



Smith, Trevor. "Brian Jungen." *00's - The History of a Decade That Has Not Yet Been Named*. Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2007. p. 249-250.

[TREVOR SMITH]  Brian Jungen

Anyone taking seriously the task of limning the emerging outlines of our new century must first acknowledge that the beginning of a century has never really meant anything like the end of the old one.

I remember innocently musing at the dawn of the 1980s that it was good that the “me decade” was coming to an end. A decade later we had come to characterize the 1980s as the “decade of greed” and the 1990s in turn were marked by the global triumph of corporatism. In the face of our inability to construct an alternative to rampant global consumerism, it is no wonder why we stand in 2007 anxiously awaiting the birth of a “new” century. Even so it is impossible to shake the knowledge of how often in art, as in society at large, the seductive promises of a fresh start, a *tabula rasa*, so often turns into the staging ground for the return of the repressed.

In contrast to the avant-guardist and futurist ideologies that marked the start of the last century, many of the most compelling artists of our time are thus not producing visions of our uncertain future but instead are re-examining the recent past—its vernaculars, materials, and iconography—in order to grasp the impact of the extraordinary changes we have been living through. Even as communications and transportation technology have made extraordinary leaps, it is clear that our time is not really marked by radical newness or the fetishization of speed, but instead by the extreme contrast between the hypersonic and the prehistoric that now exist side-by-side. You don’t have to travel to war zones or disadvantaged parts of the world to understand that such contrasts are apparent in the layering of parallel economic structures as well as struggles over interpretation and meaning within and between religious and political belief systems.

Many of Brian Jungen’s sculptures and wall carvings mediate these tensions as they map out what photographer Roy Arden has termed “the landscape of the economy,” by exploring the effects of neo-colonial and global economic forces on the construction of social space and representation. For example, *Untitled*, 2001, is a stack of ten identical replicas of industrial pallets. *Isolated Depiction of the Passage of Time*, 2001, uses one of these pallets as a base and on it tightly stacks rectangular plastic cafeteria trays. *Michael*, 2003, reproduces, in cast aluminium, copies of the Air Jordan display box. *Court*, 2004, is a scale model of a basketball court, whose floor consists of 231 sewing tables used in factories and sweatshops. All these works use the raw materials of economic production and marketing as their foundation, and they might be understood as tracing the production cycle and its effects.

integers such as running shoes in *Prototypes for New Understanding*, 1998–2005, plastic chairs in *Shapeshifter*, 2000; *Cetology*, 2002, and *Vienna*, 2003, pallets in *Untitled*, 2001, cafeteria trays in *Isolated Depiction of the Passage of Time*, 2001, replicas of Air Jordan boxes in *Michael*, 2003.

Over the past decade, Jungen has tactically deployed Minimalist strategies—a theatrical use of scale, the multiplication of integers, the use of industrial materials—in his embodied forms, not to fetishize the abstract forms of Minimalism but to refocus their potential to critique social realities. Consider his use of



Jungen uses such readymade integers as “as a device to merge paradoxical concepts. Often, such concepts have raised questions of cultural authenticity and authority while simultaneously comparing the handmade over the mass-produced. I attempt to transform these objects into a new hybrid object, which both affirms and negates its mass-produced origin, and charts an alternative destination to that of the landfill.”<sup>1</sup>

[1] Jens Hoffmann, “Brian Jungen,” *Flash Art* 36, n° 231 July-September 2003.

These integers of mass production are often cut-up to shapeshift into unique and unexpected forms such as his *Prototypes for New Understanding*, in which Nike sneakers become mask forms whose reference points range from *Haida* and *Tsimshian* carvings to goalie masks. *Shapeshifter*, 2000; *Cetology*, 2002, and *Vienna*, 2003, it is the ubiquitous white plastic outdoor chair that is refashioned, this time to suggest the skeletal structure of a whale. Recently he has been developing sculptures made from deconstructed golfbags that suggest totem poles.

The wall carvings, *Fieldworks*, are a relatively new development in Jungen’s vocabulary. While carving is one of the oldest forms of sculptural production in any culture and thus are suggestive of an inclusionary logic, the images that are being carved are in fact popular stereotypes and banalizations of the richness of First Nations (Aboriginal) cultural heritage. Even as they claim the walls of high art, they recall acts of vandalism and exclusion. 🗑️