

Pam Longobardi

“Prophetic Objects” and “Evidence of Crimes”



Date Found:	<i>7/23/2011</i>	Location:	<i>Sea cave at Liakas, Kefalonia, Greece</i>
Collector:	<i>P.L. + Maria Rigatou</i>		
Notes:	<i>Collected from giant sea cave named The Mermaid Cave. Remnant of a Styrofoam float handmade by Greek fisherman as a boat fender or buoy. Breaks into millions of tiny balls</i>		
Crime:	<i>Food Imposter; poses as fish eggs and is ingested by birds, turtles and fish.</i>		



Prophetic Object #6

Date Found: 7/11/2015

Location: *Potani Beach, Kefalonia*

Collector: *P.L. + S. Knijffenberg* Notes: *This small winged wheel toy is a symbol of Greek god Hermes. It was found among the rounded stones of a remote beach called Potani, which translates to "the mind is flying."*



Date Found: *19/25/2008* Location: *Ha Lae, Big Island, Hawaii*

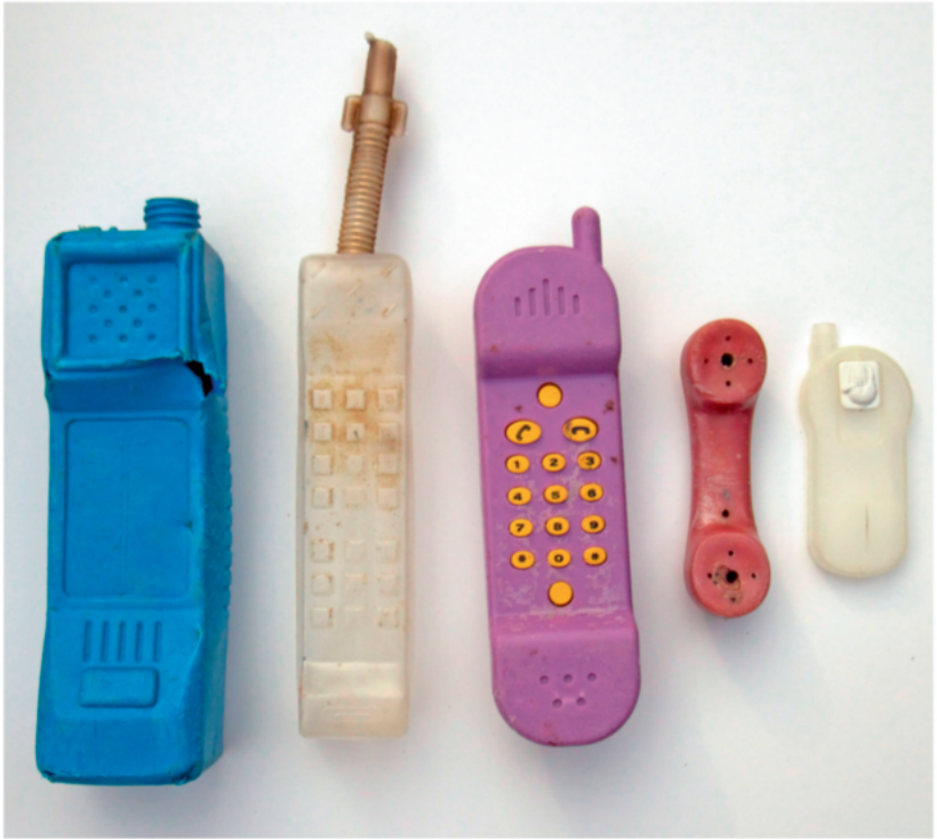
Collector: *P.L. + Dave Rothstein* Notes: *A basketball that floated for years at sea was colonized by pelagic barnacles and corals visible underneath the watertline.*

The top surface was cracked and corroded by years of baking in the tropical sun.

Crime: *Drifting plastics are planetary worlds colonized by life, sometimes invasive.*



Date Found:	<i>5/19/2011</i>	Location:	<i>Ossabaw Island, Georgia</i>
Collector:	<i>P.L. + Heather Bond</i>	Notes:	<i>This ghost net was found as it was washing ashore. Nearly 50 baby stone crabs were inside of the net; it had been their floating nursery. All of them were removed and released back into the sea.</i>
Crime:	<i>Toxic Refuge: fish and other creatures aggregate and colonize rogue nets.</i>		



Date Found: <i>2006 - 2013</i>	Location: <i>Costa Rica, Greece, Hawaii</i>
Collector: <i>P.L. + Sarina Basta</i>	Notes: <i>Found in three different countries over the course of six years; the evolution of our telecommunication obsession has been reproduced in plastic toys, drink bottles and candy dispensers.</i>
Crime: <i>Distraction through telecommunication; toxicity via plastic reproduction.</i>	



Prophetic Object # 3

Date Found: *7/28/2012* Location: *Vouti Beach, Kefalonia, Greece*

Collector: *Pam Longobardi* Notes: *Vouti is a remote beach in the far north of Kefalonia. Evidence of severe winter storms and the sea's power are revealed in the swirl of rock and plastic. 'Endless' is a Greek cleaning product company.*

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Date Found: <i>10/8/2013</i>	Location: <i>Playa Jaco, Costa Rica</i>
Collector: <i>Pam Longobardi</i>	Notes: <i>Degraded doll arm found on beach.</i>
<i>Condition and style suggests this specimen is over 30 years old.</i>	
<i>Crime: Gender Acculturation through plastic simulation. Young girls receive early conditioning to reproduce via toy products and accompanying advertising.</i>	



Prophetic Object # 4

Date Found: *7/23/2013* Location: *Poros, Kefalonia, Greece*

Collector: *Pam Longobardi* Notes: *This remote beach area has been 'adopted' by a local family restaurant and has been cleaned since 2011. Two years later, this was the only plastic found in the area. Action had been taken.*

The sea has long been an inspiration for art, with its powerful colors and vast energies; its weathers, and winds, its waters containing marine creatures of all shapes and sizes. With visions of adventure and profit, people have always come to visit, live, and work by the seashores, continuing from beaches and ports out onto the oceans themselves. Along with travelers, commercial shippers, and aquatic harvesters whose business sends them to sea, the water attracts bathers and swimmers, subsistence fishers, artists, sailors, philosophers and dreamers who come to stare across an immeasurable expanse and think about the fascination of our world. How do we fit in? How we relate to the environment around us?

Pam Longobardi gets art from the sea, though somewhat ironically. She harvests the oceans for garbage—unfortunately, not a difficult thing to do—which forms the raw materials for her art. There is a profusion of garbage everywhere: a plethora of different kinds, colors, sizes, shapes, and compositions. The seas may seem so large that people believe we can dump garbage into them limitlessly, and their enormity will render our refuse invisible. But this is, simply, not so. These waters which cover our planet have become garbage dumps, and Longobardi's work responds to that problem, that desecration.

She takes photographs of garbage and seas, garbage in the seas. My initial response is enthusiastic: good, she is cleaning up the seas; she is removing these foreign objects, these ugly and toxic elements, from places where they are not supposed to be.

But how much of the seascape can she actually clean up? Obviously, only a tremendously small amount. Does that mean her art is ineffective? If the goal is to clean, to purify the places people have befouled, the photographs in these series, "Prophetic Objects" (the ones with the dark backgrounds) and "Evidence of Crimes" (white backgrounds), might not make much of a dent. But on the other hand, the cleaning or removal of even a single piece of refuse may make a difference to one bird, or seal, or whale, or shark, or plankton. And it may also make a difference to one person, and then to more people, who see Longobardi cleaning up (either in person, or via this project). Perhaps people, faced with the enormity of polluted oceans, cannot figure what to do. The solution, this art shows us, is pretty obvious: clean up. The cleaning is contagious: it multiplies.

But her photography is an object lesson: the objects Longobardi finds and foregrounds—pieces of dolls, bottle tops, abandoned toys, packaging, nets, Styrofoam—remind us how many tokens of our polluting presence cover the earth. Do her "portraits" of this material, set against the backdrop of the sea, the beautiful sea, the sea that would be beautiful if we stopped throwing in garbage . . . do they inspire us to be better, cleaner, smarter?

Should artists engage with garbage? Perhaps we bridle at such an aesthetic. Let actual garbage collectors, and ecologists, and all the rest of us consumers, figure out how to handle garbage, how create a more sustainable ecosystem. We need artists—all the more in a garbage-strewn world—to celebrate beauty and ideals. In a dirty world, let the artist remind us of unsullied majesty . . . and of a world before human desecration.

Pam Longobardi's art gives us the world as it is. She subverts the binary idea of beauty/garbage, for her garbage is indeed beautiful, provocative, resonant. The forms, the colors, the symbols and ideas that resonate in her photographs of garbage-in-the-world, are fully appropriate to the ethos of art, the vocabulary of art. Her photographs are engaging, fascinating, curious. They are unmistakably beautiful. (Do we deserve this beauty, after having ruined the beauty of our planet? Is the beauty crusted in irony? Even if it is, does that disqualify it from our aesthetic traditions?) "The drifter objects are beautiful because they hold a message, and a horror," Longobardi says. "Only true beauty reminds us of its opposite, true ugliness, and to me, nothing is more ugly than the suffering of sea, land and air creatures impacted by plastic."

These photographs represent a small part of many large and long-term projects that Longobardi has undertaken over the past decade, to find and spotlight the prevalence of "foreign objects," pollution, plastics, in our world. Certainly she is not the only person who is saddened, and, I imagine, angry, because of what we have done to our environment; she is not the only one telling us that we must change. But she has an approach, a style, a sense of mission in her art that uniquely catches our attention and demands an ethical engagement with the story, the danger, that her art reveals.

Queerly, Longobardi's subjects are ensconced in the tropes of aesthetics. She labels her "Prophetic Objects" as if they were rare, valuable artifacts: specifying the place and date of collection, and the collector. Is it perverse to fetishize this garbage? We want creativity, fantasy, ecstasy, intensity; we get garbage, yet garbage that is recontextualized and shown back to us. "Prophetic Objects" and "Evidence of Crimes" ask us to study these artifacts as deeply as we would any other relics dredged from the sea's depths. Like the amphorae, jewels, and statuary fragments that marine archaeologists have discovered, these objects are a testament to our civilization.

Perhaps we get what we deserve.

—RANDY MALAMUD



IMAGES

Cover: *Anthropocene Fossil Beach Jug*

#1: *Plastic Coffin Bundle*

#2: *Hermes Petani*

#3: *Barnacleball*

#4: *Ghost Net Baby Crab*

#5: *Phone Evolution*

#6: *Endless Vouti*

#7: *Doll Arm*

#8: *Action*

Dan Veach

Translations from the Chinese

FLOWER RIDGE

Wang Wei:

Flying birds departing endlessly
Autumn stains the mountain range again
Climbing and descending Flower Ridge
Regret and sorrow, will they never end?

Pei Di:

Sun falls, wind rises in the pines
Returning home, dew scattered on the grass
Cloud light fills our footprints
Mountain greenery brushes off our clothes

Note: To “brush one’s clothes” meant retiring from office, shedding the dust of worldly concerns.