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BY CHRIS JORDAN

"Cans Seurat" is composed of 106,000 aluminum cans, the number used in the United States every 30 seconds. Only up close, as in the inset at right, can you see each one.

A Can-Do Artist Makes His Points

By MICHAEL O'SULLIVAN
Washington Post Staff Writer

In roughly the time it takes you to read this sentence, Americans will chug through another 21,200 aluminum beverage cans.

That's one-fifth of the number depicted in Chris Jordan's "Cans Seurat." Based on Georges Seurat's "A Sunday on La Grande Jatte," the Seattle-based artist's digital image is a take on the pointillist masterpiece. Only he's taken the 19th-century French painter's discrete specks of color and replaced them with — soda cans.

Lots and lots of soda cans. 106,000 of them, to be precise, or the number consumed in the United States every 30 seconds. Digitally miniaturized, each is about the size of a dab of pigment, so small you can almost no longer make out what it is.

Four works by Jordan are on view at the Montpelier Arts Center, in a two-person exhibition called "Digital Sequences." Jordan's contribution to the show — drawn from his powerful, politically charged series "Running the Numbers" — also features pictures of the following: a jumble of 2 million plastic bottles (the number used in the United States every five minutes); neat stacks of 1.1 million paper

Digital Sequences: Chris Jordan, Running the Numbers, and Gail Rebhan, Room Jessica Braiterman: Veneer

"Digital Sequences" through Feb. 29 and "Veneer" through Saturday at Montpelier Arts Center, 9652 Muirkirk Rd., Laurel

Info: 301-953-1993 or 410-792-0664 (TTY: 301-490-2329). www.pgiparks.com/places/artsfac/mac.html

Hours: Open daily 10 to 5.

Admission: Free.

grocery sacks (the number taken home by American shoppers every hour); and a crazy quilt consisting of 75,000 metal shipping containers (the number processed through American ports every day).

With the exception of "Cans Seurat," in which the objects form a recognizable scene, each of Jordan's images has a kind of abstract beauty. Especially "Plastic Bottles," which is half field of pure color and half landscape (or should I say landfill?). It recedes into the distance, without horizon, an ocean of trash.

Accompanying Jordan in "Digital Sequences" is Gail Rebhan. In "Room," the



BY JESSICA BRAITERMAN

In "Veneer," Jessica Braiterman gilds scraps of discarded tires.

The Story Behind The Work

Hanging in a side gallery at Montpelier Arts Center is Jessica Braiterman's "Veneer." In keeping with Chris Jordan and Gail Rebhan's trash-centric theme, it's a sculptural installation made of scraps of found rubber tires — many collected from the roadside during frequent trips between Philadelphia, where she used to live, and Washington, where her husband was.

"I'm an incredibly frugal person," says Braiterman, who now lives here. That explains the old plastic butter tubs she saves for studio use, rather than throwing them away.

But her interest in what she calls the "rubbish problem" isn't the whole story behind "Veneer," whose black rubber has been gilded with imitation gold leaf, creating the appearance of preciousness. Rather, her larger fascination is with the idea of "symbolic dichotomies." Translation: the contrast between the perfection and order of the circle and the chaos of the tire's shredded state.

Braiterman harbors no illusions of saving the planet through art, however. After this weekend, when "Veneer" comes down, she'll simply pack away its myriad bits and pieces in storage boxes and cart them home.

Better that than a junkyard? The artist is quick to see the irony. "I don't have a solution," she says with a laugh. "I guess that's why I'm an artist instead of a scientist."

— Michael O'Sullivan

Washington-based artist has documented the trash accumulated on the floor of her college-age son's bedroom during a visit home for the summer. Consisting of 10 photo grids of six photos apiece, "Room" charts the migration of various possessions over the course of several weeks. In one grid, a tennis ball is the center of attention; flip-flops in another. Beer cans, a discarded Celeste pizza box and copies of Playboy magazine drift in and out of the frame.

There's a lot of humor to Rebhan's work. More so than Jordan's, at any rate (at least any parent would think so). But when the laughs of recognition die down in the face of what the artist calls — in a cheeky attempt at anthropology-speak — "male clutter," there's a serious subtext to "Room" that goes beyond its poker-faced comedy.

There's the too-much-stuff message. That much is obvious in each artist's work. A we-can-do-better moral that would make Al Gore proud.

Like Jordan, however, Rebhan wants to do more than score politically correct brownie points. Where "Running the Numbers" and "Room" succeed as art, as opposed to ideology, is this: They may both point out the ills of our consumerist culture, but they do so without pointing fingers, except perhaps at our-



BY GAIL REBHAN

In her "Room" series, Gail Rebhan focuses on the trash, including a squirt gun, in her son's bedroom.

selves.

With the exception of "Cans Seurat," what's notably absent from these pictures is people. All the same, we're there, by implication. We are, in short, our stuff.