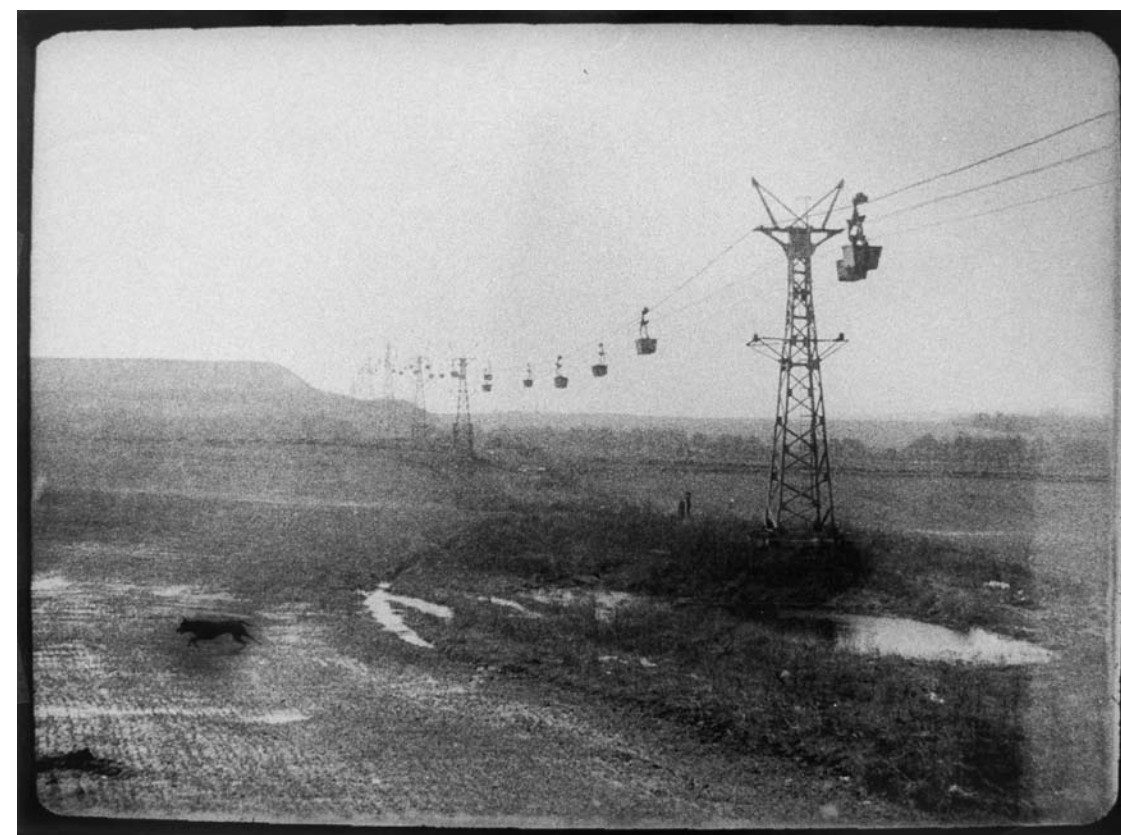


goldiechiari
Controcorrente, 2005
 DVD, 22 minutes
 Courtesy of the artists



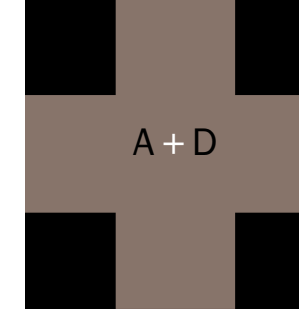
Dante Busquets / Anzenberger
View of Eje Central Lázaro Cárdenas from the Latinoamericana Tower's Observation deck, Mexico City, 2006
 HP Inkjet print from medium format colour negative original, 82 x 100 cm
 Courtesy of LSE's Cities Programme/Urban Age



AVERILL AND BERNARD LEVITON
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 619 SOUTH WABASH AVENUE
 CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60605
 312 369 8687
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GALLERY HOURS:
 TUESDAY – SATURDAY, 11AM – 5PM
 THURSDAY, 11AM – 8PM

Paolo Pennuti
 (In collaboration with Lorenzo Pazzi & Gianluca Stazi)
Going to sleep is something absolutely certain in life, 2007
 Single channel video, 20 minutes
 Courtesy of the artist



Edward Burtynsky
Oxford Tire Pile No. 5, Westley, California, 1999
 132 x 157cm
 Image copyright Edward Burtynsky
 Courtesy of Charles Cowles Gallery, New York



Ariel Rojo
Cerdo ahorrador (Piggy bank), 2008
 13.5 X 10 X 18.5 cm
 Stoneware
 Courtesy of the designer



Máximo González
Torres de petróleo, 2006
 Out of circulation bills, acid free glue
 200 x 300 x 15 cm
 Courtesy of the artist

create...
 change

Columbia
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art + design



critical encounters
HUMANATURE

On the Cover: **Aylin Kayser & Cristian Metzner**
Ikarus, 2007 . Wax and stainless steel, 27.5 x 27.0 cm
 Courtesy of the artists

This exhibition is sponsored by the Art + Design Department at Columbia College Chicago and the Efrogson Family Fund, a CICF Fund. This exhibition is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.



criteria

JANUARY 15 – FEBRUARY 28, 2009

Curated by Jimena Acosta & Emiliano Godoy



Siri Brekke
Tableware Stories, 2008
10 Plates, sepia print
25 cm each
Courtesy of the artist

- Siri Brekke
- Edward Burtynsky
- Dante Busquets
- goldiechiari
- Máximo González
- Aylin Kayser & Cristian Metzner
- Jason Middlebrook
- MINE™
- Paolo Pennuti
- Diego Pérez
- Ricochet Studio
- Britta Riley & Rebecca Bray
- Ariel Rojo
- Vitamin
- Uli Westphal
- Craig Zucker



Vitamin (Andy and Chris Vernal)
IV Plant Pot, 2008
Fiberglass
31.5 x 53.5 cm
(Diameter of inside of pot 22cm)

Curators, Jimena Acosta & Emiliano Godoy
Curatorial Assistant, Renata Fenton

criteria

...there is no such place as away just out of sight...

This exhibition is about sustainability. It is not about green design, ecology or environmentalism. It's about humanity and its incapability to sustain its habits and culture for future generations. To be precise, it is about the inability to foresee the long-term consequences of industrial development.

The works in *Criteria* thrust the visitor outside of his/her comfort zone, aiming at constructing an argument on the need to transform current production and consumption patterns into a viable cycle of creating well-being. The main contradiction between the views portrayed in the exhibition and our preconceived notions of progress and wealth could be described as the illusion of constant growth, or the wishful thought that progress is unidirectional, and always moving upwards.

For the past two centuries all evidence has supported this fantasy. The industrial revolution started a growth pattern that cannot, and should not be denied. Before the nineteenth century over 90% of the world's population lived in extreme poverty, life expectancy was around 30 years and literacy was the exception, not the norm. Since we have any record of human existence, it had been that way. With the turn of the millennium, now less than 20% of the world's population lives in extreme poverty, over 80% is literate and life expectancy is above 70 years. Economy, health and culture have indeed flourished in the last two hundred years.

How can this be? What happened that allowed humanity to thrive so quickly, after millenniums of mere survival? In short, we won the lottery. We found a seemingly endless source of energy in the form of fossil fuels, which soon powered everything from manufacturing and transportation, to war and scientific research. Production and consumption patterns accelerated at a tremendous rate, demanding ever-greater amounts of raw materials on the one hand and agile markets on the other. Our newly acquired health meant that the world's population multiplied sevenfold, and our food and housing needs grew accordingly. Over six billion mouths to feed meant an enormous pressure on living systems, driving thousands of species to extinction in what is now considered the sixth major extinction event in the planet's history, right after the asteroid that killed all dinosaurs. Furthermore, the imbalance created by releasing the carbon content embedded

in fossil fuels and depositing it in the atmosphere has driven climate into a warming spiral we have yet to see where will end.

What's even more troubling is that fossil fuels are not renewable: our primary source of energy is running dry, crippling our chances to successfully respond to the problems we as a species have caused, and rendering our goals of human and environmental welfare unobtainable. Whether we accept it or not, fossil fuels are a historical exception.

The impact human development has on natural systems is difficult to conceive as individuals, thus creating the delusion that there's none to be considered, or that its repercussions occur only at a local scale. These opinions are contrary to scientific thought that states, that our current lifestyle is impossible to sustain in the long term and our impact on the planet has reached a level so pervasive that it is rendering nature incapable of recovery. What is now clear to those willing to listen is that "growth" as we've seen in the past two centuries cannot go on forever, capitalist processes need be radically reshaped and a model created that may be sustained over time. The design and art work gathered in *Criteria* critically approach our current crisis through a number of themes and a variety of media that range from drawing, photographs, video and products. While some of them use a documental strategy others use daily life objects as their reference.

In *Alaskan Pipe Line*, Jason Middlebrook depicts an eagle's head pierced by a pipeline carrying the profits of international oil companies. While responsible for completely shaping the XXth Century, this magical source of energy brings about the destruction of habitats, the fragmentation of ecosystems, the waging of war and the loss of life. The planter designed by Vitamin, parallels these ideas using a different language. The I.V. plant pot feeds a plant through an intravenous system, in a disturbing association of nourishment and intensive care. Have we re-



Diego Pérez
Untitled (Ponque)
from the Obra Negra series, 2004-2006
C-Print, 80 x 100 cm
Courtesy of the artist

ponents of waste from one organism are nutrients for another, and how our linear thinking ends where a new cycle should begin.

Drawing deeper into the relationship between landscape and human waste, Edward Burtynsky photographs in *Oxford Tire Pile No. 5, Westley, California* thousands of tires piled in an open field. While the artist portrays a landscape invaded by spoil he also points out to an over productive and over consuming system. Capitalism has taught us to read this as development, while the mountains of rubbish piling up everywhere are an externality, thus not part of the equation. This is one of many distorted ways capitalism measures economic performance. War, natural disasters and oil spills are also among the forces driving economic growth. Máximo González in *Torres de petróleo* underlines how exploitation of fossil fuels (and of nature broadly speaking) is about wealth. Specifically, González references both Mexican paper coin and the country's dependence on the continuous extraction of non-renewable resources to keep the country afloat. *Torres de petróleo* seems to point to a day when oil fields run dry and the economy turns into piles of worthless paper.

Both artists and designers are quite concerned about our thirst and dependence on energy, some of these projects are practical while others are purely metaphorical. *View of Eje Central Lázaro Cárdenas from the Latinoamericana Tower's Observation deck, Mexico City* by Dante Busquets shows a night view of a vastly lit city, consuming thousands of kilowatts per hours. In all its beauty, the photograph is also disquieting in its portrayal of an endless city kept alive with electricity. In a distinct manner, Aylin Kayser and Cristian Metzner denounce our thirst for energy through *Ikarus*, a wax lamp that alludes to the Greek myth of Ikarus, melts during use. The *Puerquito ahorrador* (Piggy bank) by designer Ariel Rojo, comments on saving energy and money through a simple lighting system composed of energy saving light bulbs. Siri Brekke's witty series of engraved plates *Tableware Stories*, treats issues related to overpopulation, famine and war caused by industrialization and progress through allegorical intent. With phrases such as "There will be billions of mouths to feed by 2050" or "If you want to make it through the breakdown, you should build a safe heaven which is self sufficient and capable of growing some kind of food", Brekke talks about preparing for a state of emergency in the near future which has not been planned or foreseen.

Paolo Pennuti's *Going to sleep is something absolutely certain in life*, documents a present-day emergency and narrates a dystopic scene caused by hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005. Traveling at night with a hand held camera the artist records images of the remains of the city after the tragedy. The long sequences are hard to withstand. While people's homes are completely destroyed and left in bare ruins, the bent trees that appear throughout the landscape still stand, stating that nature prevails all, even humanity. Diego Pérez's post-apocalyptic scenes, on the other hand show absolutely no signs of life amongst rusted metallic pieces in Baja California. Is this the only possible outcome for our civilization?



Ricochet Studio
Best Before, 2008
Bone China, 6.3 x 6.3 x 8.8 cm
Courtesy of Ricochet Studio,
Vancouver



Craig Zucker
Tapd NY, 2008
NYC Municipal Water (and plastic bottle)
21.59 x 8.89 cm
Courtesy of Tap'd NY, New York

ally brought nature to such a critical condition? Apparently, no place is sacred: neither the arctic virgin lands nor the birthplace of western civilization. In *Controcorrente*, the Italian collective, goldiechiari picture an urban river polluted by endless amounts of colored plastic bottles. In the video trash constantly plunges and surfaces in a continual whirlpool, incapable of leaving Rome with the river current. As we know now, there is no such place as away, just out of sight.

Similarly, this criticism of the use of objects that live with us briefly only to retire for years of exile is brought about by Ricochet Studio. *Best Before* addresses the short life of throwaway objects by constructing them from durable materials. This set of ceramic vases, shaped like milk cartons, cleverly brings forward the short relationship between users and objects destined to landfills or dump sites. Using the formal language of disposability, *Tapd NY* by designer Craig Zucker is a product that comments on both the marketing strategies of companies that ship bottled water from miles away, and the absurdity of our being enamored with the idea of this remote paradise. Zucker appeals to local consumers, selling NYC tap water to New Yorkers by claiming that "No glaciers where harmed making this water" and that it is "Not from the top of some far away mountain".

In the same way that understanding our impacts on natural ecosystems is difficult, visualizing the place where trash goes or where water comes from is even harder. Systemic thinking goes against the grain of our education, where a long tradition of compartmentalizing and isolating variables has been the norm. But nature is almost synonymous to interconnectedness, and every effort to think about it otherwise has failed tremendously. *Drink.Pee.Drink.Pee.Drink.Pee* is a project in progress by Rebecca Bray and Britta Riley that effectively reminds us that urine functions as a fertilizer within the natural cycle. In a simplified loop the piece shows how the com-

The question is how we are going to deal with all this. Do we need to accept the fact that this is the price of progress, and convince ourselves that there is something beneficial in our current heading? Like a comforting parent, *Everything is ok* cordons off a disaster zone and labels it as a supposedly controlled situation. The irony in Mine™'s tape is analogous to a morbid joke that is so good it makes you feel guilty. The thought of humanity driving the planet into a destructive helix is quite unsettling, bringing us to accept an artificial state of comforting familiarity.

But everything is not okay. Even if we cover our disastrous reality with shiny wrapping and lustrous makeup, we must understand the interrelations between industry and nature if we plan on staying here. We will have to accept diversity, uncertainty and a state of continuous adaptation. The idea of a perfect world –our collective and predictable dream– will have to include all that nature has to offer, including the collection of irregular potatoes and curly carrots that Uli Westphal documents in *Mutatoes*. Revealing that perfection is a social construction, Westphal shows how the poster child of sustainability might not be an iconic leaf or a bright red apple.

The concept of sustainability should be understood as the main criterion to evaluate future development and current lifestyles. It's not about renewable energy, organic farming or passive solar architecture. It is about the interconnectedness needed to make all of them work. We need to draw a diagram that maps all the tools we have, and redraw it as the world evolves. This is a redefinition of utopia, one that constantly adapts, flexes and changes. Not an absolute truth but utopia with an escape plan.

Sustainability goes beyond politics, ethics and creative disciplines, since it is about being able to maintain what's allowing us to do everything else. Agreed, the idea of doing something just because it may be sustained over time is quite bare, but is a requisite for long-term survival. A prerequisite we've failed to meet.

Criteria puts under scrutiny an aesthetic in art and design that unveils a common awareness on contemporary environmental and social conditions. The similarity of themes and discourses among the artists reveal a historical condition more than a trend or a coincidence. This exhibition attempts to inspire the audience and provoke a sensibility toward their own life style and decisions.

Jimena Acosta Romero (Mexico City, 1972) is an independent curator focusing on contemporary art and design. She holds a MA in Curatorial Studies from the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College and a BA in Art History from Universidad Iberoamericana. She has curated shows for institutions such as the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo in Torino, the Mexican Institute in Madrid and MUAC Museum in Mexico City. She also writes in magazines such as *Arquine*, and *La Tempestad*, and teaches at Centro de Diseño, Cine y Televisión in Mexico City.

Emiliano Godoy (Mexico City, 1974) is an industrial designer from Pratt Institute's graduate program, with a BA degree in industrial design from Universidad Iberoamericana. Godoy runs the design firm Godoylab, is the design director of the furniture manufacturer Pirwi, and part of the design collective NEL. He is a staff editor of the quarterly architecture and design magazine *Arquine*, as well as a member of the Advisory Board of the UNESCO/Felissimo Social Design Network. Godoy also teaches industrial design at Centro de Diseño, Cine y Televisión in Mexico City.



Left:
MINE™
(Christopher Simmons, Tim Belonax)
Everything is OK, 2006
Vinyl Caution Tape
Variable dimensions
Courtesy of MINE™, San Francisco



Below:
Jason Middlebrook
APL#1 Woodland Caribou, 2003
Colored pencil, graphite, ink, pen, xerox transfer, Sharpie and acrylic on paper
10.1 x 22.89 cm
Courtesy of Sara Meltzer Gallery, New York



Above:
Uli Westphal
Mutatoes, 2006 - present
Digital photograph, Ink jet on paper
120 X 160 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Left:
Britta Riley & Rebecca Bray
Drink.Pee.Drink.Pee.Drink.Pee
Mixed media
10.1 x 10.1 x 10.1 cm
Courtesy of the artists