

Virtual Exhibit: Chris Jordan

When we view works of art such as *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* by Georges Seurat or *The Birth of Venus* by Sandro Botticelli as positive outcomes of human culture. Many people may go to museums to escape harsh reality of human consumption and its Environmental impact. People may not realize the number of single-use plastics they use in a lifetime, or the quantity is unfathomable. On his website, Chris Jordan displays art that is recognizable, but when you look closely the picture is made up of things like plastic bags or aluminum cans. The point of his art is for people to pay attention to detail. What we think is no big deal today, can make a bigger impact in the future.

The use of plastic is everywhere and is not going anywhere either. In a research report written by Tallash Kantai called *Confronting the Plastic Pollution Pandemic*, “Plastics are omnipresent in agriculture, fisheries, renewable energy, transport, technology, retail, textile...and industries that directly or indirectly affect our daily life”.¹ This pollution is affecting our landfills and most importantly our waterways. Most of the plastic that is floating in our ocean is still intact or will never disintegrate. It may take generations before a plastic bottle to breakdown. Microplastics are toxic to human health because, in the same report by Kantai, the World Health Organization (WHO) 2019 did a study that “concluded microplastics pose no danger at current levels.”² This study was inadequate due to the lack of research, but other studies have found that the chemicals contain endocrine disruptors which are linked with brain, reproductive, immune, and developmental issues. It is in the food we eat and the water we drink. The report mentions “A study commissioned by the WWF estimating humans consume about five grams (or one credit card in weight) of plastics every week.”³ With the inevitability of plastic Jordan uses it as a medium to show just how much it affects us.

The number of plastics used by a human in their lifetime is unknown and thinking about statistics is uncomfortable. In an *Earth Island Journal* article Chris Jordan state, “emotionally barren language of statistics, turns us off”.⁴ We are a species that does not like to face the consequences of our actions. Many of us make the effort to be sustainable or recycle, but occasionally, we make mistakes and accidentally forget to use a reusable straw or throw plastic into the regular garbage and that guilt stays with us. So, we do not like to think about all our mistakes floating around in the ocean, and how long they will stay there. On his own website, Jordan states “My hope is that images representing these quantities might have a different effect than the raw numbers alone, such as we find daily in articles and books.”⁵

¹Tallash Kantai. “Confronting the Plastic Pollution Pandemic.” International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), 2020, 2. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep29273>.

² Kantai, *Confronting the Plastic Pollution Pandemic*, 2.

³ Tallash Kantai. “Confronting the Plastic Pollution Pandemic.” International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), 2020, 2. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep29273>.

⁴ Chris Jordan. “Do the Math.” *Earth Island Journal* 26, no. 1 (2011): 31–33. 1. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43880379>.

⁵ Chris Jordan. “Running the Numbers: An American Self-Portrait”. Chrisjordan.com. May 18,2022 <http://chrisjordan.com/gallery/rtn/#about>

What pulled me into his work was his website and how interactive it was. Especially, when it came to his projects *Running the Numbers*, *Midway*, and his film *Albatross*. Both deal with the same topics, but with different approaches. On his website, Jordan describes “*Running the Numbers* looks at contemporary American culture through the austere lens of statistics”.⁶ These numbers are realized in a more palatable method. But on the opposite side, there is *Midway* which is darker and brooding. Chris Jordan says this about the project: “These birds reflect an appallingly emblematic result of the collective trance of our consumerism and runaway industrial growth.”⁷ The only emotion that can come from these pictures is dread. Humanity has not only messed with life but also dead. These birds cannot die in peace. My plan for my virtual exhibit plays on emotion. I wanted the viewer to feel as if they were visiting vastly different museums. *Running the Numbers* would feel interactive in a way. It is fun, but there are some hard truths to face. There are many children's museums that are bright and colorful, but statistics are on display. On the other hand, with *Midway* there is no beating around the bush. This is about facing consequences, and how humans had their hand in it. The colors would be dull or even absent. It is just images of dead birds with their stomachs filled with plastic. Learning about the environmental crisis can be interesting and fun, but we need to understand how much we have been affected. That is why we need to be more concerned about the insignificant things that can affect the future of the Earth

⁶ Jordan <http://chrisjordan.com/gallery/rtn/#about>

⁷ Chris Jordan. ” Midway: Message from the Gyre” Chris Jordan.com. May 18,2022
<http://chrisjordan.com/gallery/rtn/#about>