

*The Capital City Arts Initiative [CCAI] is delighted to present, Waste Aeon, an exhibition by artist Kyle Karrasch, at the Western Nevada College Bristlecone Gallery from September 19 – December 20, 2022. CCAI extends its sincere appreciation to the artist, Western Nevada College, and to all those involved with the exhibition. In addition, CCAI thanks our commissioned writer, Josie Glassberg, who provided the following essay.*

## Waste Aeon

Elegant trash sculptures evoke deep time, deep depression, and prismatic hope.

*“Is your work meditative?”*

*“Meticulous, not super meditative.”*

For several years, Kyle Karrasch has spent his time transforming trash into large-scale sculptures for exhibitions. His latest, *Waste Aeon* — a re-staging of his 2020 MFA thesis of the same name — has come together in the artists’s usual way: with minimal meditation and some amount of masochism. Trading soft focus for painful attention to detail, Karrasch puts in long hours crushing 12,000 aluminum cans into a wall, joining 15,000 beverage tabs into a textile, and cataloging fingernail-sized bits of plastic into 24 feet of color-coded containers.

“I’m constantly sitting there,” Karrasch says, “thinking the same thing, repeating the action over and over. I want the thought behind the action to be really potent to the viewer — I want to get across the idea that this is just continuing.”

*This*, of course, is the hellscape we are responsible and not responsible for. The Anthropocene, the Capitalocene, the Waste Aeon. Both inherited and relentlessly created, the waste stream that defines our unofficial unit of geologic time is, arguably, our biggest contribution to the planet.

Here, it is customary to list off all the ways we’ve been the absolute, environmental worst... and the statistics are convincing, but ultimately easy to tune out. Harder to miss are Karrasch’s two- and three-dimensional sculptures, which offer elegant, visceral imagery about the condition we find ourselves in as well as an opportunity to transmute the numbers into something more useful than facts and more emotionally sticky than guilt trips.

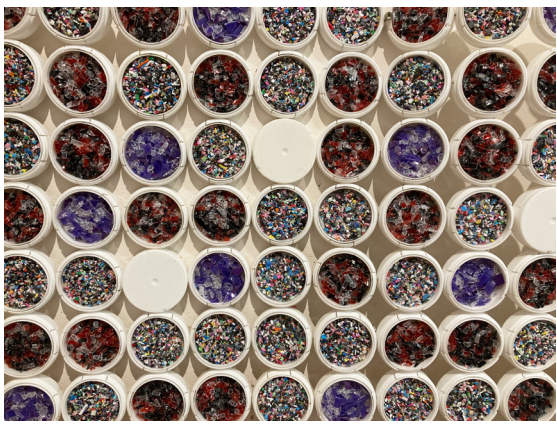
*Strata* sets the tone for the exhibition as nine light-reflecting and distinctly colored layers of garbage settle like tiered rock — *strata* — over the span of three frames, offering up the metaphor of waste as geology. Like the bedrock beneath our feet, trash will be here for ages and may be of equal interest to future archaeologists, Elon Musk descendants, or even our own bodiless-, metaverse-uploaded hivemind as future monuments to what Karrasch calls “the sobering aggregate

of our discarded materials.”

Looking at the bands of pink, blue, green, gray, black, and white, it’s not a stretch to interpret each layer as representative of the material it is made of: paper, aluminum, rubber, textiles, glass, plastic. So much plastic. According to Karrasch, the layers correspond to their landfill counterparts, though this detail is left out of the exhibition to avoid it looking too “infographic-ish.”



*Strata*, aluminum, rubber, glass, textiles, paper, and plastic, depicts percentages of material volume in U.S. landfills, 2022.



*Negligible*, made from various plastic polymers, depicts percentages in types of plastic waste as well as the percentage of plastic that gets recycled, 2022.

In *Negligible*, hundreds of plastic containers containing hundreds of pieces of plastic to mimic candy dots, ticker tape, or another more contemporary reference you surely have in your head. Jewel-toned reds, ocean blues, and bright, rainbow confetti belong in their own separate canisters, sparkling in the light like glass beads or rock candy — so pretty you momentarily forget that we, as a planet, have an ocean-wide, multiple-millions-of-tons microplastic problem and, as a nation, only recycle 5% of the 40 million+ tons of plastic we use each year.

More natural-looking is *Ascent* — a freestanding, eight-foot-high by eighteen-foot-long, shades-of-brown structure made up of more than 200 corrugated cardboard boxes. Arranged in an ascending formation that curves into a crescent footprint, the 3-D bar graph gently encloses you inside its perimeter so you can better contemplate the number of trees that the boxes literally equate to (1.5) and figuratively represent (493 million).

You imagine that our volume of paper waste per year is unbelievable, but it isn’t until whole, window-sized swaths of cardboard start to vanish that incredulousness sets in. At first, it appears that there is a glare, but upon closer inspection you discover that a direct gaze allows you to see straight through to the gallery wall on the other side of the sculpture. It’s an effect that, according to the artist, only works at a cardboard depth of just over an inch and is one that echoes the

More natural-looking is *Ascent* — a freestanding, eight-



*Ascent*, cardboard, depicts a graph of paper consumption over the past 20 years in the U.S., 2022.

unseeable and unknowable nature of our garbage — the hyperobject that Karrasch describes as “an unimaginable ball of volume.” It is also conceivable that the mirage-like absence of waste is a winking, prismatic view into another, better time period; a distant past or an alternative future.

The largest piece in the exhibition, *Fractionary Mass* is an eight-by-nine-foot sculpture that doubles as a barrier, demanding we stop and reckon with the material implications of what we’re looking at

— 12,000 crushed cans that have been further compressed into cooler-sized blocks and stacked into a solid wall. As a data visualization, *Fractionary Mass* represents only 3.4 seconds of aluminum can consumption in America. As an extended metaphor, the sculpture reads as a monument to a civilization that has been kicking the proverbial can down the road for lifetimes now, drafting the next



*Fractionary Mass*, 12,000 condensed aluminum cubes which equates to 3.4 second of total U.S. consumption, 2022.

generation to either do the work we didn’t or accept that personal preference in soda is about the extent of our agency.

*Nexus* — the final piece in *Waste Aeon* — continues with the aluminum theme, this time using the beverage tabs leftover from the other cans as weaving material for an elaborately made but delicate looking, floor-to-ceiling chainmail tapestry that doubles as a glittering waterfall or a silvery, slinky dress that pools on the floor. It is primarily beautiful and only informative if you care to find out (or are told by the artist) that the 15,000 tabs equate to less than five-seconds of canned beverage use in our country.

“Are we doomed?”

“We might be kind of f\*\*\*ed for a future. If we went totally sustainable right now — just sustainable — we’d need another Earth.”

Returning to the wilds of conspicuous consumption, we can take and leave what we will from Karrasch’s work — knowing that it is probably not enough to save a whole earth, let alone the second one we will soon be



*Nexus*, 15,000 linked aluminum beverage tabs that equate to 4.2 seconds of U.S. consumption, 2022.



needing. Comfort is not everything, though. It's barely anything. Wouldn't you rather know how we go down? Wouldn't you rather recycle your Amazon boxes in case we don't?

Josie Glassberg

Reno, Nevada

September, 2022



Kyle Karrasch



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