altered perspective. The installation brings the viewer into a position where they can experience the ocean's condition.

In 2008, Zi Xi created *'An Effort Most Futile,'* a series of illustrations that communicated her concerns about the environment. *Plastic Ocean* was inspired by this, as a way for her to "create a physical manifestation of the Pacific Garbage Patch" (Zi Xi, 2016). She wanted to communicate with people in a more physical way, to convey this enormous problem. The plastic items are freely suspended, so as the viewer walks through the space they create a ripple of movement. The objects rustle in contact with the body and sway to mark their passage; and in this way

the body becomes part of the work. *Plastic Ocean* is on such a large scale that the space is transformed, becoming beautiful and sublime, while also conveying a very clear message. The viewer becomes a small figure within the mass. A phenomenological reading is encouraged as the items are recognisable; each container or bottle is a product that we encounter every day, and we can see our life reflected in these everyday consumer items. This work is a reminder of the permanence of our impact on the oceans. We are a fragile small species in the face of this vast problem, and yet, as a collective, we are the cause (Zi Xi, 2016).

Robson works with materials associated with consumption and pollution. She collects plastics from the environment and suspends them, creating immersive spaces that encourage a phenomenological response, as the viewer walks within the confines of the sculpture or has to arch back to see it hanging overhead.

The *Great Indoors* (2008. Figure 6.) at Rice University in Houston was a portal or tunnel that visitors could walk through (Gomez, 2009). Loosely based on the human body, ribs form the structure leading to a centre in which there is what the artist describes as the 'heart.' "What happens when a heart forms in a human being is one cell suddenly pulses and then the next time it decides to pulse all the surrounding cells pulse with it" (Weiss, 2014). Robson believes this idea is crucial in creating works that have a life of their own, in that they start conversations and create awareness. Similarly, Rebecca Solnit talks of an artwork that remains "alive, to engage in a conversation that will not ever end but will instead keep feeding the imagination" (Solnit, 2014). The work is made in the community with volunteers who all have a similar outlook on plastic, so connections form between people, initiating conversations that can grow. Robson wants to give people 'a pulse' that can start a movement. "This is a global problem and art is a global language" (Weiss, 2014).

Tara Donovan takes objects we overlook in our daily lives and transforms them into large installations. She disguises the material, often presenting it on such a scale that the form is initially hidden; the careful arrangement becomes an unidentified mass. *Haze* (2003, Figure. 7.) contains nearly two million drinking straws, stacked pointing outward against a wall to create a surface of subtle swells and hollows (Frankel, 2003). Presenting very small consumer items, such as plastic cups, straws and toothpicks, *en masse* changes how we view them, as they take on a resemblance to natural phenomena and become 'landscapes' in the gallery. Donovan's immersive spaces respond to the physical qualities of materials to get a response from the audience. "I want people to bring their own associations to it, to feel what they feel, experience what they experience from their life" (Nyholm & Wagner, 2015). Her works react with light; see-through or shiny material changes with the body's movements.

The artists that I discussed above create immersive spaces to encourage phenomenological responses. The works are large scale and use a wide range of materials and techniques to play with the body's interaction within a space. The viewer is sometimes fully immersed and becomes part of the work, the work is expanded through community engagement, or small items of our ordinary lives get transformed in a way that we could not imagine. Each of these strategies is an attempt to communicate with the viewer in a more personal way by intimately engaging their mind and body. They are able to interact with the work on a level other than that of a two-dimensional depiction; it must be experienced in real time, in real life, as it requires all the senses, and the viewer's presence, to be fully appreciated and understood.

My work is an attempt to create a space where people bring their own knowledge and prior experiences to the work as they recognise materials that exist in their daily lives. Through this realisation, I hope the work will get people thinking and start a conversation.

Figure 2. Author and plastic wall. Image by O'Brien (2019).

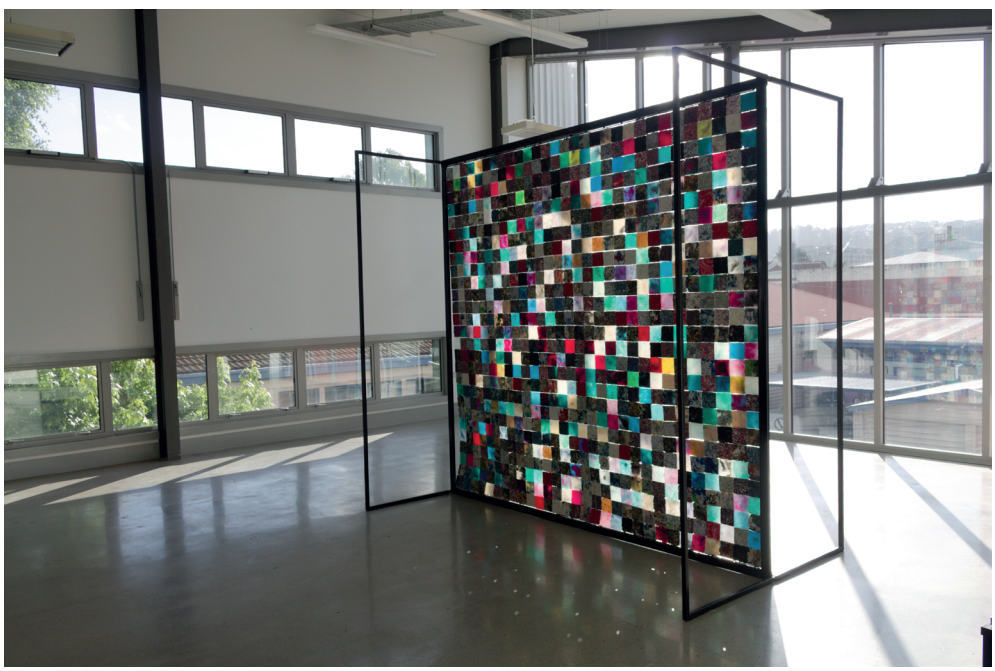

Figure 2. Author and plastic wall. Image by O'Brien (2019).

One work is a large hanging plastic wall made of individual tiles. The see-through quality of plastic means the work changes and interacts with natural light. This work addresses photo-degradation and its impacts on the food-chain, while also responding to the environment outside the gallery. The work changes as the body and light move in the space.

This work, made of multiples, shows how we look at the world and nature as something we can construct, name and control. The 'wall' is an attempt to represent the barriers we have built that prevent us from seeing, that keep us 'safe', the walls we build that protect us, both politically and personally. This 'wall' will force the viewer to renegotiate the space. The brightly coloured and varied tiles stitched together resemble a patchwork quilt. This is a comment on one of the most common plastics in the marine environment, the microfibre. This work is made from materials that could have been 'recycled' into these fabrics. In turn, this is also a comment on the recycling system: we cannot recycle our way out of the plastic pollution problem as less than five percent of all plastic gets recycled (Parker & Olson, 2018). Many of these items are down-cycled as they are no longer fit to be the item they once were, and in some cases, this is a faster way for them to enter the natural environment.

The use of materials and products to create 'beautiful' works that become abject as the message and product become apparent

Contemporary artists have shifted the practice of using found materials beyond definitions of art and beauty to symbolise wider human practices of consumption, disposal and pollution. Sometimes the specific materials are not visible until closer inspection. Once the material is revealed, the work expands in meaning towards the political and the ecological. The works initially play with people's aesthetic sensibilities and expectations before confronting the viewer with difficult questions and realities about the state of the environment. Malcom Miles has stated: "all I say now is that I take the position that, to communicate any message, art needs first to engage the viewer" (Miles, 2014). From this perspective, there is little value in conveying information through artworks that are so abstracted or disgustingly confronting that people do not want to look, and fail to engage. Susan Sontag urges us, in her book *Regarding the Pain of Others,* to "not let the torrent of images that pour down on us convince us that we understand or make us numb to suffering... knowledge can numb as well as awaken feeling… even if we cannot completely understand, we might care" (Solnit, 2014) Sontag is referring to the horrors of war. However, I believe this quote can be used in relation to the hard-to-grasp idea of climate change and pollution.

Like Miles, I believe in the importance of getting people interested before revealing a deeper meaning, or allowing the viewer to discover the meaning on their own. This gradual realisation can render the aesthetically appealing artwork abject. Abjection is a term synonymous with the philosopher Julia Kristeva, and is associated with disgust and things that people wish to dissociate from (Kristeva, 1980). It involves the body and our habitual rejection of objects and functions that we do not wish to see or consider gross or uncomfortable (Kunst, n.d.). Chris Jordan and Tara Donovan are artists using this idea to convey their thinking.

Materials come with social or contextual meaning. Some artists, like Donovan, attempt to create works that conceal the original material. However, her straws are still recognisable as straws, invoking the social concepts of consumerism and pollution; they cannot be removed from their function in society, even if that is the artist's intention. Donovan's materials are only revealed at close range. "Up close, the image sharpened and the viewer's preconceptions changed instantly, swept away in the recognition of surprisingly familiar objects from which *Haze* was made" (Donovan, 2003). To me, this recognition makes the artwork abject.

Donovan states that there is no environmental reading in her works as she aims for a more minimalist interpretation of objects and their forms. The forms "mimic the ways of nature not necessarily mimicking nature" (Nyholm & Wagner, 2015). I disagree with her as she is actively creating 'nature' out of common pollutant products. For art writer Petra Lange-Berndt, "the term 'material' describes not prime matter but substances that are always subject to change, be it through handling, interaction with their surroundings, or the dynamic life of their chemical reactions" (Lange-Berndt, 2015, p. 105). This highlights the problems I see in Donovan's work as materials are subject to

change, and in this case the plastic items are now loaded with symbolism associated with their use in our modern society. The items she is using as her medium are now being identified as polluting, consumer items. This product is now a symbol of our modern consumer-driven society. In this work there is a realisation of the material, leading to questions of quantity. In the United States, 500 million drinking straws are used every day (Cress, 2018). To understand is the enormity of this problem, *Haze* depicts roughly 1/240th of this, or six minutes of straw usage. This really puts Donavan's 'large' installation in perspective. Her work becomes abject with access to this knowledge as it portrays the very large impact of a very small object. She says her work is representing nature, but 'plastic nature' is very real, with plastic infiltrating every habitat on earth. "At a distance, one felt that he or she was looking at a formation of encrusted minerals, a cross section of a coral reef, or wisps of a strange, opaque fog" (Donovan, 2003). However, what you are viewing is consumerism.

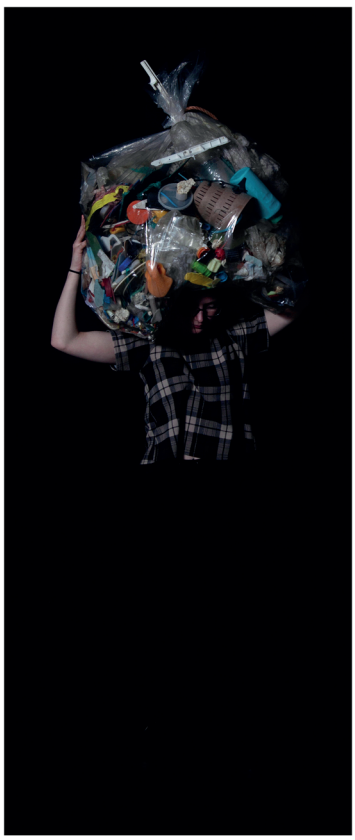

Figure 2. Author and plastic wall. Image by O'Brien (2019).

Jordan's photographic series *Midway: Message from the Gyre* (2009 – current, Figure 8.) and documentary *Albatross* (2017) are abject in the way they show the impact of plastic upon the natural world, specifically on the Laysan albatross on Midway Atoll. Both these works show graphic environmental realities through images of dying, dead and decomposing birds, all suffering their demise because of the plastic fed to them by their parents. These are eye-opening and shocking truths that demand an emotional response. The images are abject, they reveal the young birds' distressing and horrific deaths as a direct result of humanity's impact on the ocean, the consequences of our consumerism.

Do we have the courage to feel deeply enough that it transforms us, and our future?

Come with me on a journey, through the eye of beauty.

Across an ocean of grief and beyond.

(Jordan, 2017)

I want to use the abject in the way that I see it used in Donovan's simple installations of objects and in Jordan's photographs. Objects *en masse* represent numbers that in turn represent consumerism and pollution. Donovan's works are beautiful, simple forms created using unconventional materials, unaltered but disguised, using light, space and colour to turn something ordinary into something extraordinary.

Jordan's work shows us the realities our ocean is faced with today through a camera lens. Close and personal encounters with the albatross show the suffering, dying and dead birds which exploits our maternal instinct to protect and care for the sick and injured, to alleviate suffering. This moving imagery makes us care, makes us want to make a difference, as we see the beauty we have destroyed.

In my work, animals made from discarded plastic cutlery are scattered on the floor. They are the forms of animals to which we see ourselves as superior. They are very fragile, and it would be expected for some of them to be broken and destroyed at the exhibition, their tiny miniaturised forms crushed beneath human feet. Making animals out of plastic cutlery is a way for me to question what is in the food chain, using the initially disguised material, as a symbol of our waste, consumption and pollution, just one of the everyday common single use products that we throw away unnecessarily – an invisible item that has anything but an invisible impact.

CONCLUSION

This essay has explored the way contemporary artists represent numbers, mass and consumption, create immersive spaces, and challenge the meaning of the abject. These strategies are used to convey complex information to wide audiences. Specific artworks have been analysed to investigate the effectiveness of each of these strategies.

My work is an installation consisting of three main components that address issues of consumerism and waste. My work aims to convey information on environmental problems to the public while maintaining the qualities and conventions of contemporary art. I have used numbers and statistics to help people 'see' the problem in a way that they can understand, taking statistics and displaying them in reference to the human body to communicate the problem. The viewer will hopefully bring their own knowledge and life experience to the work in order to engage, and through a realisation become more aware of the problems we face. The large-scale works will immerse the viewer, beautiful at first, they become confronting through understanding. The sculptures attain the 'abject' not in the way they look, but in what they represent. I attempt to hide the explicit materials to arouse curiosity. In this way, I want to draw people to the work so our sickening realities are not initially present, then once the viewer is engaged the meanings will be revealed and this will change the reading of the work. The materials, sourced from Dunedin, centralise and locate the work and bring the problem closer to home. This could be the rubbish you threw away, a reminder of your presence, outliving you and any mention of your name.

Tori Clearwater is a Dunedin based artist and graduate of the Dunedin School of Art.

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