Simon Pericich’s world is not one for the faint hearted. There has been a dark shift and nothing is as it once was. Discarded detritus is now collected to build a sacred funeral pyre for consumerism, ready to be set ablaze by a homemade Molotov cocktail made from an oil-filled Coca Cola bottle, brimming with smiley face stickers, and old currency for a fuse. Like the hapless teenagers in Lord of the Flies, the denizens of Pericich’s world have armed themselves. His sculptural installation, when they come we will be ready, is the arsenal of desperation. It is savagery replete. A domestic iron becomes a post-medieval mace. The steel shaft of a vacuum cleaner is topped with an unsheathed stanley knife. A guitar fret has been hacked off and attached to a clothes hanger, only to be reborn as a crossbow. This is the weaponry of the damned, the stranded. The works in when they come are sculptural paranoia in extremis. The demented forms of black lacquered timber frames adorned with digital images on stretched satin loom out of the dark. Everything here is patterned with bastardised corporate logos and teen fashion trinkets to create a postmoderndoo voodoo cargo cult sensibility. The explosive cocktail stands ready by the pyre. This is how the world ends, not with a whimper but a bang; this is the endgame for hyper-capitalism. The working titles of the individual pieces in PROGRESS IN AN AGE OF DECADENCE make the audience implicit in the work by offering a macabre Q&A test:
Q. I never feel alone because...
  a) Every star in the galaxy is capable of supporting complex life forms.
JEREMY KIBEL ON SIMON PERICICH
Co-Director, Block Projects
“The thing I’ve learnt about Simon,” say Block Project’s Jeremy Kibel, “is that he’s incredibly proactive as an artist, he’s always involved in projects, even small community-based projects, and he always has something going on. He works really hard and that’s what I appreciate about him.” The recipient of a 2003 Samstag Scholarship, which he undertook at the Slade School of Fine Art in London, Pericich returned to Australia and the Victorian College of the Arts, where he received the VCA Masters Award upon completing a second Masters degree in 2006. Pericich has only been represented by Block Projects for just over six months now and his debut solo show with them will be in 2009 - one of two solo shows already slated for next year.

The increasing visibility of his work in group and solo exhibitions, projects and residencies such as Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces only adds to the buzz. Kibel acknowledges that Pericich’s work can be challenging for collectors on a conservation level, given its ephemeral nature, but he speaks to a new breed of collectors coming through the gallery that are increasingly fascinated by the alchemy of this style of art-making, which internationally is also gaining increasing critical attention as a movement of unmonumental art. “I think it’s really on the mark – it says a lot about society now, the throwaway society, consumer society and I think a lot of shrewd collectors see that and pick up on it. Some of Melbourne’s best collectors have been really interested and I’ve been receiving requests for images and information from some of the best private collections in Melbourne, so the word is out.”
"I think there's a real trend today towards making installations that somehow spiritualise, or attempt to find the spiritual in contemporary life. What's interesting about Simon is that, even though aesthetically he resembles these kinds of artworks, he's actually a kind of antidote to what they're doing. He's really looking at the absence or lack of the spiritual in contemporary culture, particularly in reference to contemporary consumerist culture and the way the world is going environmentally and I think that's a major concern for him.

The thing that I find most interesting about his work – and I think it's something that's at the core of all his practice – is the sense that everything he makes is darkly prophetic. It's all about potential future visions, dystopic visions, almost apocalyptic visions, and what Simon describes as the "hilariously doomed nature of humanity". It's very much his own unique way of looking at the world. Crucially, I think he understands the failures and limitations of the contemporary world but at the same time he doesn't blame it for it. He's such a generation Y-er, but underneath that cynicism and underneath his dystopic vision, there is this sense of compassion for humanity and there is a glimmer of hope – this idea that art can be an agent for awareness or change, be that social or environmental and that's a sincere statement that he makes. I think that compassionate voice is quintessential to what he does in his practice.

In the end it's really poetic, his work, because whether or not the world is dying, he is creating something new and there's something very beautiful about what he does. It's a bit like being in Venice where it's still a profoundly beautiful city even though it's crumbling around you at the same time."

Meredith Turnbull is a Melbourne-based writer, curator and artist alongside her position at the Victorian College of the Arts Margaret Lawrence Gallery.

b) Humans naturally form groups in times of need

c) I trust the government will always look after its citizens

Pericich's LAST DAYS SALE SALE SALE MUST END SOON, which featured as part of the aptly titled group show World's End at Melbourne's Carlton Hotel in 2007, felt like a missing scene from Blade Runner. It was a fully functional garage sale of pre-loved goods and artworks of over 15 artists, all housed in a handmade tent constructed from a recycled billboard. Old books, original paintings, a gas bottle, drawings, jewellery, sculptural objects, hand printed t-shirts and artist-crafted furniture were all up for grabs. With its dim fluorescent lighting, trance music, chai tea and incense sticks, LAST DAYS was decidedly future noir.

This is a world not dissimilar to that of Cormac McCarthy's breathtaking post-apocalyptic novel, The Road. Here everything is blackened and detritus becomes the new currency, an economics of ruin. Pericich's world is not an alternate reality. It is our world – the day after tomorrow.

New work by Simon Pericich will be showing this quarter at Gertrude Street's Studio 12, Melbourne, until June 21 2008, and Platform, Melbourne, from 4 to 30 August 2008.

Merchandise


Opposite page: Simon Pericich, density of darkness, 2007. Wood, water pump, plastic tubing, living local weeds, various bling, boro lights, soft drink bottles and assortment of trash, approx 4 x 5 x 3m. COURTESY: THE ARTIST

This is the weaponry of the damned, the stranded. The works in when they come are sculptural paranoia in extremis.