



WASTED: Artist Alex White Mazzarella's New Exhibit Explores Social Inequality Using Recycled Materials

by [Yuka Yoneda](#), 03/26/13



111 bottles and one shoe: the components that comprise artist [Alex White Mazzarella's](#) latest piece may seem mundane, but are impactful when they work together, just like the immigrant workers they represent. Called "A Working Class", the assemblage is currently on view at Japanese gallery [Resobox](#) in [Long Island City](#) along with a selection of Mazzarella's older works in an exhibition entitled [WASTED](#). We recently caught up with Mazzarella to find out more about WASTED, his use of recycled materials, and his related projects, which endeavor to bring attention to marginalized communities throughout the world. Read on for some of his thoughts.



Mazzarella's older works layer found materials like cigarette boxes, tomato can wrappers and photographs to create collages for the viewer to interpret for themselves.

INHABITAT: The show is really centered on “A Working Class”, your most recent piece, which is also a big departure from your other works. Can you tell us a little about that piece?

Alex White Mazzarella: “A Working Class” is a wall installation of plastic liquor nips, oil and refreshment containers excavated out of the underserved streets of [Willets Point, Queens](#). It speaks towards not just the Willets Point workers but the low and middle classes worldwide who are increasingly seeing their wealth diminished and even undermined by private powers. In Willets Point, eminent domain is being used by the city to transfer this land to another class of private interests who will manifest their idea of development. Free enterprise – what this country is supposedly built to achieve – turned Willets Point into what is now a regional automobile repair destination. Workers are incredibly innovative, creative and above all invested in Willets Point. If the city were to take a democratic approach of listening and developing a [redevelopment plan](#) around their skills and their needs, those workers would be capitalized as assets. But instead the EDC's new development is disregarding them and their well being. As a result, they say they will either be on unemployment or be deported. These are real jobs being destroyed to make money for the ultra wealthy and working poor waged jobs at the mall that will be WASTED. This is just short sighted and speaks to why income distribution is becoming everyday more skewed to the 1%. In fact a worker now tells me that India is feeling more like our notion of “America” than the United States does as he's constantly getting fined and harassed by city workers. These people are taxed without receiving roads, water and waste management. WASTED. Meanwhile high-rise luxury condominiums are getting 25-year tax abatements. “A Working Class” is a tribute to these workers that struggle for democratic representation and a reflection on the course of increased inequality that our current foundations of private power is producing.

INHABITAT: What was your main inspiration for WASTED? What are the underlying messages you wanted to convey?

Alex White Mazzarella: Wasted is a way of defining a wide range of conversations on the discarded and disregarded that I've been spurning through [my artwork](#) over the past three years.

INHABITAT: Can you tell us a little bit about why you choose to work with recycled materials over new?

Alex White Mazzarella: Largely because these materials come out of certain processes that stain them with the stamp of social systems and life functions. They are the materials that make things go round, and indicative of the time and age in which we are living. These materials and objects are more than just their composite – they can carry stories if used intelligently to articulate stories, emotions and narratives. Recycling materials into artwork also mean that people are familiar with them because they are there in people's lives. When taken out of a certain context of everyday life and put into another more spiritual one, the everyday familiarity sticks and brings the viewer a little bit closer to what is being articulated. We live in a material world but are driven by immaterial souls. That in a way is what the material art is all about.



INHABITAT: WASTED contains works you created while in multiple locations in the world. Did those locations have anything in common that influenced your art?

Alex White Mazzarella: For Detroit, [Dharavi](#) and Willets Point, yes there was a commonality in the fact that they were all products of different stages of our industrial process. Detroit perhaps represents the post-industrial, the decentralized, the cut and run. Dharavi and Willets Point both represent dynamic innovative places of industrial activities that are in the process of a forced de-industrialization via institutionalized real estate speculation.

INHABITAT: In additionn to being an artist, you're also the founder of ARTEFACTING. Can you tell us about that organization?

Alex White Mazzarella: [Artefacting](#) is a 501 (c)3 non-profit urban regeneration initiative that creates and curates public art projects as a vehicle to vitalize culture and stimulate social cohesion & capital. We facilitate and create inclusive cultural productions in communities worldwide. Participants and collaborators are brought together to construct a dialogue of progress and identify commonalities through a creative process that aims to work off of the social capital and social cohesion of a community. Out of this process come “Artefacts” (art, performances, photographs, film, exhibitions, etc.) that materialize and reinforce the stories, issues and cultures of a people and place. These “Artefacts” unify the creators and provide understanding to outside audiences. Ultimately our inclusive cultural productions aim to transform people into resources that can benefit themselves, their communities and their cities. In short, our teams believe that people are the central asset and key resource to their own revitalization and regeneration. Revitalization and regeneration occur through activities that create value and cultivate the minds and souls of individuals. These are means to activating people as producers of their own culture rather than simply the consumers of other people’s culture.

INHABITAT: What is the main goal you would like to achieve through WASTED?

Alex White Mazzarella: I wouldn’t say there is a main goal per se, but it’s geared to raise some awareness for the struggles of the workers of Willets Point, exhibit how my work has evolved and matured over the course of three years and provide some sparks to contemplate wasted in the context of our consumer culture – whether its natural ecology, our emotional balance, or social equity. And lastly, to find beautiful homes for the artwork.

INHABITAT: Do you have any other projects on the horizon that we should know about?

Alex White Mazzarella: Yes, I’m going to [Delhi in April](#) for an artists residency. Then looking to go to Cologne to collaborate on a performance-based project that will engage diverse citizens called “Am I Labor?” If you would like to see WASTED for yourself, the exhibition will be on display at Resobox until April 4th.