



Andy Yoder: *Overboard*
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 Brattleboro Museum & Art Center
 Downtown Brattleboro, Vermont

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With over 240 recycled-material sculptures of classic Nikes, an installation-based museum solo show responds to ‘The Great Shoe Spill of 1990’

Taking the spatial form of a designer showroom—and reflecting on the aftermath of an incident in which more than 61,000 Nike Air Jordan 5 sneakers spilled into the Pacific Ocean—Overboard addresses the environmental impact of consumerism through the lens of sneaker culture

Brattleboro, VT – Fall 2020 – The Brattleboro Museum & Art Center is pleased to present Andy Yoder (b. 1957)’s *Overboard*, an installation-based solo presentation consisting of more than 240 sculptural replicas of size 13 Air Jordan 5 sneakers that are handmade from foraged consumer packaging. *Overboard* responds to a historical event in which 61,820 Nikes spilled into the Pacific Ocean, subsequently becoming the focus of oceanographic studies—and the obsession of beachcombing sneaker enthusiasts—when they started washing up on far-apart beaches.

Yoder, a classically trained artist with a formal education in sculpture, has always worked with repurposed everyday objects as a way to explore manmade order and the way humans interact with their constructed environment. He designed *Overboard* in a manner that emulates the effect of walking into a shoe store. In doing so, he elevates the discarded packaging (much of which he personally foraged from recycling and trash bins in the DC metro area) to luxury objects—the trash now playfully worthy of display in a lighted showroom. Microcosmically inverting the environmental impact of consumer culture, the work is at once serious and humorous.



All 2020; all Bristol board, reclaimed packaging, found object, and hot glue; all 9Hx13Wx4D”.
 Clockwise from left: Mantova (right) Jordan 5 • Lakers #1 Jordan 5 • David Hockney Jordan 5 • #2 McDonalds/
 Diet Coke Jordan 5 • Corona Light Jordan 5 • Harry Styles Jordan 5. All photos © Greg Staley.

‘The Great Shoe Spill of 1990’ occurred in late May 1990, when a container ship that was en route from Korea to the United States encountered a storm, spilling overboard 21 forty-foot cargo containers into the Pacific Ocean just south of the Alaskan Peninsula. Five of these containers had

collectively held over 61,000 of the much-hyped Nike Air Jordan 5s, which over the coming months and years began washing up on beaches from Vancouver to Hawaii—over 2,700 miles from the initial spill. Beachcombing sneaker fans descended upon the coastlines and even began holding swap meets to match up left-and-right shoes to make a pair (the shoe came in five colorways). At a retail price of \$125 for a pair in 1990, the spilled sneakers had a total approximate value of \$7.7 million in today's dollars.

A duo of oceanographers, W. James Ingraham and Curtis Ebbesmeyer, got word of the spill and, because all of the shoes had unique serial numbers, were able to produce extensive documentation of ocean currents. One notable aspect was that the majority of the hundreds of shoes that washed up in Vancouver were right footed, while those farther down in Oregon were left footed. Ingraham and Ebbesmeyer discovered that the angle of the shoes' indent echoed distinct ocean currents. While the Spill was undeniably an environmental disaster, two parties—scientists and sneaker enthusiasts—reaped the benefits for over a decade to come, as the serial numbered shoes continued to wash up.

“The issue of how consumer culture affects the environment isn't new,” said Yoder, “but it has become politicized and suffers from message fatigue. Hopefully the visual impact of the exhibition, and the decision to explore things through the lens of sneaker culture in a visually playful manner, will present the issue in a way that is fresh, and as a result more impactful.”

Forged materials that make up the individually ‘themed’ shoe sculptures include cereal boxes, Bruce Lee posters, Hermès shopping bags, a blue Tiffany's box, a reproduction of John James Audubon's famous flamingo, and a print of Hokusai's *The Great Wave*. Using a size 13 Nike Air Jordan 5 shoe as his model, Yoder hot glues the sculptures together using 25 individual template components. Some of the sculptures include unique embellishments like a graduation cord used as a shoelace, and each sculpture takes three to six hours to create.

Aside from the environmental commentary of recreating the shoes with recycled materials, Yoder was fascinated by The Great Shoe Spill of 1990's juxtaposition of highly manufactured and extrinsically valued objects being controlled by the natural environment of the ocean currents rather than their intended context (the constructed environment of a well-to-do person's home). Said Yoder of the latter, as it situates into his larger practice:

“Many people take great comfort in the bathroom towels being the same color as the soap, toilet paper, and tiles. It means there is a connection between them, and an environment of order. Home is a place not only of comfort, but of control. This sense of order acts as a shield against the unpredictability and lurking chaos of the outside world. My work, including and beyond *Overboard*, is an examination of the different forms this shield takes, and the thinking that lies behind it. I use domestic objects as the common denominators of our personal environment. Altering them is a way of questioning the attitudes, fears, and unwritten rules which have formed that environment and our behavior within it.”

In a conceptually integrated fundraising component, the shoes in the exhibition are for sale to benefit the cultural sector's pandemic-related deficit—a rare case of an object (in this case, an Air Jordan 5)'s iconic consumer status being unusually ‘capitalized’ upon to fund the nonprofit world.

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With the museum building's past life as a train station constructed in 1916, the gallery in which *Overboard* is on view served as the train station's ladies' waiting lounge from 1916 until the space's

conversion to a museum in 1972. The original signs signifying the ladies' waiting lounge and other locations—like the baggage claim, ticketing kiosk, and smoking room—remain intact.

Demonstrating the museum's curatorial breadth (BMAC stages approximately 15-20 shows each year across its six galleries), among the other shows on view during *Overboard* is *Figuration Never Died: New York Painterly Painting, 1950-1970*, guest curated by Karen Wilkin. In another gallery, Rachel Portesi's *Hair Portraits*, made in the antique photographic medium of tintype, explores the complex, cross-cultural relationship that individuals have with their hair.

Overboard was originally developed for CulturalDC's solar-powered Mobile Art Gallery, which is housed in a repurposed shipping container. The show was adapted to its "sneaker showroom" format at the Brattleboro Museum for what was intended to be its second tour stop; due to COVID-19, the exhibition was unable to debut with CulturalDC and is therefore debuting at BMAC prior to its now-second stop at CulturalDC's Mobile Art Gallery in Spring 2021. Principal support for Overboard as part of CulturalDC's 2019-2020 season was provided by Bloomberg Philanthropies.

ABOUT THE BRATTLEBORO MUSEUM & ART CENTER

The Brattleboro Museum & Art Center (BMAC) was founded in 1972 by two groups of Brattleboro citizens committed to saving their town's historic train station, Union Station, from demolition. One group wished to transform the building into a museum of local history, the other into a center for art classes and exhibitions. At the behest of the Brattleboro selectboard, they agreed to work together, and BMAC was born.

Following months of laborious cleaning and renovation done by scores of volunteers, the newly fledged institution opened its doors to the public on September 10, 1972. One side of the former train station lobby contained display cases featuring historical artifacts, the other an exhibition of new artwork by Wolf Kahn, David Rohn, and other artists with local ties. The legendary Vermont folk musician Margaret MacArthur sang and played lap dulcimer.

Fast forward nearly 50 years, and BMAC is today a non-collecting contemporary art museum focused on the work of living artists. (The historical artifacts from the early days were eventually donated to the Brattleboro Historical Society.) An anchor of Brattleboro's vibrant cultural life, BMAC seeks to bring notable art and artists to Brattleboro, and to provide a prestigious showcase for the region's own artistic riches.

The Museum contains six galleries. It rotates exhibitions roughly every 3–4 months, resulting in a total of about 15–20 exhibitions per year. BMAC borrows the work it exhibits from collectors, galleries, other institutions, and often directly from the artists themselves.

In addition to presenting contemporary art exhibitions, BMAC offers 50–60 cultural and educational events each year. These include artist talks, workshops, performances, film screenings, studio tours, and an eclectic assortment of events aimed at serving families who do not necessarily see themselves as contemporary art museum-goers — for example, an annual LEGO contest and exhibit, the world's longest-running domino-toppling event, and monthly art- and food-making collaborations with the Brattleboro Food Co-op.

Rounding out BMAC's activities is a rich array of education programs serving thousands of children of all ages from Windham County, Vermont, and the surrounding area. In collaboration with Brattleboro's Early Education Services, BMAC sends professional artists into local Head Start classrooms to work with at-risk infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. For students in grades K-6, BMAC offers numerous opportunities to engage with art both at the Museum and at school. And for middle and high school students, we administer the prestigious Scholastic Art & Writing Awards for the state of Vermont.

ABOUT ANDY YODER

Andy Yoder (b. 1957, Cleveland; resides in Falls Church, Virginia) is a graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Art and attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. His work has been exhibited at the International Print Center New York, the Saatchi Gallery, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the Reykjavik Art Museum, among others. He has been commissioned to create work for numerous public installations, including for the Columbus Museum of Art, the ESPN Zone in New York, and Hilltop Montessori School in Brattleboro.