

Chris Jordan: Beauty and the Blight

Thousands of people pass by them every day in most major cities – auto junkyards, mountains of shipping containers, the rusted piles of relics at the end of their life cycles. Few people even notice their existence. Seattle-based photographer Chris Jordan wants to change that.

These images from the half-forgotten industrial graveyards of South Seattle and Tacoma, Wash., are the beginnings of an ongoing photographic series by Jordan in which he attempts to illustrate the unintended effects of a runaway consumerist society. Rather than bludgeoning the viewer with bleak and ugly vistas of chaotic debris, Jordan finds bright colors and bold geometric patterns within the detritus, revealing a hidden and sinister beauty behind the blight.

"I'm mostly interested in places like these, where the scale of our consumerism is truly visible," he says of the industrial parks to which he is drawn. "We rarely get to see the aggregate, cumulative effects we have on the environment."

The idea for the series came to Jordan while he was shooting in the rail yards near the Port of Seattle, looking for interesting patterns and spots of color. "After a while I realized I was sort of making a macabre portrait of American consumerism," he says.

Jordan used to consider himself a nature photographer, working part-time, mostly in the rain forests of Washington state, although he yearned for something more mean-

ingful. "I always had a sense that the work wasn't relevant," he says. "Whenever I went into the forests, it seemed more like a form of escapism."

Then, about 10 years ago, Jordan started turning his gaze toward the urban landscape. He shot many photo essays on Seattle's alleyways and the neon light reflected on the city's tree-tops. This new appreciation for synthetic surroundings got him interested in the roles that consumers play in transforming the natural world.

"This is the first time I've ever addressed a social issue through my work," Jordan says of his current environmental series. "I've been working full-time on this subject for a couple of years now, and it may become what I do for the rest of my life."

Jordan cites photographers Richard Misrach and Edward Burtynsky as the main influences on his work, as well as Andreas Gursky and Thomas Struth of the contemporary German school. "I try to incorporate elements of formalism into my social commentary," he says.

Fine-art prints from this series are scheduled for display next spring at the Paul Kopeikin Gallery in Los Angeles and the James Nicholson Gallery in San Francisco. For more information about Chris Jordan and his work, visit his web site at www.chrisjordan.com.

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Photos clockwise from top right:

"Container Yard #1, Seattle 2003"

"Boxcar, Seattle 2003"

"Drums, Seattle 2004"

"Crushed Cars, Tacoma 2004"

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