

# DADATABASE

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THIS IS NEW YORK GARBAGE

By Mohammad Salemy

The Idea for this ongoing series of photographs came to me after my trip to New York in October / November of 2004. Upon downloading my travel photos into my computer and viewing them, I was instantly drawn to a few pictures of trash that I took on my way home from the Election Plaza on the night of George Bush's reelection as the President of the United States of America. Those photos convinced me of the anthropological nature of garbage photographs from a particular city at a certain moment in time. Whether as a single object abandoned on the sidewalk or as a collection of things and printed surfaces trapped in a garbage bag, the collage of discarded objects, once looked upon closely, act as an index that documents the habits of a city's inhabitants and points to their social character.

I have since returned several times to New York and have focused on taking more photographs of the inside of garbage bins and discarded objects on the streets of the city.

Garbage pictures from a popular destination like New York are the flip side of the photos that tourists take from well-known sites and monuments of the city. However, rather than pointing to the city as the subject of the photograph, they highlight the people and what they have decided to throw away.

The trash bin functions similar to a democracy where objects, regardless of their original purpose and value, reunite for the purpose of disappearing from the public eye. It is this democratic quality that give garbage photos their ability in determining the social conditions of a particular community or a city. In this analogy, garbage photos are similar to the election results in reflecting the will of a people.

What does a lone discarded half consumed iced skim latte in a Soho garbage bin have in common with a bin full of night club flyers from Chelsea? They both tell a particular story about life in the neighborhood from which they were taken. The former suggests the presence of hurried city dwellers who are too picky about their calorie intake or the taste of their coffee. Meanwhile the later suggests the stiff competition that forces the nightclub owners to engage in publicity wars that waste their money.

A garbage bin, very much like a time machine or a spaceship, transposes our waste to a different space outside of the real physical coordinates of our existence. Once we throw something in the bin, the object not only disappears from our sight, but enters a different dimension. By photographing the content of the bin, I try to depict this unknown dimension where individual pieces of trash continue their existence alongside each other, shedding light on the aesthetic and the conceptual aspects of this peculiar world.

But I would not go further, since Vancouver is not new to photographs of garbage as art. Both Roy Arden and Kelly Wood have previously approached this subject and have conceptualized the relationship between garbage and art at length. What distinguishes my work from theirs is that, unlike their conceptual and abstract interest in the subject, my interest is the concrete and the specific examples of garbage and its vernacular content that marks a particular time at a particular place, in this case New York.

Mohammad Salemy is an artist and curator of Dadabase Gallery. He is also known for his writing and activism. Born in Iran and a graduate of Emily Carr University of Art and Design, he is currently a MA student at the University of British Columbia. His work has been included in solo and group exhibitions locally and nationally. His work titled "Newton's Third" Intervention" is on display at Artpeak gallery in Vancouver until October 30, 2009.