

## Sometimes Garbage Art Is Just Garbage

By [Rohin Guha](#)

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Maybe that one guy in *American Beauty* was right when he was trying to **get into Thora Birch's pants** with talk of finding poetry in the desultory flight of plastic bags caught in an updraft. And if that's the case, we could probably make a case for artfulness akin to Shakespearean sonnets in works like "**Plastic Bag Chandelier**" by Dan Steinhilber. So while there's been no shortage of trash art lately, the photography of **curbside refuse as art** pushes the idea too far.

It's an honorable idea—really—to find art literally sitting on street corners, but if that's the case, Staten Island's landfills could be billed as the next emerging art districts. After all, it's a veritable mecca of filthy hazmat awaiting the cunning of curators and the poignant contexts of wily artists. Perhaps all these amateurish lensmen looking to make a name for themselves with this trashy trend need a push towards innovation. Take a cue from Steinhilber, guys. Instead of snapping up pictures of abandoned armchairs and trash bags, strive for the spark of the **ragpickers**.

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### Comments (3)

Posted by Matthias on Wed Jul 30, 2008 at 02:32 am

#1

Thanks for the link to my post about "curbside refuse as art." I guess I didn't explain it fully, but the reason I like the images is that (I believe) the photographer is making fun of the art presented in the "Unmonumental" show at the New Museum in NYC. For more info on that show, [click here](#). While that show had good and bad work, the codification of a whole field of practice made it ripe for pot shots, such as Joy Garnett's "Found Art: Unmonumental" flickr series.

Posted by MadSilence on Thu Aug 14, 2008 at 12:14 pm

#2

That's my understanding as well, Matthias. And isn't there a lot to be made fun of? The "Unmonumental" show at NYC's New Museum had me on the keen edge between lunacy & hilarity, especially following a group listening raptly to the exhibition commentary on their iPods.

As for garbage art, it may be a tribute to human inventiveness and creativity, unless you're a proponent of the infinite monkey theorem ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infinite\\_monkey\\_theorem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infinite_monkey_theorem)). Lock a bunch of monkeys in a room with a load of garbage and they might eventually recreate the Mona Lisa!

MadSilence :-)

Posted by china syndrom on Sun Sep 14, 2008 at 09:52 am

#3

watch out, you folks are coming off as art illiterates (you are forgetting so much, including Duchamp and the found object...). while the flickr set sure pokes fun at the New Museum show, it also points (with real affection) to the fact that there's always been a feedback loop between art and the vernacular and the ephemeral.