

Ways of Perceiving (ADDA4019)
Millie Jones

Washed Up

Washed Up

The accumulation of waste amongst our ocean has become one of the most pressing environmental crises of our time. Throughout photography, art and sculpting, contemporary photographers, artists and environmental activists have taken it upon themselves to visualise the importance of this matter and to do more than 'raise awareness' of this fundamental issue.

'Washed Up' is an effective experience which entails the viewer to face the action of human consequences of accumulating waste in our ocean. By visualising the environmental crisis of ocean waste, the medium of art and photography plays a crucial role by compelling viewers and audiences to acknowledge and act against the ongoing crisis of ocean pollution.

This exhibition curates work from photographers and sculptures including Barry Rosenthal (1952), Mandy Barker (1964) and Andy Hughes (1966) presenting a coherent selection of images, installations and publications from their own projects that represent the significance of highlighting the ongoing concern about ocean waste pollution that respond to 'Washed Up'. Coinciding to the ideology explored from Bennet's *Vibrant Matter* (2009) and Morton's *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (2013).

'Washed Up' explores the haunting quantity of waste and object consumption found through the perspective of marine and ocean debris. All three artists have similar visual narratives yet showcase their work through different methods in the medium of photography and sculpture. The foundation of this exhibition is more of a visual confrontation for the viewers, a discomfoting yet unique look on what is unfortunately found 'Washed Up' from the ocean. The exhibition aims to provoke reflection and a sense of human responsibility of our consequences. Showcasing the unsettling beauty that arises when human neglect interacts with the natural world. 'We embrace the idea that art is activism and has the power to influence policy and change the way we deal with marine debris as a community' (NEC, 2021).

'Washed Up' will be held in the Mission Gallery, Swansea. By curating these works within a shared conceptual space, 'Washed

Up' becomes not just an exhibit of washed up and discarded objects, but an immersive and intimate engagement with human action and influence.

Incorporating moving blue lighting in the exhibition was a fundamental decision and a deliberate sensory strategy to immerse viewers into an underwater atmosphere. By stimulating the sensation of being underwater, this encourages a deep empathetic connection to the ocean and therefore an intimate realisation of the threat waste pollution has on the environment. The shifting blue shades mimic the play of moving water which emphasises the contrast between man-made objects and the ocean which represents the underlying theme of the exhibition.

Upon entering the exhibition, on the right the viewers are met with a selection of images from Mandy Barker's series *Shelf-Life* (2019). Barker is a British photographic artist whose practise revolves around documenting the effect, impact and excess amount of marine debris accumulated around the world. This body of work depicts the journey of recovered plastic objects that once occupied a place on a *shelf*, whether this be in a shop, somebody's home or storage space, manufactured on land but ultimately ended up on the natural reef and coral *shelf* on Henderson Island. 'My aim is for these images is to end up on the SHELF of someone who has the power to implement change concerning the issue of plastic pollution' (Barker, M 2019). The notion that each human is a heterogeneous compound of vibrant matter (Bennett, J, 2009) challenges the traditional perception of humans' superiority to the material world. This concept resonates with Barker's series as the images symbolise the deep entangled connection between human action with material life. This is ultimately the overarching objective of the exhibition for humans to consider the impact our actions have and emphasise that the objects we produce endure a significant fatal journey of the ocean which needs to be recognised and understood.

For the exhibition, five images have been selected from this project. By arranging the objects against a dark background and photographing them with creative intent, Barker transforms pollution into art, encouraging viewers to reflect on one's own consumption habits.



Barker, M. (2019)

(Fig 1) Image Size (103 x 73 cm)



Barker, M. (2019)

(Fig 2) Image Size (107 x 152 cm)



Barker, M. (2019)

(Fig 3) Image Size (103 x 73 cm)



Barker, M. (2019)

(Fig 4) Image Size (107 x 152 cm)



Barker, M. (2019)

(Fig 5) Image Size (103 x 73 cm)

I have chosen to include another project of Barker's in the exhibition, *Shoal* (date unknown). A selection from this series has been placed on the left wall from entering the gallery. The series *Shoal* presents visual evidence of marine plastic debris gathered during the Japanese Tsunami Debris Expedition in June 2012. This body of work represents visual awareness of plastic and waste pollution yet also serves as a memorial of the tragic event. *Shoal* can be defined in the dictionary as 'a large number of fish swimming together' therefore the title given to this project is a deliberate play on words referencing the marine context whilst contrasting with the plastic debris.



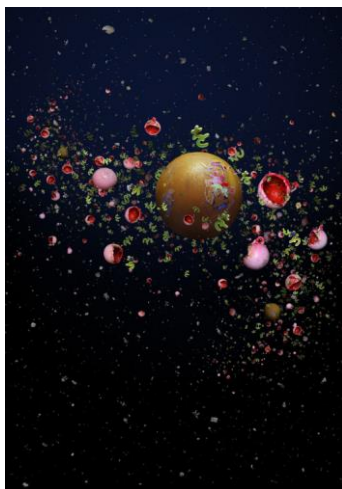
Barker, M. (unknown)

(Fig 6) Image Size (103 x 73 cm)



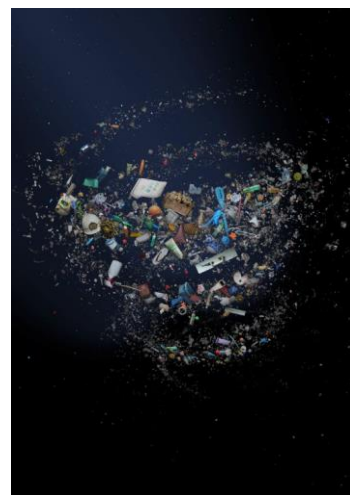
Barker, M. (unknown)

(Fig 7) Image Size (103 x 73 cm)



Barker, M. (unknown)

(Fig 8) Image Size (103 x 73 cm)



Barker, M. (unknown)

(Fig 9) Image Size (103 x 73 cm)

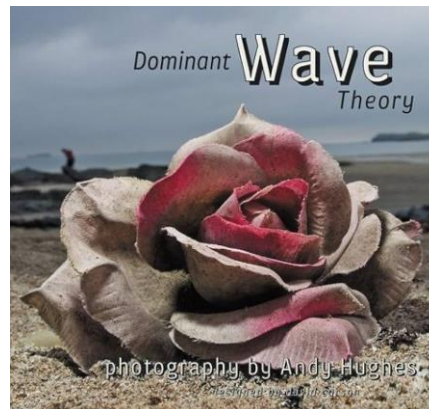
The mission gallery offers in the far side of the space an intimate curved 'room'. This section is where Hughes' *Dominant Wave Theory* (2006) is placed on top of a white plinth that is designed for the book to be viewed practically by the visitors.

Andy Hughes is a British artist whose work revolves and focusses on the coastal zone and the environmental politics of plastic and waste pollution. From 1995- 2006, Hughes dedicated himself to capturing the build-up of ocean waste debris along the beaches where he simply enjoyed to surf. The outcomes of this project resulted in the creation of his influential publication of *Dominant Wave Theory* (Hughes, 2006). Hughes' publication transforms ocean waste into compelling visual statements that challenges viewers to rethink about the aesthetics of ocean pollution and our inevitable relationship with consumerism against the natural environment. His work does not just document the waste he finds; Hughes creates visually captivating expressions of ocean waste. The objects he finds are quite 'ugly' yet end up being striking in the image giving personality and depth to the waste he obtains. The photographic collection critiques human consumer culture by focusing on the desolate character the objects obtain once they have been 'Washed Up'. 'Hughes presents us with not only an ecological message but a knowing heady rush through artistic strategies using the power of photography's saturated colour to highlight, frame, and play with scale' (Daniel-McElroy, S, 2007).

The decision behind choosing to showcase only the book itself within the exhibition was because of the impact that the book itself has. The concept of a singular object representing a coherent selection of singular objects that have detrimental connotations within the context of the exhibition's theme was something that portrayed a paradoxical outcome. Allowing the narrative of 'Washed Up' objects to unfold quietly, yet with overwhelming influence. Furthermore, the interplays of word and image, of waste as topic and waste as material for new designs, allow for what is strange, at the margin, often excluded and voiceless, to take centre stage (*Wastiary* , 2023, p.2) .

Dominant Wave Theory (Hughes, 2006) serves as a conveyable archive, a lasting object that the viewers can return to, reinforcing the message that this environmental crisis of

ocean waste pollution is not momentary but alarmingly permanent and continuous.



(Hughes, 2006)

The final gallery wall space in the exhibition has been designated to present a selection of work by Barry Rosenthal from his series *Found in Nature*. Rosenthal is a fine art photographer and sculptor. *Found in Nature* initiated in 2007, is a project that has developed from small scale collections of found objects around the harbours in New York into expansive photographic work and sculptures that depict ocean-borne debris. This series arranges found marine debris into visually structured photographic compositions, critically engaging and exposing the underlying disarray of consumer culture and the evolving relationship between waste, nature, and aesthetic representation. Rosenthal collects man-made objects that have been 'washed up' along beaches, harbours and reefs, then arranges them into colour coded bright compositions before photographing them in his studio. His practise constructs a visual argument about the human impact of distributing waste which ends up being 'Washed up' and 'Found in Nature'.

His work reveals the uniformity of consumer design within bottles, caps, utensils, bold colours and how this unsettling universal consistency is 'Found in Nature'. This concept is manifested by Morton, 'beauty is nonconceptual. Nothing in the object directly explains it' (Morton, 2013, p.206). The selection of Rosenthal's work showcased in 'Washed Up' is a combination of photography and sculpture. The reasoning behind this was to offer the viewers a variety of visual expression. For example, the four-by-four feet instillation *Pick Up the*

Mantle (Rosenthal, B 2012) was chosen for 'Washed Up' as the scale and material expression of the plastic straws emphasises the **amount** of waste debris found in the ocean.



Rosenthal, B. (2013) *No Vanishing Point*

(Fig 10) Image Size (unconfirmed)



Rosenthal, B. (2012) *Green Containers*

(Fig 11) Image Size (36 x 27 inches)



Rosenthal, B. (unknown) *Pick Up the Mantle*

(Fig 12) Installation Size (4 x 4 ft)



Rosenthal, B. (2012) *Blue Ocean*



Rosenthal, B. (2012) *Forks Knives Spoons*

(Fig 13) Image Size (36 x 27 inches)

(Fig 14) Image Size (48 x 48 inches)

Overall, in curating the exhibition 'Washed Up', the focus on presenting objects accumulated from areas in the ocean, whilst being submerged in moving blue light reveals the complexity of the relationship between humanity and materialism and how this has an impact on our ocean. By evoking both emotional response and intellectual questioning, the collection in 'Washed Up' encourages a deeper reflection on personal and combined responsibility, urging audiences to question their own roles within these times of environmental crisis.

Reference List:

- Barker, M. (2019). *SHELF-LIFE*. [online] MANDY BARKER. Available at: <https://www.mandy-barker.com/shelf> [Accessed 15 Apr. 2025].
- Barker, M. (n.d.). *Shoal*. [online] MANDY BARKER. Available at: <https://www.mandy-barker.com/shoal-2> [Accessed 15 Apr. 2025].
- Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. [online] Durham: Duke University Press. Available at: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/trinity/detail.action?docID=1170671&pq-origsite=primo> [Accessed 15 Apr. 2025].
- Culture, L. (2025). *Barry Rosenthal*. [online] Lensculture.com. Available at: <https://www.lensculture.com/barry-rosenthal> [Accessed 8 Apr. 2025].
- Daniel-McElroy, S. (2007b). *Art Now Cornwall* © Tate Gallery 2007. Available at: https://www.andyhughes.net/dominant_wave_theory.html [Accessed 15 Apr. 2025].
- Google.com. (2025). *Google Search*. [online] Available at: https://www.google.com/search?q=shoal+definition&rlz=1C1UEAD_e_nGB1128GB1128&oq=shoal+de&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqBwgAEAAygAQyBwgAEAAygAQyBggBEEUYOTIHCAIQABiABDIHCAHQABiABDIHCAQQABiABDIHCAUQABiABDIHCAYQABiABDIHCACQABiABDIHCAGQABiABDIHCAkQABiABNIBCDIwNTBqMGo3qAIAsAIA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8 [Accessed 15 Apr. 2025].
- Hughes, A. (2006). *Dominant wave theory*. London: Booth-Clibborn; New York, N.Y.
- Hughes, A. (2006c). *dominantwavetheory*. [online] www.andyhughes.net. Available at: https://www.andyhughes.net/dominant_wave_theory.html [Accessed 12 Apr. 2025].

Jabr, F. (2021). John A. Long - Publications List. *Publicationslist.org*, [online] 14(6). Available at: <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2571149616/fulltext/1A6D26E4AD6D4A27PQ/1?accountid=130472&sourcetype=Reports> [Accessed 14 Apr. 2025].

John Cornicello (2021). *Conversation with photographer Barry Rosenthal - Found in Nature*. [online] YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kg_-HN39cwA [Accessed 12 Apr. 2025].

Morton, T. (2013b). *Realist magic : objects, ontology, causality*. [online] Ann Arbor, Mich.: Open Humanities Press. Available at: <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/33358> [Accessed 15 Apr. 2025].

Northcoast Environmental Centre (2021). *CRAFT FOR THE COAST: TRASH ART CONTEST RESULTS*. [online] Proquest.com. Available at: <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2571149616?accountid=130472&pq-origsite=primo-ra&sourcetype=Reports> [Accessed 15 Apr. 2025].

Picard, M., Brenchat-Aguilar, A., Carroll, T., Gilbert, J. and Miller, N. (2023). *Wastiary*. [online] UCL Press. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv37kck87> [Accessed 14 Apr. 2025].

Rosenthal, B. (n.d.). *BARRY ROSENTHAL PHOTOGRAPHY - Found In Nature*. [online] barryrosenthal.com. Available at: <https://barryrosenthal.com/found-in-nature/> [Accessed 15 Apr. 2025].

Figures List:

Figure 1: Barker, M. (2019) *3" pieces of fishing net recovered from Henderson Island*

Available at: <https://www.mandy-barker.com/shelf> (Accessed 14th April 2025)

Figure 2: Barker, M. (2019) *Plastic products from more than 25 different countries recovered from Henderson Island*

Available at: <https://www.mandy-barker.com/shelf> (Accessed 14th April 2025)

Figure 3: Barker, M. (2019) *Plastic containers eaten by turtles, sharks, or fish - shows bite marks where teeth have been, recovered from Henderson Island*

Available at: <https://www.mandy-barker.com/shelf> (Accessed 14th April 2025)

Figure 4: Barker, M. (2019) *Plastic turtle recovered from Henderson Island*

Available at: <https://www.mandy-barker.com/shelf> (Accessed 14th April 2025)

Figure 5: Barker, M. (2019) *Microplastic fibres recovered from Henderson Island*

Available at: <https://www.mandy-barker.com/shelf> (Accessed 14th April 2025)

Figure 6: Barker, M. (unknown) *33.15N, 151.15E*

Available at: <https://www.mandy-barker.com/shoal-2> (Accessed 14th April 2025)

Figure 7: Barker, M. (unknown) *30.27N, 163.28E*

Available at: <https://www.mandy-barker.com/shoal-2> (Accessed 14th April 2025)

Figure 8: Barker, M. (unknown) *30.41N, 157.51E*
Available at: <https://www.mandy-barker.com/shoal-2>
(Accessed 14th April 2025)

Figure 9: Barker, M. (unknown) *31.15N, 155.22E*
Available at: <https://www.mandy-barker.com/shoal-2>
(Accessed 14th April 2025)

Figure 10: Rosenthal, B. (2013) *No Vanishing Point*
Available at: <https://barryrosenthal.com/found-in-nature/> (Accessed 14th April 2025)

Figure 11: Rosenthal, B. (2012) *Green Containers*
Available at: <https://barryrosenthal.com/found-in-nature/> (Accessed 14th April 2025)

Figure 12: Rosenthal, B. (unknown) *Pick Up the Mantle*
Available at: <https://barryrosenthal.com/found-in-nature/> (Accessed 14th April 2025)

Figure 13: Rosenthal, B. (2012) *Blue Ocean*
Available at: <https://barryrosenthal.com/found-in-nature/> (Accessed 14th April 2025)

Figure 14: Rosenthal, B. (2012) *Forks Knives Spoons*
Available at: <https://barryrosenthal.com/found-in-nature/> (Accessed 14th April 2025)

Map of Exhibition and Layout:

