

TURIN, ITALY

## "Greenwashing"

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*Greenwashing*, according to Wikipedia, means "misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service." "Greenwashing. Environment: Perils, Promises and Perplexities," curated by Ilaria Bonacossa and the Barcelona-based curatorial office Latitudes (Max Andrews and Mariana Canépa Luna) at Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, positioned itself critically within a history of shows engaging with environmental issues—from eco-positive approaches like "Beyond Green: Toward a Sustainable Art," organized by Stephanie Smith at the Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago in 2005, to more self-questioning undertakings such as the Eighth Sharjah Biennial, "Still Life: Art, Ecology and the Politics of Change," 2007, which, in the interest of full disclosure, I curated. "Greenwashing" took its stand against the false promises and misleading practices of corporations that exploit consumer guilt by selling "indulgences" in the form of targeted products or carbon offsets, while at the same time interrogating the inherently flawed concepts of "environment" and "nature."

Aware that real solutions for the problem of climate change are not supposed to come from art, the twenty-five artists and groups included here presented projects ranging from the more or less humbly utopian

through the formally analytic and ethically critical to the biting irony and fundamentally antagonistic. Exemplifying the last was Santiago Sierra's *Two Black Vehicles With the Engine Running Inside an Art Gallery*, 2007/2008. In this variation of previous works, two black Alfa Romeos parked inside the museum blasted their exhaust fumes via pipes into the atmosphere of Turin, home of Alfa and other car manufacturers. Typical of Sierra's confrontations, the cars ran for no other purpose than to provoke a discussion about what justifies pollution. Also engaging with the city's waste products, on a less sinister level, was Tue Greenfort's *Untitled*, 2008. The artist modified three 1,100-liter Eurobins—garbage and recycling containers, like the ones found on the city's streets—with transparent sides, so that their contents could be seen. The daily use (or, at times, misuse) of the containers, placed in front of the Fondazione, literally became apparent.

Sergio Vega, in an ongoing body of work, juxtaposes the notion and location of "paradise" with the realities of ecological, economic, and social exploitation in the state of Mato Grosso in Brazil. His film *Paradise on Fire*, 2007, was shot in the ecologically rich Chiquitano dry forest, where multinational energy companies such as Shell and Enron have been responsible for massive habitat degradation that affects both the land and its natives. Ironically, much of the devastation is caused by the demand for "green" biofuel, as huge amounts of forest are burnt for the planting of sugarcane and other crops providing alternative fuels. In his film, Vega juxtaposes his search for paradise with images of "tropical modernism" and interviews with indigenous people; accompanying photographs of a burning rain forest offer a perverse aesthetic pleasure. Amy Balkin's *Public Smog*, 2004–, presented here as a documentary slide show, addresses the dilemma embodied in the show's subtitle sarcastically. By purchasing carbon-emission credits on the open market and putting them out of use, she creates virtual "clean spaces" in the atmosphere—"air parks" hypothetically hovering over California or the European Union that she proposes as public domain.

One project that stood out by claiming not to be art but rather a campaign that addresses the art world was the leaflet "RAF/Reduce Art Flights—Torino," 2008, part of a drive launched by Gustav Metzger on the occasion of the 2007 Skulptur Projekte Münster. "Greenwashing" negotiated a path between goodwill (catalogue printed on eco-friendly paper, etc.) and articulated criticality. What else can be done? This question must be answered elsewhere than in an art show.

—Eva Scharrer

Sergio Vega,  
*Untitled*, 2007,  
ink-jet print, 42 x 53".  
From the series  
"Paradise on Fire."  
From "Greenwashing."

