



Detroit wheels: Scott Hocking reuses rubber to raise funds for art. (Photos: Scott Hocking and Mitch Cope)

Pyramid Scheme

Scott Hocking treads on suburbia with his Detroit junk art

by **Nick Sousanis** 5/31/2006

Scott Hocking was standing on the side of a road in Detroit, next to his borrowed truck, the bed of which was full of decaying, muck-encrusted tires. He was filthy from transporting tons of the rubber from an abandoned lot on Detroit's east side, where they were originally dumped, and tossing them on the front lawn of a well-kept suburban home in Bloomfield Hills. He'd been doing this for 10 days in the rain, and he was almost done. So, of course, that was the moment when two cops approached, wondering what Hocking and his helpers thought they were doing. Hocking explained that the rubbery refuse was going to be art.

Hocking's art installation, a hulking pyramid erected from 2,109 tires — approximately four tons of rubber, steel and grime — was showcased during a fundraiser for the new Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MoCAD). The art collector who allowed them to defile her expansive lush green lawn? It's MoCAD board member Julie Taubman, wife of Bobby Taubman, son of shopping-mall magnate Alfred Taubman.

Creating pieces from what's discarded is an essential aspect of Hocking's philosophy. We're a throwaway society and Detroit has become a convenient dumping ground. Hocking seeks to reverse the look of this by bringing new life to the discarded and decayed. He explores abandoned places in the city and transforms junk into objects of beauty, most notably by framing rusted sheet metal as if it were an abstract painting. For his "Tire Pyramid," Hocking brought a new dimension to his work, he's "not just using what's been wasted, but cleaning out what's been wasted ... one small area at a time."

When the folks behind MoCAD took interest in this project, Hocking made sure that recycling the tires factored into the budget. Hocking says, "I can't take them back and dump them. Not only would that be illegal, but it would be immoral."

This project was realized in a couple of weeks, but the idea of building a pyramid of found car tires had been brewing in Hocking's mind for about five years. The idea came from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, based on Arthur C. Clarke's short story *The Sentinel*. In the film, the discovery of an object gave our species prowess as toolmakers. In the short story, this object is a clear pyramid, while in Kubrick's film, it became a black obelisk. Hocking fused these two visuals into his own icon, one that also references the significance of the wheel in civilization's development, as well as Detroit's automotive history.

He submitted his proposal to the Detroit Institute of Arts' *Artists Take on Detroit* exhibition, in recognition of the city's tricentennial celebration. The project was to be a specific installation at the site of the abandoned and toxic Uniroyal Tire Plant site, along the riverfront, near the bridge to Belle Isle. That project was rejected, but Hocking kept thinking.

Last summer, Hocking began work in an overgrown, abandoned trailer park near City Airport where each street was lined with trash. There he began building his pyramid in peace.

"I'd been going there for a decade, and it'd probably been abandoned for longer," Hocking says.

Around this time, MoCAD board members wanted a temporary outdoor installation to dress up their fundraiser. Hocking heard of it and spoke up. To his surprise, they went for his pyramid idea. After working out a budget and locating a truck to transport tires, Hocking and a few part-time helpers got to work.

He began moving the pyramid to the Taubmans' front lawn. Concrete barriers were then set up at the trailer park to prevent anyone from driving into the area. His work there had to stop completely.

"Here I am finally removing the trash, and that's when they block it."

Fortunately, in Detroit, Hocking says, there's no lack of tires, and he found more. Naturally, his efforts attracted attention, in the city and the suburbs.

"Most people [in Detroit] wanted to know if they could make money by helping me or if they could make money doing a similar thing." He'd explain that it was an art piece, which registered with some.

"A lot of people looked at me like I was crazy," Hocking says.

The Taubmans' neighbors were concerned about how long the art would be in place, and were relieved to learn it was temporary.

The pyramid remained in place until last week. A company was hired to remove the much-labored-over tires, all 2,109 of them, for a buck apiece. The material is to be shredded, and then made into something new again. _____

Nick Sousanis is the arts editor of thedetroiter.com. Send comments to letters@metrotimes.com.