THE COMMON DESTINY OF LIVING CREATURES

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Table of Contents

002 Abstract
004 Introduction
006 Consumerism, Plastic Pollution, and Long-term Environmental Implications
022 Animal Extinction and Biodiversity
026 Self-Exploration: From Individual to Collective
032 Return to aggregation
043 Craftsmanship and Sustainable Material Repurposing in Jewelry
044 The Exploitative Pursuit & De-Value Onlyism
066 The common destiny of living creatures
076 Documentation of Process
096 Interactive Engagement: Exchange feathers with a pledge
119 Cycle of Consequences
131 Exhibition Site Convention Center
140 Conclusion
142 Notes
144 Appendix
146 Bibliography
148 Acknowledgements
Abstract

This thesis explores the transformation of recycled materials and trash, into materials for jewelry making, and investigates the effects of human consumption on the environment. It is also concerned with ecological damage and biological harm by combining physical research methods with literature and data review. It also calls for consumers to reflect on their behavior and actively participate in the collective action of protecting the environment.

In this thesis, I collected and analyzed studies and information related to consumptive behavior, environmental pollution, and ecological damage. This includes academic papers, reports, statistics, and perspectives from professional organizations on consumption patterns, waste statistics, biological impacts of waste, examples of environmental pollution, waste management, etc.

The findings show that uncontrolled human consumption behavior leads to a generational pattern of large amounts of garbage and waste, which in turn leads to environmental pollution and the destruction of ecosystems. Extensive research reveals the challenges of over-consumption in terms of overexploitation of natural resources, increased energy consumption, and failed waste management. These problems seriously affect the ecological balance and pose a threat to the habitat and survival of animals everywhere.

Based on these findings, this thesis proposes a call for people to reflect on consumptive behavior and participate in environmental protection through artistic creation. Using materials such as found garbage as materials for jewelry making, and the installation of a large collection of feather brooches and necklaces of bird skeleton remains, this project conveys the harm caused by consumer behavior. It seeks to make an impact by evoking emotional resonance and action awareness in the audience. At the same time, this study also emphasizes the importance of promoting sustainable consumption and lifestyles, which requires the joint efforts of all sectors of society and the participation of every individual.
Introduction

In recent years, I have been concerned about the survival of plants and animals and the impact of human behavior on the environment. Extinction has always been a serious problem for contemporary society, and the overfishing and hunting of species as well as habitat destruction are rapidly accelerating this process. In particular, the news that the “King of Chinese freshwater fish”, “Panda of the Yangtze”, the Chinese paddlefish (Psephurus gladius) (Fig. 1), was officially declared extinct by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) on July 21, 2022. In addition, the huge amount of waste that humans produce places a serious burden on the environment.

It is common knowledge that plastic consumption causes serious global environmental pollution, and most of these plastic products are single-use. According to the research published in the journal Science Advances, the research team from UC Sanata Barbara found that from 1950 to 2015, humans have produced 8.3 billion tons of plastics broadly and 79% of which is landfilled or abandoned in the natural environment. Garbage seems to disappear when people throw it in the trash, but that doesn’t mean it disappears from the earth. In fact, the life cycle of some plastic products can be hundreds of years long. In addition, 70%-80% of marine plastic litter comes from land-based pollution.

Plastic litter wreaks havoc on marine ecosystems. For example, the accidental ingestion of plastic by animals, the death of marine life due to plastic pollution and the environmental pollution caused by the accumulation of plastic waste are all ways that plastic litter is destructive in nature. When consuming disposable products, people are often unaware of the impact of convenience. This is context where thesis resides.

To highlight the harmful effects of consumerism on the environment and biodiversity, this thesis “The common destiny of living creatures” transforms collected plastic packaging waste and aluminum cans into brooches and bird skeleton necklaces. Through an intuitive visual experience and interaction, in exchange for signing a pledge with the artist to protect the environment, viewers are encouraged to take, wear and preserve the feather brooches they are given. The project and exhibition aims to evoke a reflection on the endless pursuit of human consumption and inspire a sense of collective responsibility.

The goal of this research is to delve into how artistic practices can provoke viewers to think about consumer behavior and environmental issues in ways that touch people’s emotions and minds. By combining environmental issues with the expression of jewelry, it seeks to raise public awareness of the correlation between consumerist patterns and environmental issues, and to encourage them to engage in sustainable action and environmental protection.
Consumerism, Plastic Pollution, and Long-term Environmental Implications

Fast moving consumer goods are one of the characteristics of today’s global consumer era. The large number and diversity of them bring efficiency and convenience to people’s lives. But a crucial predicament arises: the economic paradigm of boundless expansion imposes a substantial strain on the environment. Subtly ingrained within us is the notion that a superior existence can solely be attained through material accumulation, thereby ensnaring us in the clutches of consumerism. Consumerism, as both a cultural construct and economic framework, revolves around the acquisition and utilization of commodities. It stimulates individuals to incessantly seek contentment and gratification through the relentless procurement of an increasing multitude of products.

In the book “The Consumer Society” (Fig. 2) by French sociologist Jean Baudrillard, it is mentioned that consumerism has shaped people’s behavior and conceptual values. The core of consumerism lies in satisfying individual desires, pursuing social identity, and meeting personal identity needs through consumer symbols. Consumer symbols include advertising logos, product packaging, etc. Consumer symbols not only meet the functional needs of products, but also meet the social, spiritual, and identity needs of consumers. By purchasing, displaying, and using specific symbols, consumers express their economic power, social status, taste, and identity. These symbols are symbols of social status and promote social interaction. The global economy has led to an increasing number of consumers consuming endlessly, constantly meeting or even exceeding their personal needs by choosing specific consumer symbols.

Nevertheless, the economic framework centered on ceaseless expansion has engendered a plethora of adverse consequences for the environment. The unreflective pursuit of
material possession disregards the veracity of finite resources and ecological sustainability. Consumerism fosters a culture characterized by single-use and expeditious product substitution, but this convenience often blinds us to the ramifications of our disposable commodities. The excessive packaging of products can engender deleterious outcomes, resulting in the squandering of resources, environmental degradation, and pollution. These products swiftly accumulate within our daily routines, culminating in vast mounds of refuse. Ultimately, this waste finds its way into our oceans and land, posing a colossal peril to our environment and ecosystem.

In accordance with the findings presented in the "Environmental Footprint Assessment of Plastics in China" report, the period spanning from 1950 to 2015 witnessed the cumulative production of an astounding 8.3 billion tons of plastics in a broad sense, with approximately 6.3 billion tons of plastic waste subsequently being discarded. Remarkably, an alarming 79% of this waste finds itself either landfilled or abandoned within the natural environment.
Astonishingly, 70%-80% of the refuse found in our oceans originates from land-based sources. While we dispose of our trash, it seemingly vanishes from our immediate surroundings, only to resurface in various locations across our planet. Plastic trash remains in nature without much change even between decades. Chinese artist Fu Junsheng uploaded two photos on his social media in 2022, showing a picture of the current state of a plastic food bag package he found on the beach after 20 years (Fig. 3). The words of the production date in 2000 and the basic information of the package are clearly visible in the picture (Fig. 4), and this particular bag resonated deeply with me because it carries so many fond memories of my childhood. This is the packaging of my most cherished potato chip snack. Since the appearance of this package had barely changed (Fig. 5), I could recognize it immediately. This photo led me to ponder the disturbing notion that for every additional bag of potato chips I ate, an additional fragment of packaging continued to accumulate in the grasp of nature.
According to the United Nations, at least 800 species worldwild are affected by marine debris, and as much as 80 percent of that litter is plastic. Our oceans and a range of living species are succumbing to this human “Hyberobject” - plastic. Hyberobjects is a concept proposed by philosopher and ecologist Timothy Morton, who pointed out in his book “Hyberobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World” that plastic pollution is a supermaterial problem that transcends the limits of time and space. In his book, he argues that plastic pollution is a supermaterial problem that transcends time and space, i.e., “Hyberobjects” pollution. The material nature of plastic pollution perpetuates its presence in the environment, releasing harmful substances that affect human health and the balance of the ecosystem.
Plastic does not disappear in the oceans, it just keeps breaking down into small pieces of plastic finally into microplastics, but the final breakdown takes millions of years. These little pieces of plastic are eaten by birds (Fig. 7), sea turtles, and other creatures. Plastic waste kills up to one million seabirds each year. Seabirds that accidentally eat plastic have their stomach space taken up by the plastic pieces, often causing them to become even hungrier and thus eat more plastic by mistake.

Fig. 7 Albatross eat squid, but regular consumption of plastic debris that may kill them. Screenshot from the documentary Albatross
Consumerism, Plastic Pollution, and Long-term Environmental Implications

This is shown in the photographer’s work: Mandy Barker’s photograph, titled “276 Inside-out” (Fig.8), which was taken in 2012 by the photographer 276 Pieces of plastic recovered from the stomach of ONE 90-day-old Albatross chick from the Island of Midway. More intuitively—another work Chris Jordan is below (Fig.9). A dead albatross chick was found on Midway Atoll in the Pacific Ocean with plastic debris in its stomach.

Fig.8 276 Inside-out, 276 Pieces of plastic recovered from the stomach of ONE 90-day-old Albatross chick from the Island of Midway, 2012

Fig.9 Chris Jordan’s project: Midway: Message from the Gyre (2009-Current), Unaltered stomach contents of a Laysan albatross fledgling, Midway Island, 2009
What makes me even sadder is that recent research shows that in 2023, scientists described the first disease caused by ingesting plastic, which scientists call "plasticosis." The flesh-footed gull is one of the world’s most plastic-contaminated species. (Fig. 10) Plastic debris causes severe physical damage to the bird's stomach, and over time, the inflammation caused by these plastics causes severe scarring in its stomach.

Fig. 10 Flesh-footed shearwaters are among the world’s most plastic contaminated species.
It is estimated that up to 13 million metric tons of plastic end up in the ocean each year—the equivalent of a rubbish or garbage truck load every minute. It appears that plastic can lead to accidental ingestion by birds, and has only been found in one species, but it is a testament to the prevalence of plastic pollution and the possible effects on human health. Humans are inevitably threatened by plastic and microplastics as well. As humans are at the top of the food chain, plastic particles can end up enriched in the human body.

Back in June 2019, the World Wildlife Fund reported that humans are already ingesting large amounts of plastic particles. In the report, titled “No Plastic In Nature: Assessing Plastic Ingestion From Nature to People,” researchers at The University of Newcastle revealed that the average person is inadvertently consuming far more plastic than previously anticipated. The scientist gave more specific figures: globally, each person consumes about 5 grams of plastic per week, which is the weight of a credit card. And most of the plastic particles originate from drinking water. Not coincidentally, on March 27, 2023, Dutch scientists published new research in the journal Environment International saying that they had found microplastic in human blood for the first time. (Fig. 11)

Plastic, a man-made quick consumable, eventually binds to our bodies and becomes a part of them in a way that cannot be dissipated and metabolized. Plastic waste and the like are always closer to us than we think. They fill our lives, surround the outside of our lives and invade our bodies, threatening not only the health of animals but also humans themselves. We should not be distracted by the disappearance of these wastes from our view, but rather face the damage they do to the ecosystem and the long-term effects on humans and other species. Whereas plastic had previously only been shown to be present in organs such as the human stomach, the presence of microplastics found in human blood signifies a more serious potential risk, with people eventually absorbing them through their digestive systems and reaching their entire bodies through the bloodstream.

Fig. 11 Microplastics cause damage to human cells in the laboratory. Photograph: David Kelly/Photograph David Kelly
Animal Extinction and Biodiversity

Extinction of plants and animals has never been far from us, and it is a contemporary problem that has always existed. When we mention phrases about extinct animals, the first animal that comes to mind is probably a dinosaur or a mammoth. But it sounds like a long time ago, something that happened in ancient times and history. However, the extinction of species is a real thing in our present day.

My initial inspiration for this work stemmed from the somber announcement made by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) on July 21, 2022, pronouncing the official extinction of the Chinese paddlefish, renowned as the "King of Chinese freshwater fish." Before this news, I had been oblivious to the existence of this extraordinary species until I encountered an image in the media (Fig.12). Little did I know that this brief encounter would mark the final glimpse of this remarkable creature. The extinction of the Chinese paddlefish, attributed primarily to habitat destruction and rampant overfishing by humans, stands as a stark illustration of the devastating consequences of human actions. It is a distressing reminder that a once thriving and autonomous species has been irrevocably wiped out due to the rapacious exploitation of its habitat. Regrettably, this tragic event is not an isolated occurrence.

Fig.12 Chinese Paddlefish
In the natural world, species extinction is a normal occurrence. However, over the past hundred years or so, human activities have led to the extinction of many species due to the interplay of habitat destruction, climate change, overfishing and hunting, species invasion, pollution, and other factors that have accelerated the extinction of plants and animals. According to a study published in the journal Science by Duke University biologist Stuart Pimm, after the advent of humans, plants and animals are becoming extinct 1,000 times faster than they were before humans appeared. The reason for this is attributed to the loss of habitat, and species are disappearing at an accelerated rate. Many species have disappeared from the planet before they even have a chance to be described and named. (Fig. 13)

The extinction of species has undoubtedly destroyed biodiversity. When biodiversity is reduced or destroyed due to human activities, such as the extinction of species and destruction of living environments, these changes may have unpredictable chain reactions and effects throughout the ecosystem, for example, the “Butterfly effect”. Biodiversity plays a key role in the stability and dynamic balance of the Earth’s ecosystem. The loss of biodiversity caused by species extinction will lead to instability in the system, and instability may further lead to the disappearance of more species, a vicious circle of chain reactions and effects such as the butterfly effect caused by small changes in the huge impact.

The acceleration of species extinction proves that human beings prioritize their development interests over species. They show indifference towards the fate of animals and fail to consider their long-term sustainable development. It is as if animals are treated as disposable products, discarded when they are no longer useful. As mentioned above, we cannot predict the day when the negative consequences of our collective behavior toward other creatures will affect humans. The garbage we dispose of may eventually find its way back into our bodies. With the ongoing extinction of other species, I am deeply concerned about the possibility that humans will one day face the consequences of the uncontrolled development.

Fig. 13 Creatures that have gone extinct in the last few hundred years
Self-Exploration: From Individual to Collective

Our world is facing a grave environmental threat due to the excessive use of disposable products. (Fig.14) Encountering a myriad of distressing statistics and alarming trends, as an artist and, more fundamentally, as an individual engrossed in the study of environmental concerns and the intricacies of our habitat, I find it untenable to remain passive in the face of such disheartening realities. It is incumbent upon me to take action and contribute towards meaningful solutions.

Fig.14 Freedom Island, is one of the most polluted areas of the Philippines. Beaches polluted by single-use plastic
As an artist and an individual, I find it impossible to remain passive amidst the profound environmental crisis precipitated by the rampant consumption of disposable goods. Being born in China during the early 1990s, I was instilled with a sense of duty to prioritize collective welfare and assume responsibility for society and the environment. Undeniably, China has experienced remarkable economic advancement and urbanization; however, it is crucial to contemplate the sacrifices made in pursuit of this growth. (Fig. 15)

Fig. 15 China’s urbanization has been besieged by garbage. In Lanzhou, Gansu, the edge of the city is surrounded by a huge garbage dump, and citizens live in pollution. Credit: The Epoch Times.
Chinese artist Xu Bing’s large-scale installation “Phoenix Project” (Fig. 16) was created in 2008 and completed in 2010 after two years of work. 2008 was a special year for every Chinese people. 2008 was the year when the Beijing Olympics were held, the first time China bid to host the Olympics. It was a time when China was showing its image as a great nation and its rapid modernization and development to the world. The birth of the Phoenix project has a richer meaning in the context of this moment. This work is based on the construction waste from the city construction process, including construction materials, labor tools, and construction workers’ daily necessities. His work, which is made of waste materials, includes construction materials, labor tools, household items of construction workers, etc. The Phoenix, which represents the beautiful symbolism of traditional Chinese culture, is not only a profound reflection of the urbanization process and development of Chinese society but also shows concern for environmental protection issues. His work is a powerful link between art and reality and demonstrates his concern for nature and waste.
Between 1950 and 2015, a total of 6.3 billion tonnes of primary and secondary (recycled) plastic waste was generated, of which around 9% has been recycled, and 12% incinerated, with the remaining 79% either being stored in landfills or having been released directly into the natural environment.13 Mainly composed of plastics, paper, metals, and other materials. These alarming numbers made me realize that I had to start doing something to show my concern about the environmental crisis, even if it was something small. With my concern about the growing environmental problems, I started a journey to collect used materials and detritus.

My initial inspiration for my artwork came from my arrival in the United States and the various recyclable paper products I collected. I began to turn my attention to my everyday life. I found that after arriving in the U.S., my life was filled with a lot of paper waste: supermarket discount coupons, lots of paper bags marked with the word recycled, paper advertisements, and free magazines. This is a far cry from the environment I once lived in China, where paper-based advertising magazines and a plethora of supermarket shopping paper bags are now rare. These papers are short-lived, disposable, and of low value. Although there has been a lot of advocacies in society regarding recycling garbage, the vast majority is still not recycled or misclassified. According to the data from United states Environmental Protection Agency, the total generation of municipal solid waste (MSW) in 2018 was 292.4 million tons (U.S. short tons, unless specified) or 4.9 pounds per person per day. Of the MSW generated, approximately 69 million tons were recycled, and 25 million tons were composted. Together, almost 94 million tons of MSW were recycled and composted, equivalent to a 32.1 percent recycling and composting rate.14
In my artistic exploration, I embarked on a conscious endeavor to collect and repurpose paper as a central element in my creative process. Adopting a methodical approach, I meticulously punched holes in the paper, carefully stacking and compressing it to fashion flexible and supple linear structures that evoked the concept of timelines. Through this meticulous manipulation, the once ordinary paper transformed into a material that resembled the texture and appearance of wood.
As I delved deeper into my artistic experimentation, I ventured to push the boundaries of my medium. I began gathering substantial quantities of paper, deliberately obscuring and rendering unreadable the information that was once inscribed upon it. This deliberate act of obfuscation catalyzed the gradual metamorphosis of the paper, progressively assuming a wood-like quality. The transformation from legible text to an organic, tactile material was a metaphorical journey, symbolizing the transient nature of information and the fluidity of perception.

Bending Wood, 2022
Brooch
5.5”x3.5”x2.5”
Recycled paper/magazines, stainless steel

Spoon, 2022
Brooch
6.2”x2”x1”
Recycled paper/magazines, stainless steel
Return to Aggregation: Ridges, 2022
Necklace
13” x 3.5” x 0.5”
Recyclable papers, newspapers, magazines, cotton thread

Return to Aggregation: Gray Wood, 2022
Necklace
14” x 3” x 0.5”
Recyclable papers, newspapers, magazines, cotton thread

1/16 of floor, 2022
Brooch
5.3” x 5.3” x 0.8”
Recycled paper/magazines, resin, stainless steel
With this wood-like material at my disposal, I embarked on the process of recreating familiar household objects or discarded items that are often overlooked in our daily lives. By manipulating the paper and sculpting it into these simulated forms, I aimed to shed light on the inherent beauty and value that lies within the ordinary and disregarded. Through the act of transforming discarded materials into aesthetically pleasing and thought-provoking sculptures, I sought to challenge societal notions of worth and prompt viewers to reevaluate their relationship with the material world.

Simultaneously, I embarked on a series of size variations, experimenting with different scales of the simulated forms. This exploration not only served as a technical exercise but also allowed me to witness firsthand the transformative power of aggregation. By scaling up or down the size of these forms, I observed how the material properties responded, how the graphic representation of the underlying message evolved, and how the possibilities for creative expression expanded exponentially.

Ultimately, this multidimensional approach to working with discarded paper offered me a rich tapestry of creative opportunities. It allowed me to explore the boundaries of materials, question preconceived notions of value, and reflect on the interplay between form and function. Through this artistic process, I sought to stimulate critical thinking, challenge conventional perspectives, and provoke conversations about our relationship with discarded materials in a disposable society.
Craftsmanship and Sustainable Material Repurposing in Jewelry

Contemporary society is experiencing a renaissance in the arts and crafts. The book, The New Politics of the Handmade argues that this renaissance is not only due to the aesthetic value of craft art but also because craft art tends to oppose industrialization and globalization in contemporary society. Craft artists seek to revive traditional handcrafted art skills and use them to express their views and values about the world. Through handcrafting, they emphasize the process of making artwork, as well as the culture and history associated with the process of making it.

In addition, the place and role of handcrafted art in the contemporary art market is changing. More and more people are recognizing the value of craft art and are beginning to collect and display it as a separate art form. This trend reflects the significance individuals attribute to conventional expertise and cultural legacy, and exemplifies introspection and aspiration towards contemporary society.

Craft arts have an important role to play in the development and transformation of society. Through their works, craft artists reflect on the issues and challenges of society and try to inspire people to think and act. Craft artists can use handmade skills and methods to create meaningful works that make people think and reflect on social phenomena and inspire them to take positive action for social change.

Craftsmanship serves as the cornerstone of my artistic practice, specifically in the realm of jewelry creation. In today’s fast-paced society, where mechanization and mass production prevail, emphasizing efficiency, speed, and quantity, I consciously choose a divergent path to challenge this paradigm. I slow down the creative process, choosing to counter the rapid
mechanization of production through a relatively less efficient handcraft, and using it to capture the precision and uniqueness of my work, and also to minimize the consumption of materials to a certain extent.

Central to my approach is the collection and repurposing of discarded materials, emphasizing sustainability and resourcefulness in my creative process. I purposefully minimize the intervention of large machinery, preferring to rely on manual techniques and tools. By doing so, I liberate myself from the limitations imposed by machines, allowing my artistic expression to flourish and explore uncharted territories.

In my series of works titled “Return to Aggregation”, I employ a manual punch to perforate collected magazines and informational materials. Each punched hole is then threaded carefully with a needle and thread. Drawing inspiration from traditional bookbinding techniques, I assemble the paper stacks to resemble the appearance of wood. This labor-intensive process demands significant time and effort, but it also imparts a rebellious and self-expressive quality to my creations. It prompts contemplation on the themes of time, value, and efficiency, and establishes a profound connection to nature and humanity. This method of working fascinates me and I have decided to continue to develop it.
Craftsmanship and Sustainable Material Repurposing in Jewelry

Return to aggregation: Knot, 2022, necklace, 15"x2.4"x1.6", recyclable paper, cotton

Return to aggregation: Chains, 2022, necklace, 15"x2.4"x1.6", recyclable paper, cotton
Rather than settling for abstract forms, I focus on using my transformed materials to mimic real, tangible forms. Making a more direct connection to the fate of the creatures I care about.

Through my research, I found that two animal species in China are facing vastly different fates. The Chinese Pangolin (Fig. 19) is facing severe survival crises due to illegal hunting for its scales, which are used in traditional Chinese medicine. In fact, the scales of the pangolin (Fig. 20) are no different from the composition of human nails, and this blind pursuit has led to the destruction of a species.

Meanwhile, the crested ibis (Fig. 21) is a miracle of China’s conservation efforts, as it has rebounded in population after once being on the brink of extinction.

Fig. 19 Chinese Pangolin. According to the International Wildlife Trade Investigation Committee (TRAFFIC), 1 million pangolins have been poached in the past 10 years, and the number has been classified as "critically endangered" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
Craftsmanship and Sustainable Material Repurposing in Jewelry

Fig. 20 Scales of Pangolin. Illegally smuggled pangolin scales were intercepted by customs

Fig. 21 Crested ibis, Nipponia Nippon
In “Return to Aggregation: Pangolin”, I used recyclable aluminum cans as material and reproduced the two animals with pure hand-cutting, reconstructing the body of the pangolin with aluminum scales.
Craftsmanship and Sustainable Material Repurposing in Jewelry

Collection of Aluminum cans

Collection of Aluminum cans
In “Return to Aggregation: Crested Ibis”, the shape of the ibis is reproduced with feathers. All these feathers are cut from soda cans. Compared to the softness of real bird feathers, these aluminum feathers are hard and even a little stabbing. Real bird feathers are very environmentally friendly, while many aluminum cans that are marked recyclable are thrown away and persist in nature, causing environmental pollution. When the audience tries to touch them, they can feel the tingling sensation brought by the sharpness. When humans hunt birds for their own consumption, they often overlook the suffering inflicted upon these creatures, leaving the birds defenseless against such actions. With the sharpness of the touch back to the viewer who touches it, I hope the viewer will realize the sting of all the bad actions that humans do to other creatures.
The Exploitative Pursuit & De-Value Onlyism

People’s pursuit of decorative items such as furs and feathers often leads to the exploitation and harm of animals. Reflecting the exploitation of animals and the impact of human consumption behavior on the environment, this consumption pattern is unsustainable, negatively impacting the ecosystem and posing a threat to the future. More critically, humans see themselves as dominant in this process, considering only their own development prospects and needs, and treating other creatures as their subordinates, such as single-use products, with humans alone as supreme. This single value system with humans as the apex animal destroys the ecological balance and damages biodiversity, and in the long run, humans will eventually bear the consequences.

It is crucial to revisit the notion of value itself. Former CEO of Coca-Cola, Bryan Dyson, poignantly states, “Value has a value only if its value is valued.” In contemporary society, however, the term ‘value’ has become narrowly associated with monetary worth. This limited view fails to recognize the true nature of value and leads to a pervasive anthropocentric mentality that prioritizes human desires over sustainability and the well-being of other species.

This thesis and work center on the construction of a value system that differs from the animal evaluation system that has human beings as its apex. It is seeking a De-Value onlyism, a term that describes a concept that eliminates the traditional value system in which money is the only criterion of judgment and establishes a pluralistic value evaluation system.

This evaluation system no longer has capitalism as its main orientation but takes into full consideration the concept of value and introduces the concept of moral value, and environmental value. Such a system takes sustainable ecology as the goal of development and takes into full consideration the fate and value of species other than humans.
The common destiny of living creatures

I have been collecting plastic packaging for a year so far. This conscientious collection process has entailed meticulous cleaning, careful sorting, and the transformative act of repurposing this material into functional recycled resources.
“The common destiny of living creatures” is an installation of recycled plastic brooches aggregated together. The feathers take the form of a flying bird, reprocessed and transformed from thousands of disposable plastic bags and food packaging. This process requires a great deal of time and labor, to strike a dramatic contrast to today’s quest for the quick and the consumable. The use of hand-cutting minimizes waste of material and creates feathers that are each different and bear a unique message mark and shape.

Mock up at Metcalf Building
The common destiny of living creatures
The common destiny of living creatures is a term I created. It means that all biological life is considered equivalent, without distinguishing hierarchical relationships. The fate of all living things is seen as tightly linked to the fate of humans and does not pose a threat to the survival of other living things because of human behavior. It is a beautiful expectation and vision.
Documentation of Process

The meticulous documentation of the creative process holds paramount significance in my artistic practice. Specifically, I dedicate careful attention to capturing the step-by-step transformation of plastic bags through the process of ironing, and laminating the bags with heat, yielding a material resembling leather. When arranged in a stacked configuration, these resulting brooches evoke vivid imagery reminiscent of topographical maps or an assemblage of various commodities. Through the application of high-temperature ironing, the distinct surface information on the plastic bags is eradicated; however, vestiges of product packaging details may still be discerned. By deliberately eliminating the reliance on industrialized stencil production, I aim to subvert the prevailing ethos of hasty and excessive consumerism, symbolizing my resistance to its detrimental effects.
Documentation of Process
Fig. Process recording: Test of converting plastic bags into bird silhouettes

Fig. Process documentation: Test of plastic placement of bird silhouettes in a natural environment (Photoshop)
In the ongoing and protracted process of creation, I diligently cut different feathers. Within this procedural framework, I experience a profound serenity that has eluded me for an extensive duration, and I find solace in this perpetual and repetitive undertaking. Though this endeavor may appear mundanely tedious, it constitutes a pivotal and efficacious measure in my environmental conservation endeavors, whereby I convert the plastic bags I have accumulated. This metamorphosis, characterized by the alteration of constituent materials and the elevation of inherent worth, concurrently augments my resolve to safeguard the environment. I discern the tactile warmth imparted by the materials, apprehend the artistic processes intrinsic to craftsmanship, and engage in profound contemplation concerning the essence of existence. The meticulous documentation of the creative process is of paramount importance in my artistic practice. Specifically, I work to capture the step-by-step transformation of plastic bags through an ironing process that produces a leather-like material. When arranged in a stacked configuration, these resulting brooches evoke vivid images reminiscent of topographical maps or combinations of various commodities. Through the application of high-temperature ironing, the apparent surface information on the plastic bags is eliminated; however, remnants of product packaging details can still be discerned. By deliberately eliminating the reliance on industrial stencil production, I aim to subvert the prevailing ethos of hasty and excessive consumerism, symbolizing my resistance to its harmful effects.
In this ongoing, slow process of creation, I trim the plastic feathers night and day. In this process, I feel a peace of mind that I haven’t felt in a long time, and I feel healed in this constant, repetitive activity. This process may seem very boring, but it is an effective step in my efforts to protect the environment by converting the plastic bags I collect. This transformation, with the change of materials and the upgrade of values, also gradually increased my determination to protect the environment. I feel the warmth of the materials brought to me, feel the time and labor consumed by handicraft making, and when the feather brooch was finally exchanged successfully. I only have the digital image of this feather brooch and the signature of the viewer who took them away. The final disintegration of this bird image represents a loss, but at the same time, it is comforting to me. The audience took them away and kept them for a long time, instead of just using them up and throwing them away like they do with disposable plastic packaging.

I got a commitment from the viewers, and I was excited by the promise of future environmental action that would come as a result of the signed agreement.
Interactive Engagement: Exchange feathers with a pledge

Viewers are free to participate and take the recycled feathers to wear. This process symbolizes the endless pursuit of human consumption and the impact it has on the natural environment and the survival of animals. As the feather brooches are removed by the audience, the form of the flying bird gradually disintegrates, suggesting the destruction of the natural ecosystem by human impact. In exchange for wearing a feather brooch, viewers are asked to sign their names in a pledge of solidarity to decrease the use of disposable plastics and aluminum. The project aims to increase one’s value of caring for environmental issues and reflecting on consumer behavior through a craft practice. I hope this project will raise awareness regarding environmental protection and our shared responsibility so we can work together to contribute to the sustainable development of this planet.
Interactive Engagement: Exchange feathers with a pledge
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Interactive Engagement. Exchange feathers with a pledge.
Interactive Engagement: Exchange feathers with a pledge
A very important aspect of the work of the postmodernist Felix González-Torres (1957-1996) is that his work breaks away from the traditional conceptions and forms of art, with a greater emphasis on the participation and interaction of the viewer, breaking away from the isolation of traditional artworks. Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.) (Fig.22): This is an installation consisting of many identical candies. The viewer is free to take the candy away from the exhibition site as a representation of the passing of the artist’s deceased partner, Ross. As the viewer removes the candy, the number of candies becomes smaller, just as Ross’ life gradually passes away. The participation and interaction of the audience are the keys to the presentation of the work, and this sense of participation touches me profoundly, immersing the audience in it, not only as viewers but also as part of the artwork. Rather than this unconditional sharing, I would like my work to be an exchange between each viewer and me, to make a pact, to make a commitment to protect the environment. In my work, I contribute time and labor, and I hope that the viewer will contribute their responsibility to this ecological environment.
As an artist, I believe it is my responsibility to use my platform to create meaningful and impactful work that brings attention to important social and environmental issues. Through *The Common Destiny of Living Creatures*, I hope to inspire viewers to consider their own impact on the environment and to question the culture of consumerism that has led to the proliferation of single-use plastics and other waste.
Pledge for the common destiny of living creatures

Dear audience, let’s journey to a green future together.

Through this exchange,

An offer you a feather brooch made from modified plastic waste, I ask you to join me in a solemn pledge to reduce our consumption of single-use plastic and aluminum.

As this feather brooch adorns your chest,

let it serve as a reminder of our shared responsibility to protect and preserve the delicate balance of nature.

We, the advocates of environmental protection, solemnly pledge to take the following actions to protect the planet and reduce our impact on the environment:

Reduce the use of disposable products:

a. When shopping, we will carry reusable shopping bags and avoid the use of plastic bags.

b. We will minimize the use of disposable tableware by using reusable cutlery, cups, and straws.

c. We will reduce our reliance on disposable paper towels by choosing reusable paper towels or washable cloth towels.

d. We will encourage using individual coffee cups in coffee shops to reduce the consumption of disposable cups.

Promote sustainable consumption:

a. We will carefully consider our products’ environmental performance and sustainability certifications before purchasing and choosing products that meet environmental standards.

b. Reduce reliance on fast fashion and choose durable, high-quality clothing and shoes to avoid over-consumption.

c. Whenever possible, purchase locally produced goods to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions during transportation.

There is much I can do to protect the home of the planet we all share as creatures through my tangible actions.

I bear witness to this with the feather pins I take with me. I pledge to personally uphold these commitments and work to incorporate them into my daily life and behavior.
If we do not respect our common destiny with all living things, the first to pay the price will be the birds. But one day, the consequences of this cycle will inevitably fall on humans. We should reflect on our actions and make the necessary changes to protect our planet and its precious creatures before it is too late.

Aggregated burned aluminum soda cans
Cycle of Consequences

The Cost of Ignorance (Patali, 2023)
Necklace, aluminum (soda can), steel
Cycle of Consequences
The series, themed The Common Destiny of Living Creatures, shows the consequences if humans do not protect biodiversity. Made of recyclable aluminum cans as the material, the act of heating and burning simulates the process of recycling aluminum products or burning garbage, causing the words on the surface of the cans to change color but still retain their product information. Different bird bones are cut out of the aluminum cans to form a closed necklace, a circular necklace structure that demonstrates a sense of reincarnation. According to the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu’s Tao Te Ching theory, “One life gives birth to two, two gives birth to three, and three gives birth to everything”, which is a doctrine of the origin of all things, but my project concludes with three necklaces, which are about reincarnation from the beginning of life to death. If left unchecked, it is the birds and other creatures that are affected by environmental pollution, but ultimately these negative results will be reflected in humans themselves, which is a critical issue concerning the fate of humanity.
The Fate of Disregard (Partial), 2023
Necklace, aluminium(soda cans), steel
The Fate of Disregard, 2023
Necklace
2” x 4” x 1”
Aluminum (soda cans), steel
Exhibition Site Convention Center

The Common Destiny of Living Creatures, 2023
Exhibition site
Convention Center, Providence, Rhode Island
May 24th, 2023, Opening Day

Thank you so much my wonderful peers and professors! I couldn’t have done it without all of you!
The Cost of Ignorance, 2023
Necklace
Aluminum (soda cans), steel

The Fate of Disregard, 2023
Necklace
2’6” x 1”
Aluminum (soda cans), steel
The Cycle of Fate, 2023
Necklace
Aluminum (soda cans), steel

The Common Destiny of Living Creatures, 2023
Installation, brooches
Plastic, steel
The Common Destiny of Living Creatures, 2023
Exhibition site
Picking for a feather brooch

The Common Destiny of Living Creatures, 2023
Exhibition site
Viewers' signature on the pledge
Conclusion

This thesis examines the detrimental effects of human consumption on the environment and the exploitation of animals through the pursuit of decorative items like fur and feathers. It explores the unsustainable nature of this consumption pattern, which not only negatively impacts the ecosystem but also poses a threat to the future. Furthermore, the prevailing anthropocentric value system that prioritizes human interests and views other creatures as subordinates have exacerbated the destruction of the ecological balance and the loss of biodiversity. It is evident that humans must recognize the consequences of their actions and adopt a more sustainable and inclusive value system that considers the well-being of all species.

Through the collection and analysis of research materials, this thesis reveals the extensive damage caused by uncontrolled human consumption. The generation of large amounts of waste, particularly plastic waste, has resulted in environmental pollution and the destruction of ecosystems. Overconsumption has led to the overexploitation of natural resources, increased energy consumption, and the failure of waste management, all of which threaten the habitat and survival of all species.

In response to these findings, the thesis proposes a call for reflection on consumptive behavior and active participation in environmental protection through artistic creation. By transforming recycled materials and detritus into jewelry and incorporating them into an interactive installation, The Common Destiny of Living Creatures aims to convey the harmful effects of unrestricted consumer spending. Through emotional resonance and heightened awareness, viewers are encouraged to reconsider their relationship with the environment and accept collective responsibility for the well-being of our world. If people continue to ignore these issues, the consequences of our lack of responsibility may result in the extinction of humanity itself.

The study also highlights the need for active individual participation in the local community efforts. By integrating craft and repurposed materials into jewelry that can be worn and preserved over time. The thesis demonstrates the process of creating upcycle art and provides examples on how to initiate constructive dialogues that challenge current social values and norms.

In summary, this thesis highlights the urgent need to address the harmful effects of human consumption on the environment. This body of work addresses a need to reassess current value systems, emphasizing the importance of sustainable practices and the preservation of biodiversity. Through artistic expression and interactive participation, the project aims to raise awareness and foster a sense of collective responsibility for environmental protection. By embracing an integrated approach that combines individual action, social change, and artistic intervention, we can work towards a sustainable and harmonious coexistence with the natural world.
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