



Seeing is believing

Images are not always what they appear to be on site devoted to environment

If a picture is worth a thousand words, what is a picture made up of a thousand pictures worth? **ChrisJordan.com** is the website of a photographer and environmental activist of the same name who creates powerful images by repeating single pictures thousands, even hundreds of thousands of times.

The images deal with the impact of human activity on the environment. A picture that appears to be the sinking Titanic, but with nuclear cooling towers for smokestacks, is revealed upon zooming in to actually be composed of 67,000 photos of mushroom clouds. The text beneath the picture informs the viewer that 67,000 is equal to the number of tons of radioactive waste stored in temporary pools at nuclear power plants around the country. It goes on to describe in apocalyptic terms what could happen if something were to go wrong at one of these sites.

Another image of a skeleton smoking a cigarette is composed of 200,000 cigarette packs. According to the text, 200,000 Americans die every six months from smoking.

Focusing on an issue

The site contains several dozen of these photo collages. The images give power to the raw statistics that accompany them. Each collage addresses a different environmental or social issue by choosing an appropriate motif to repeat and arrange into an editorial illustration.

The images apparently exist as large prints somewhere, since each one is labeled with its dimensions. They range from around 5 feet on a side up to 20 or more feet. The online versions offer something that physical prints can't. Clicking on an image allows you to zoom in or out in order to see the big picture or the individual motifs. The effect can be both mesmerizing and fascinating as individual images merge into a larger whole, or as the whole disintegrates into thousands of tiny pictures.

The gallery of images would benefit from more selective editing. There is some repetition of subject matter, and some of the images are much more interesting than others.

Picture a better world

Mr. Jordan has other galleries on the site in addition to the large collages. They all deal with similar environmental and social issues. He has a way of discovering a disturbing beauty in images of consumer-driven industrial waste and disasters caused by humans.

A gallery called Intolerable Beauty displays frame after frame filled with thousands of discarded cell phones, piles of crushed cars, mountains of empty drums and many other examples of waste on a massive scale. The images send a powerful message about consumption and conservation.

Another gallery, In Katrina's Wake, chronicles the aftermath of the 2005 hurricane that ravaged the gulf coast. The text accompanying the images describes how the actions, and inactions, of people turned a dangerous storm into a catastrophe.

The Midway gallery contains dark, yet powerful, images that bear witness to the impact of consumerism on wildlife. The photos are of partially decomposed carcasses of young albatrosses. There are piles of bottlecaps, cigarette lighters and other brightly colored plastic debris where the birds' stomachs used to be. The adult birds pick the floating plastic waste from the ocean thinking it's food, and take it back to their nests to feed the chicks. The birds die from ingesting the plastic.

There's also a trailer for a documentary Mr. Jordan made about his Midway project. It starts with video depicting the islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean as a natural paradise, then transitions to images of trash floating in the sea and washed up on the beach.

Not just pretty pictures

The website has a clean design with limited, simple navigation. The plain white background and simple, sans serif black and grey type allow the images to take center stage. The site is divided into four sections:

- **Artworks**, contains the galleries.
- **Information**, contains a blog and resumé.
- **Books**, profiles the four books Mr. Jordan has had published.
- **Contact**, is what it sounds like.

Chris Jordan is on a mission to get people to take better care of our planet. He's using his considerable photographic talents to make a compelling case as to why we should.

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