



**Everything's
Trash.**



**Everything's
Treasure**

Terminal Project Report
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1. Introduction

My artistic practice is rooted in process-based research, manifesting as a type of pastiche—an interdisciplinary collage of video, sculpture, and sound performance. I'm interested in how seemingly disparate things come together and form meaning. There are overarching themes, but I am not attempting to provide a straightforward answer within the work. Instead, I strive for it to be skewed, off, strange, otherworldly. I rely on spontaneity and experimentation, beginning my work in a predominantly formal manner—responding and reacting rather than planning and organizing. By remaining open to circumstance, instinct, and impulse, I find that ideas coalesce and form around objects and materials.

In Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, she says, "Glove, pollen, rat, cap, stick. As I encountered these items, they shimmered back and forth between debris and thing... In the second moment, stuff exhibited its thing-power: it issued a call, even if I did not quite understand what it was saying... I caught a glimpse of an energetic vitality inside each of these things, things that I generally conceived as inert. In this assemblage, objects appeared as things, that is, as vivid entities not entirely

reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics."

Bennett's philosophy challenges traditional perceptions of material objects as passive or inert and opens a dialogue with how I approach art. It recognizes the vibrant, interconnected web of relations that constitute reality and the significant role that non-human actors play within this web.

I'm always observing. I look for my own "glove, pollen, rat, cap, stick" moments out in the world and in the studio. I collect these things through photographing, 3-D scanning, recording video, etc.

Gathering and arranging becomes an almost stream-of-consciousness-like endeavor, bringing a piece into being. This approach allows me to engage critically and conceptually along the way. Processes and ideas form an interwoven structure, each relying on the other to expand the possibilities and potential meaning of the work. Everything is trash, and everything is treasure. There are no horizon lines, and hierarchies disappear, oozing, bleeding, blending, shimmering, sparkling. This is the ethos of my terminal creative project and encompasses my work as a whole. The forms in this project take shape via video and sculpture. My work is an ever-evolving continuum. Each piece opens the door for the next, and they are an interconnected train of thought.



"As I have already noted, the items on the ground that day were vibratory—at one moment disclosing themselves as dead stuff and at the next as live presence... It hit me then in a visceral way how American materialism, which requires ever-increasing numbers of products purchased in ever-shorter cycles, is antimateriality... Sullivan reminds us that a vital materiality can never really be thrown 'away,' for it continues its activities even as a discarded or unwanted commodity. For Sullivan, that day, as for me on that June morning, thing-power rose from a pile of trash" Jane Bennet, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*

Bennett argues that these rapid consumption and disposal cycles created by our materialist culture become antimateriality because they fail to acknowledge the ongoing life and agency of materials once they are categorized as waste or unwanted commodities. This concept relates to everything I make and is also one of the central ideas in my approach to “Everything’s Trash. Everything’s Treasure.” I’m utilizing and thinking of trash in all of its semiotic translations: socially, culturally, environmentally, and as a physical material to make things with.

The image above is a still from the video piece of the same title. It is a 3-D scan using an app on my smartphone. It captured a trashcan left in the rain and filled with about a quarter of water. Capturing these idiosyncratic moments furthers the notion that what is discarded is not without its own 'thing-power,' a vitality that continues even when categorized as waste. The digital 3-D object has a slightly unreal texture. It's like a singular asset for a video game. Exporting the file to video creates a spinning object, like you would see for a product on QVC. I can dictate the camera path in the app, sometimes zooming into detail or clipping through the object entirely, creating more abstract formal moments. This adds another layer of engagement with the material, suggesting that there

is always a different angle, a fresh perspective to be found, even in the most mundane or discarded items. This echoes Bennett's notion that everyday items have a vibratory existence. It illustrates trash as treasure, the absence of horizon lines and hierarchies, and the blending of forms and meanings. The water inside the trashcan and the discarded items participate in a continuous material assemblage that shifts and morphs as more objects are repeated and layered over each other, blurring the lines between reality and virtuality.

2. Expand Image/Digital Garden

The initial inspiration for my terminal project came from a tool called "expand image," accessible through a platform called Runway, which offers various AI-powered tools that I have utilized throughout all the pieces in the show. The top image was taken on a walk during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. I was struck by this particular assemblage in someone's driveway and the combination of these predominately Nike socks individually hung on a clothesline coupled with all these houseplants.

The "expand image" tool operates by uploading an image and specifying how much to expand it, along with a text prompt for the desired fill-in content. The software uses "generative fill" to analyze the original image and match its color, content, and lighting. Runway often auto-fills text to the prompt box with what the A.I. has interpreted the image to be. Using these ready-made prompts to expand my images is quite productive. The filled-in image results create new mutated forms. Elements meld and bleed into one another. These digital mutations presented an opportunity for sculptural forms that bring the digital into the tactile world.

The work for "Everything's Trash. Everything's Treasure." was made with the concept of expanded



Above- iPhone photo. Below- iPhone image altered with expand image tool



image as it relates to these particular images, but it's not a direct translation. The objects I created portray a blurring of domestic space and outdoor space. It is a direct visual apparatus that portrays merging mechanical and organic elements. As referenced by philosopher Yuk Hui. "in other words, machines are becoming organic....they are able to assimilate to the organismic structure."

In his 2022 lecture at the Venice Biennale, "Meetings on Art: Between the Enchantment of Technology and Technophobia," Hui introduced the concept of technodiversity. He posits this as an approach to the future. "Today we live in a homogenous and totalizing understanding of technology, and this homogeneity is problematic because it sees a rationality in technology which is logical; therefore, it is universal." By comparing technology to pesticides, Hui argues that when we view technological tools as universal, we enable a system that destroys biodiversity. The path to singularity is the current technological path we have set forth. Technological singularity is the hypothetical concept that technology will advance beyond human capabilities and become uncontrollable, leading to the demise of our civilization or, in other words, the apocalypse.

He criticizes digital technology as being appropriated for the purpose of capital. Imagination and innovation

are centered around the apparatus of consumption and military power. Because of this, we are presented with a situation where it is challenging to create alternatives. Hui refers to this system as being a closed question of technology. "Re-opening the question of technology means to rediscover and to reinvent...these presuppositions that were already made and embedded in the software and platforms... they have to be questioned and challenged and replaced with alternatives....questioning these presuppositions is crucial to the reappropriating of digital technologies."

This concept of technodiversity inspired me to reframe my assumptions about digital technology and opened up a way to approach the "problem" of technology. It led me to realize the necessity of deep engagement with these technologies, mining them for opportunities and allowing the space to find ways to reappropriate them.



"Bioplastic Bloom" 2024

"Bioplastic Bloom" came together very slowly and intuitively. I wanted to tie together themes of decay, domesticity, and the melding of indoor and outdoor spaces, machine and organism. Starting with plaster, I worked in layers, pouring the wet plaster into a bucket and then adding acrylic paint, swirling it around to achieve a marbled effect. The organic plant/flower form was created from a material called "friendly plastic," which consists of small beads of bioplastic that turn into a malleable gel when heated. The material is challenging to mold and form free hand. I utilized an aspect of uncontrollability to create these partially realized natural forms that appear fragmented and melting, much like the plants in the expanded image. The plastic resembles 3-D printing, but it is



"Bioplastic Bloom" 2024 (detail)

handmade. The polyurethane pour foam also utilizes this notion of chance and uncontrollability. The material and the way I used it are directly inspired by Lynda Benglis, for whom it was about capturing the gesture of flow. I'm using it to portray oozing, accumulation, and transformation over time, like a rock covered in layers of bird shit.

The readymade table serves as a pedestal, painted blue screen blue, a gesture intended to make it "invisible" because it can be keyed out. The rug functions as a way to delineate space through patterns. The pattern itself is a nod to Chinoiserie, a decor style from the 18th century that appropriated Chinese motifs. These motifs, often appearing on ceramic vessels, were customized to reflect aspects of the lives of the aristocrats who commissioned them. Through a modern lens, we recognize these designs as problematic symbols of colonialism, and I wanted to highlight the absurdity of these designs. I asked Chatgpt, a language learning model that can generate images, to create a Chinoiserie pattern reflecting the modern moment. This digitally generated Chinoiserie pattern references how cultural information is filtered, adapted, and infinitely reappropriated in the digital age. The work signifies domestic space visually, yet it deviates with the untamed visuals of the plant and pour foam, which references an unmaintained outdoor space.



"Bioplastic Bloom" 2024 (detail)



"Mermaid" 2023

3. Trash Culture and Rococo

The Rococo style emerged in 18th-century France and was characterized by curvaceous natural forms, grandiosity, and ornamental excess. The word "Rococo" derives from the French word "rocaille," meaning "rock" or "pebble," referring to a method of decoration using stones, shells, and cement, often in garden ornamentation. Once emblematic of aristocratic taste and wealth, this style became pejoratively associated with vulgarity and femininity as the period of Enlightenment took over. In Melissa Hyde's essay "The 'Makeup' of the Marquise: Boucher's Portrait of Pompadour at Her Toilette," she sets up a relationship between makeup and painting as makeup. Makeup was initially intended to display your social status and was relegated solely to the nobility. In the eighteenth century, accessibility to rouge opened up and allowed more people to begin wearing makeup. This created class confusion, becoming an exclusive association of makeup as feminine and a means for feminine deceit. The enlightened critique of Rococo involved dismissing the style as feminine and having a stylistic similarity to makeup. This is because it similarly created a confusion of social status. "I would suggest that one of the reasons was that the hierarchy of genres invoked to displace the Rococo involved more than a matter of aesthetic categories: it intersected powerfully with social hierarchies that

were called into question by that class of self-made aristocrats.”

Rococo sets the stage for the future of trash culture because of this reactionary period of Enlightenment. In Robert Pattison’s *The Triumph of Vulgarly* he describes how the French Revolution, in which the masses overthrew the bourgeois aristocrats, opened the door for Romanticism. Romanticism still rejected vulgarity, demonstrated through critic John Ruskin’s distaste for Dutch painter’s illustrations of the common man. He shows the conflict of the Romantic period with trying to revise and conserve aspects of the old aristocratic culture. In Romanticism, there was still room for transcendence, which seems to be a key to achieving good taste and elevating something out of vulgarity. This led to pantheism. A type of philosophy that demolished hierarchies and took away the possibility of transcendence. The burgeoning middle class was unable to disregard their desire for aristocratic luxury. This desire manifests as kitsch, which mimics Rococo’s luxury but is accessible, thus allowing the middle class to indulge in the fantasy of opulence.

In “Mermaid,” the transformation of mundane objects through a digital-physical process speaks to this. Through the lens of Karl Marx’s concept of commodity fetishism, where the “mystical character of

commodities does not originate...in their use value.” Instead, it is their transformation into objects that obscure the labor behind them. I’m particularly interested in commodity fetishism as it relates to kitsch objects and, in particular, ceramic figurines. In this context, ceramic figurines, with their exaggerated ornamentation and mass production, become emblematic of a democratized Rococo aesthetic, consumed not for utility or high cultural standing but for the appearance of luxury and the aspirational lifestyle it implies. Their strange gaudiness presents a particularly poignant form of camouflage, as it allows for them to be dismissed easily. But these objects, in my opinion, are an interesting reflection of our consumer-driven culture.

I scanned a thrift store ceramic figurine on a flatbed scanner to create the central image and manipulated it in Photoshop. By repeating elements in the image, using the clone stamp in Photoshop, I make a mutation illustrative of the tool used for its manipulation. The frame is adorned with ceramic scraps, a repeated slip-cast doll hand holding a shell, oozing foam, glitter, and gold jewelry. This layering process allows me to blur boundaries between high/low ideas and points to the working process of digital media.



"Digital Garden" 2024

“Digital Garden” references classical aristocratic opulence through voluptuously draped silky fabrics. Aspects of the fabric resemble specifically the Venetian drape style. However, the fabric is a cheap, shitty polyester that has accumulated stains and dirt from being on the floor of my studio. The fabric envelopes and frames a TV, displaying a bright, abstract image with a slight motion to it. I purposefully wanted the TV to feel like a formal element as opposed to its usual use for entertainment or as an apparatus to show video work. A slip-cast ceramic unicorn, glazed white, references classical sculpture and mass-produced figurines. An image of glitched flowers moves from the wall to the floor.

Protruding out from the wall is a sculpture made of starched fabric with a repeated patterned motif of a dog, made in the “rocaille” style, consisting entirely of tiny seashells. Again, I am using a pattern to delineate space, but in this case, I was interested in portraying something that appears large and voluminous. Inspired by opulent and intricate patterned wallpaper, I created my design using this silly shell dog. It’s clearly a piece of fabric, but the bulbous shape alludes to something the viewer cannot see underneath. In reality, the fabric is starched and hollow. Extruding out of the fabric is a large ceramic piece in flesh color. A colorful spinning party light illuminates the interior; the rays seep out onto the floor through the cracks. I

wanted a solid textural and material juxtaposition. The fabric is indicative of decor and interior space. The ceramic piece is literally a stone, which has another friendly plastic plant growing from it, once again referencing outdoor space. Body-sized, it resembles a curvaceous natural form.



Still from "Everything's Trash, Everything's Treasure." 2024

4. Artificial Intelligence and Kitsch

Oscillating between the digital and the physical, I contemplate how to portray the liminal—a threshold of transformation, the in-between—exploring alternate realities and parallel universes as lived experiences. I create spaces that feel familiar yet distorted as if existing within a dream. An individual participates in multiple universes, accessing them simultaneously every day through computer technology and the internet. This extension of one's identity into the digital realm predominantly takes the form of curated photos and words on social media apps. However, there is also a more covert form of our identities traced online in the form of data. Our online activities are constantly tracked and stored. Although we can request this information from companies, we largely lack access. Until recently, we had almost no visual relationship with this abstract, accumulating data that grows larger every day. Recently, the emergence of AI text-to-image generation technology has provided a novel means of access.

AI text-to-image generation is a technology that synthesizes visual content from textual descriptions. It is developed from vast databases compiled through a process known as "scraping," where algorithms gather and analyze online information, including images, text, and data patterns. This technology employs neural

networks, which are computational systems modeled on the human brain's network of neurons. These networks are trained on large datasets to recognize and replicate patterns and styles found in the data. When given a text prompt, the AI references its learned database to generate an image corresponding to the described elements, often creating visuals that blend multiple concepts and stylistic features in unexpected ways. This process enables a tangible interaction with the otherwise intangible data that represents our fragmented digital identities, providing a form of visual access to the complex web of data that we contribute to endlessly. They are a type of mirror. In an interview with ArtNet News, Hito Steyerl refers to this type of image creation as statistical renderings. "...these renderings do not relate to reality. They relate to the totality of crap online. So that's basically their field of reference, right? Just scrape everything online and that's your new reality. And that's the field of reference for these statistical renderings." Steyerl's crap refers to the overwhelming abundance of data, images, and text that vary widely in quality, relevance, and truthfulness, much of which could be considered superficial, misleading, or devoid of meaningful content. They are kitsch.

Hermann Broch's essay *Notes on the Problem of Kitsch*, he states, "Kitsch could not in fact either emerge or prosper without the existence of kitsch-

man, the lover of kitsch; as a producer of art he produces kitsch and as a consumer of art is prepared to acquire it and pay quite handsomely for it. In a broad sense, art always reflects the image of contemporary man, and if kitsch represents falsehood (it is often so defined and rightly so), this falsehood falls back on the person in need of it, on the person who uses this highly considerate mirror so as to be able to recognize himself in the counterfeit image it throws back of him and to confess his own lies (with a delight which is to a certain extent sincere)" He is suggesting that kitsch thrives on and perpetuates falsehoods, reflecting an image that the "kitsch-man" wants to see and identify with, often disregarding the authenticity and integrity of true artistic endeavor.

In its traditional sense, the concept of kitsch can be seen as an attempt to emulate art but ultimately fails. It superficially imitates what is considered high art but lacks in its execution and purpose. When examining art produced through text-to-image technology and the newer form of text-to-video, many similarities can be observed with kitsch in various aspects.

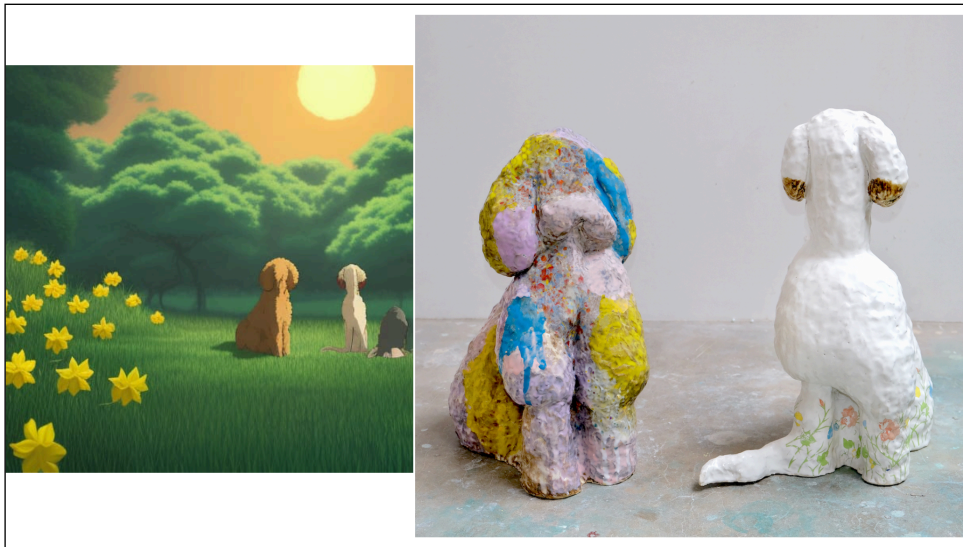
AI-generated art, similar to traditional forms of kitsch, is marked by its mass production capabilities. This rapid, algorithm-driven creation process allows for the production of vast quantities of art. These visuals, often dramatic, surreal, and rife with popular tropes,

echo the sentimentality, cliché aesthetics meant for the masses that are associated with kitsch.

They share a perceived lack of authenticity and depth. The emergence of Kitsch, created by the Industrial Revolution, presented a situation where taste was no longer solely dictated by the ruling bourgeoisie class. The traditional hierarchies were disturbed, leading to the negative associations of kitsch as the emblematic style of a complete falling apart of standards. Similarly, AI is propelled by a technological revolution and is rapidly taking over the internet. It is replacing jobs that people once did and posting on places like Reddit under the guise that it is an actual person. As these models get better at language and image making, they present us with a complicated situation where distinguishing between real and fake will be very difficult. The internet has already shown that it is a space where one can become easily misinformed, and AI will only accelerate this issue.



Left "A poodle sitting in a room photorealistic" AI Image, Right "A poodle sitting in a room photorealistic" ceramic iteration 2023



Left "A poodle sitting in a field of daffodils anime style" AI Image, Right- "A poodle sitting in a field of daffodils anime style" ceramic iteration 2023

5. Poodles!/Unnatural Nature

When I first started utilizing the A.I. text-to-image technology, I would generate whatever came to mind to see what was possible. The results weren't fully refined, often yielding strange, glitched images. This allowed me to further push my visuals in relation to illustrating an alternate reality.

"A poodle sitting in a field of daffodils anime style" and "A poodle sitting in a room photorealistic" were created using a website called Nightcafe. I was testing all of the different text-to-image software, and I found that Nightcafe produced the worst results (technically believable images), so I chose it as my primary image generator. However, I was not fully satisfied with the images in and of themselves. The speed at which you can generate images was helpful, as it allowed me to make many iterations of the same concept, akin to making sketches. Graphic designer David Rudnick refers to his process of working between physical and digital modalities as "Primacist," which refers to "strategies or structures which created value in both digital and physical formats simultaneously, rejecting the idea that the future should either be entirely in service to virtual value, or entirely in opposition to it." These large-scale ceramic poodles serve this purpose for me. The images I generated were funny and interesting, but they lacked something on their own.

By transforming these digital renderings into large-scale ceramic sculptures, I aimed to bridge the gap between the quick-paced, throw-away nature of this type of digital art and the enduring physicality of ceramics.

Ceramics and technology are not often viewed as related because we, in modern society, usually regard technology as something related to the digital. But ceramics has played a significant role in propelling technological advancement. In ancient civilizations, their role in providing food and water storage allowed societies to grow. There are also shared material properties in the minerals used to make clay, glazes, and your iPhone screen.

The initial process to create these ceramic poodles was fruitful, but I was weary of becoming over-reliant on the A.I. generated imagery. The most iconic figurines are known as the spaghetti poodle. These were produced in the 1950s and 60s, predominantly in Japan. Their name is derived from the distinctive way the hair detail is created from small extruded clay pieces that resemble noodles. Thinking about how an A.I. image generator might interpret the term spaghetti poodle, I created a series using the same process. The head and bows are slip cast using vintage molds, initially made for mass-produced poodle dolls, and the body is extruded clay. When clay



Vintage ceramic spaghetti poodles

is pushed through a piece of die-cut metal with a hydraulic extruder, it does so with a lot of force and quickness. I allow the piles to form chaotically. The result looks much more like entrails than any resemblance to hair.

“Spaghetti Poodle Folly” is arranged on a tiered structure of old bricks that I left in my driveway to rot and grow moss for two years. The complete installation of the show contained almost all artificial elements, and I felt the need to create a strong juxtaposition for the display apparatus of these figurines. The natural plants growing on the moss fully incorporate real nature with fake. It also created a firm visual reference to follies, defined in the dictionary as “a costly ornamental building with no practical purpose, especially a tower or mock-Gothic ruin built in a large garden or park.” It’s also trash from my driveway re-contextualized in a gallery space.



“Spaghetti Poodle Folly” 2024

In *The Artificial Kingdom*, Celeste Olalquiaga discusses the Victorian design fads displayed at the Crystal Palace exhibition. It was a significant departure from the true classical form and emphasized using

industrial materials that mimicked organic design. It "...sought to imitate nature, an overabundance of iron leaves, glass flowers, and wooden antlers making the Crystal Palace a sort of immense, transparent winter garden whose fauna and flora were wonderfully frozen." It illustrated an ambiguous relationship in the desire to merge manufacturing and aesthetics together to disguise industry as a utopian promise. Nature is simultaneously lost and preserved by unnatural means of industrial production and scientific advancements. "...the collecting of ferns, a true mass-culture phenomenon: one where object or cluster of objects becomes the focus of an obsessive and pervasive consumption that, despite its seriality or multiplicity, is felt as intimately personal"

The poodles evoke a sense of hierarchy and display commonly found in collections. The deliberate arrangement and the use of colorful, varied glazes add attention to the individuality of each figurine within the collective whole. The decaying bricks on which the poodles sit reference this Victorian desire to preserve nature; the poodle visually represents the unnatural and the collectible. The success of mass-produced kitsch objects relies and thrives on their ability to be collected. The act of collecting creates the condition for a personalized and sentimental relationship with the object that, in actuality, it does not possess. Homogeneity can disguise itself as unique because

the collector can feel like their choices in items and displays reflect their specific personality.

Continuing the preserved artificial nature theme, the video piece "Everything's Trash. Everything's Treasure" was displayed on a large TV and framed in fake ferns. A literal reference to pteridomania (mania for ferns) is also from the Olalquiaga text. Printed vinyl of 3-D scanned flowers stretches out from the side as a formal extension of one of the video's segments and another form of unnaturally preserved nature. The video itself is still a work in progress. It has a run time of about ten minutes but will eventually be made into a feature-length. The video is a psychedelic fever dream, a blend of media and themes, from surreal infomercial parodies to contemplative encounters with nature, A.I. generated imagery, 3-D scans, and staged performance.

"...commodities were "dream images" or "wish images" more than the objects they represent utopian desires" -Celeste Olalquiaga, *The Artificial Kingdom*



"Everything's Trash. Everything's Treasure." Video Installation 2024

6. No Conclusion

As stated in the beginning, my work is a continuum. Echoing the project's overarching theme of the refusal to provide straightforward answers, I instead emphasize the open-ended nature of my inquiries. In *1000 Words with Jennifer Pastor*, she states, "If everything that succeeds in a piece is the end of something, then problems are holes or tunnels you can travel through." In the context of my work, every iteration embodies my meandering inquiries couched within these larger questions. Every work presents me with new questions and new problems. Tunnels— not meant to reach a definitive end but to emerge into expansive new areas of possibility. This perspective is crucial in understanding the final show I presented at the University of Oregon. It is not an endpoint but a juncture that opens up new avenues for exploration and dialogue.



"Secret Furby" 2024

"Questions of originality and authorship are no longer the point; instead the emphasis is on a meaningful re-contextualization of existing artifacts"

Claire Bishop, *Digital Divide: Contemporary Art and New Media*

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"Everything's Trash. Everything's Treasure." Full Installation 2024