

by  
Donna Lypchuk

**T**ucked into a corner of the gift boutique at Reactor Art and Design is *EnvironMental Produce*, the latest hip, clever and groovy conceptual art installation by dynamic duo AO1 and JME (alias artists Andrew Owen and Jamie Osborne).

JME and AO1, are "chairmen of the bored" of *EnvironMental Produce*: a not so fictional company that manufactures and packages objects as Art. If defining an object as Art (with a capital A) is just a simple process of naming it as so, then AO1 and JME have gone one step further by labelling it literally as so, duplicating it, and then smacking a price-tag on it. Art is a Commodity (with a capital C) produced by the ole' Factory (in the Warholian sense).

*EnvironMental Produce* has been immaculately conceptualized right down to every deftly designed detail. It is, for instance, no accident that this installation is set up in a boutique; it is sort of a flip on General Idea's *Boutique* which also conceptualized the commodification of art as part of their "artistic practice".

I had to zero in on AO1's unmistakable signature iconography — the astroturf dollar sign — before I realized that the installation actually took up an entire display case as well as an entire wall. This is because everything had a price-tag and a produce number, and some of the objects represented were not manufactured by *EnvironMental Produce*, but were such name brands as RealLemon and Q-Tip.

A nice touch was *EnvironMental Produce*'s produce number, which featured a wood-grain pattern, instead of the usual series of linear striations that you find on the side of canned goods in supermarkets.

The "Echoes" series of works basically compare simulations of nature, via photograph or object, with "the real thing". So we see things such as a clump of HoneyComb breakfast cereal

## ComOddities used as art



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contrasted with a real honeycomb that looks like it's been torn fresh off the tree; an arborite sample placed next to a real piece of wood; and so on.

These images are displayed as objects but packaged in a book of bound photographs, which remove the images one genera-

tion more from their source. The message here seems to be somewhat ecological in nature and a comment upon just how much of our everyday reality is a simulation.

Equally ecologically minded in tone is *EnvironMental Produce*'s "National Produce Souvenirs" which are mounted on a gold-framed peg board along with a variety of other "products". The green and silver striped packages contain shafts of wheat, burrs, lumps of coal and pine cones, and the copy on the packaging reads: CANADA #1 PINECONE. CONTENTS: RED PINECONE, SEEDS.

Also hanging on this pegboard is "Packaged Itself", which consists of slick silver and blue packaging which has sort of bubbled in on itself and "Nothing" which features an empty plastic bubble with a price-tag.

Along with "Astroturf Pillbox Hats" and "Birch Bark Fishing Caps" by AO1 is his collection of pine car air-fresheners. "Groovy WoodGrain Sandpaper" is a chair constructed out

of white picket fence and astroturf, holograms of acorns, plastic dandelion, a stool made from a cement pylon and astroturf, a display of five platonic polyhedron on a sine-wave shelf, and two still-lives of flowers, one done by each artist (daisies for JME and irises for AO1).

In the display case, fronted by a placard reading "Echo Produce", AO1 and JME have placed sardine tins full of coal, burdock and pinecones, teacups lined with astroturf, and have juxtaposed certain commercial objects with their *ComOddities*. For instance a box of Q-tips is placed next to a "birchbox" full of pussywillow frond tips. The display case also contains examples of things that

they call "Ready Made Simulex Produce Available Everywhere", which features found commercial products (a can of Sno-Kote, fishing flies, a plastic garlic-shaped garlic powder container, a can of mother's milk substitute) that by virtue of their packaging also "echoes" the real thing found in nature.

Although the installation seemed almost tiny at first, even though the small display area is littered with a myriad of objects, its significance grew as I realized how intellectually provocative and dense the display was with both visual and tactile information. AO1 and JME are both fond of puns and like to play "mind games". One of the cutlines on the side of a package containing "Velero on Fur" and "Burdock on Fun Fur" sums it up: "Mindsport! Make the Mental Leap!".

**ENVIRONMENTAL PRODUCE**  
Reactor Art and Design  
■ 51 Camden, 362-1913. Unlimited run.

## QUOTES OF THE YEAR

"In truth, the very sight of all those dismembered bodies is repugnant, but no more so than the latest Calvin Klein ads with their models arching in precarious positions." — Review of Marc de Guerre's exhibition, Linda Genereux, January 26, 1989

"The Toronto clean up is starting to look like the story of the emperor's new clothes: the city is naked and the people are laughing." — Donna Lypchuk on the Summit graffiti cleanup, June 23, 1988

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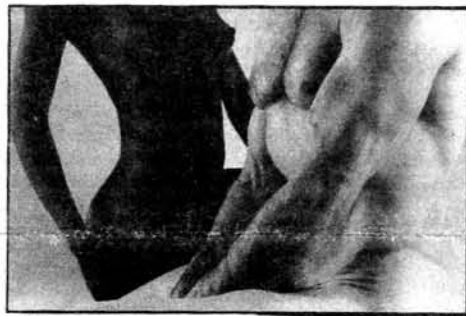
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