

The Way of the Shovel: On the Archaeological Imaginary in Art
Dieter Roelstraete

Contemporary artists have increasingly been basing their work on archival research, all in the name of questioning historical truth. Bringing together a diverse range of international artists who explore the theme of melding archival and experiential modes of storytelling—particularly in the wake of 9/11—*The Way of the Shovel* showcases some of the most intriguing art of the past decade. The featured artworks take various forms—historical accounts, documents, physical and metaphorical acts of excavating and unearthing, memorials, reconstructions, reenactments, and testimonies—while essays by leading scholars Sophie Berrebi, Bill Brown, Diedrich Diederichsen, exhibition curator Dieter Roelstraete, and Ian Alden Russell, present philosophical arguments about the subjects of history and the archive as well as cultural analysis and insight into the “archaeological imaginary.” Together, they make *The Way of the Shovel* indispensable for anyone seeking to understand the forces driving contemporary art.

Pamela Bannos
Lene Berg
Derek Brunen
Mariana Castillo Deball
Phil Collins
Moyra Davey
Tacita Dean
Mark Dion
Stan Douglas
LaToya Ruby Frazier
Cyprien Gaillard
Raphaël Grisey
Scott Hocking
Rebecca Keller
Daniel Knorr
Joachim Koester
Aleksander Komarov

Susanne Kriemann
Jason Lazarus
Jean-Luc Moulène
Deimantas Narkevičius
Sophie Nys
Gabriel Orozco
Michael Rakowitz
Steve Rowell
Anri Sala
David Schutter
Simon Starling
Hito Steyerl
Tony Tasset
Zin Taylor
Shellburne Thurber
Ana Torfs
Siebren Versteeg

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Roelstraete



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SCOTT HOCKING
Mercury Retrograde, 2012.
 1955 Mercury Monterrey, 295 taxidermy dioramas,
 salt, sulfur, mercury, and mixed media.
 Installed dimensions variable.
 Courtesy of the artist.

For a number of years now, the work of Scott Hocking (American, b. 1975, lives in Detroit) has been at the forefront of the growing interest in Detroit's postindustrial afterlife—a future in which art, and the well-established artistic strategy of reuse and recycling in particular, seems certain to play an important, revitalizing role. A native of the Motor City, Hocking first came to nationwide attention with his photographs of impromptu installations made up of the detritus lying around abandoned buildings such as the

iconic Fisher Body Plant 21, one of the many original cathedrals of American car culture that has been languishing in ruins since the mid-1980s. The most famous of these transient structures, now long gone, was a ziggurat composed of loose stones, conjuring the ghost of Robert Smithson and his theory of nonsites as well as the ancient language of architectural megalomania as embodied by Egyptian and Mesoamerican pyramids—one archetypal ruin reconstructed inside another. In a recent gallery exhibition titled *The End of the World*, Hocking's apocalyptic fantasy again produced a pyramidal structure, this time consisting of an elaborately stacked Tower of Babel of esoterically themed books from way back when, most of which had the end of the world as their subject. In front of this ominous monument, a rust-covered car wreck appeared stranded in the sands of time—an archaeological relic dating back to sunnier times of guilt-free, conspicuous consumption. These works mark a subtle yet decisive shift away from the catastrophilia that imbues the growing popular fascination with the United States' fastest-shrinking city, and signal the artist's increasing interest in the material possibilities of waste and the remnants of Detroit's long-lost industrial glory. Other recent works, including the ongoing *Cast Concrete in the Auto Age* project, incorporate formless blobs of matter as their basic sculptural elements—the mysterious finds of a potential archaeology of the future. DR

SCOTT HOCKING



SCOTT HOCKING
The Man Machine from the series
The Quarry/Steinbruch, 2013.
Found sandstone, and mixed media.
Installed dimensions variable.
Courtesy of the artist.



SCOTT HOCKING
Ziggurat, East, Summer II from the series
Ziggurat and Fisher Body 21, 2007-09.
6,201 creosote coated wooden floor blocks.
Installation dimensions variable.
Courtesy of the artist.