

Shred, Mix, Build, Stack (Repeat)

on Charles Goldman's *RE>CRETE>FACTORY>SHOOWROOM*

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Charles Goldman's *RE>CRETE>* takes shape by destroying and mixing well recognizable conduits of communication. Newspapers and junk mail, CDs and DVDs that record memories, wires carrying voice, data, electricity, and by-products of modern life like lint and packing foam. It's an adobe for the twenty first century and just like any regional blend of adobe, it uses materials common to the immediate surroundings. Add a pinch of Portland cement, rain water and fly ash and you can shape the brute paste any way you like. Well, *almost* any way you like.

As of now there are a few specific forms for *RE>CRETE>* and this is where Charles' sculpture background comes in. Each architectural module, titled in uncompromising all-caps (*RE>CRETE>BLK*, *RE>CRETE>BRK*, *RE>CRETE>ZIG>ZAG*), adding to an expanding vocabulary, reminiscent of Buckminster Fuller, which will ultimately become free for all to replicate and use. It is an open-source project that will translate into user manuals rather than art catalogs, dry-mix bags, and public workshops rather than signed editions and exhibitions.

It all started with the artist's fascination with *The New York Times*, a quintessential vessel of processed information, and his early use of the daily paper as a medium. "All the News That's Fit to Print" comes to mind. No one can tell how it will evolve, and that's part of the project's beauty. Will the new material demonstrate interesting structural qualities? Will it offer good sound or thermal proofing? If it works the way it should, *RE>CRETE>* will soon be professionally tested for all of the above and more. Meanwhile it remains an idea, a dream and a set of gestures loaded with powerful symbolism.

Transforming processed waste materials haunted by the ghosts of human presence and experience, *RE>CRETE>* is made to look like a culturally-overcharged ruin. It's ambition and utopian promise (an almost free, open-source construction material made of highly polluting scrap) remain intrinsically open to the possibility of failure. But then again, what is success?

Thinking about Charles' artistic trajectory, any effort to categorize the works by medium (or year, or series) falls prey to the evident and pleasantly distracting net of intra/intermedial threads. Here you might find an interest in the means and modes of human communication where the creation of objects and experiences reflect the processes of their own making, as well as tangible notions of space, place and time. A taste for the unfinished and recycled, elevated to utopian heights, is internally charged with significance. Memory as burden, technology as memory, refuse as a vehicle to the personal and the public, public space as inner space; a conflicted, stunted sense of humor infusing all of the above.

Charles' archives will move you to imagine the feeling, psychological implications and biographical significance of a gallery filled with 2x4s and drywall built to the scale of the walls of his childhood home. One look away, and you'll be nodding your head to the inner rhythm of a bunch of plastic bottle caps on a red string; or look up to a flying tarp as if it was a better, bluer sky. Elsewhere, a younger Charles paying people to draw his portrait in Chicago, taking pictures of vinyl records being turned into mix tapes, for love. It's a lot of work, and a lot of directions, but it all adds up. And how.

In a recent conversation, Charles introduced his plans for the *RE>CRETE>FACTORY>SHOWROOM* by describing one of his earlier series of diminutive, paper-pulp & wheat paste sculptures. Another work that became part of the conversation was the aforementioned room full of drywall, *All of the Walls of My Parent's House (Stacked)*, which he originally presented at San Francisco's *Southern Exposure* exactly twenty years ago, in 1996. That project was about potential and the power and meaning of pure material. It's easy to see how this interest in pure materiality has not only survived but evolved to meet its most extreme consequences yet, in the hands-on approach that *RE>CRETE>* production demands.

Other archived and unfinished pieces crowd Charles's Crown Heights live-work studio. Borrowing B.Wurtz's words from a 2004 artist profile published by *BOMB*, "it is hard to tell where art ends and the rest of the world begins." Charles' artistic inventory can certainly feel like a panoply. However, it is easy to frame and compress (in the sound-editing sense of the word: a lessening of the dynamic range between the loudest and quietest parts of an audio signal) when looking back through the lens of *RE>CRETE>*, which by its own nature could be considered an endpoint to all his other upcycling strategies.

The first time I heard the word “endpoint” in relation to Charles’ work it was in the his own voice. It sounded terribly tragic. My mind imagined a giant wood chipper swallowing all of those twenty plus years of artworks, turning them into dust, then stars, then black holes. I now understand that end as a culmination, a *very* concrete yet alchemical means to play out the fantasy of a studio bonfire. Purification without loss.

Many of Charles’ works *do* look like endpoints in themselves. And sure as hell, they feel *pure*, especially when considering their meticulous disdain for appearances and superficial polish (the most common and abused stand-in for actual purity). From the *Bic Drawings* series to his more recent *Distance Paintings*, it is always a matter of squeezing something out to gain a material, tangible result. An experience. In the *Bic Drawings* it is the universally available potential for communication and expression of a Bic ballpoint pen (itself, a masterpiece of modern design) drained of its ink for the sake of monochromatic absorption. The distance paintings follow a similar strategy, reducing time and space to a transcendental experience which the infinitely winding loops in these paintings convey. Similarly, *RE>CRETE>* can alternatively feel like a logical end and an unexpected departure point. In its current up-scaling phase, one of the project’s most outstanding qualities is given by the implications of its unprecedented, factory-like approach to the destruction and creation processes it requires. Invoking collective action and agency, and moving beyond creative ideation and signification into the a territory that more closely resembles utopian, yet hands-on, political activism. *RE>CRETE>FACTORY>SHOOWROOM* clearly positions itself as a beginning, rather than an end. Its ultimate goal: a fully shareable and scalable artistic experience.