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## THE ACTIVISM-CHARGED INSTALLATIONS OF ALEJANDRO DURÁN

👤 Caoilainn Scouler 🕒 June 18, 2015 📁 INSTALLATION, PHOTOGRAPHY, SCULPTURE

Alejandro Durán is a rare breed of artist in that his creations directly confront one of the most pressing global issues of the twenty-first century. **Durán**, who hails from Mexico City, creates on-site installations from washed up rubbish he collects along Mexico's shorelines, highlighting the escalating dangers of oceanic pollution. Durán's work begins in Sian Ka'an, a protected coastal reserve in his native Mexico. The Brooklyn-based multimedia artist walks the shore and collects the various pieces of rubbish that have washed up, mainly cheap, non-biodegradable plastic items. Once he has collected a significant amount, Durán segments the items into groups based on their colour and uses them to create striking on-site installations. These installations are featured in his ongoing project, 'Washed Up'.

According to Durán, rubbish from all over the world makes its way to the shores of Sian Ka'an:

*"I have identified plastic waste from fifty nations on six continents that have washed ashore along the coast of Sian Ka'an. I have used this international debris to create colour-based, site-specific sculptures. Conflating the hand of man and nature, at times I distribute the objects the way the waves would; at other times, the plastic takes on the shape of algae, roots, rivers, or fruit, reflecting the infiltration of plastics into the natural environment."*





Infiltration of the natural environment indeed: Durán's images are striking precisely because of the strong juxtaposition they evoke between man and nature. The solid colours of plastic container lids clash abruptly with the speckled browns and greys of the rocks; the smooth edges of glass light bulbs look out of place as they are tossed amongst the rippling, fluid tide. Durán also creates a clever opposition between the natural hues of the landscape and the artificial glow of manmade objects. By grouping the debris together in masses of screaming colour, the rubbish both reflects and rejects its surroundings. The images also have an unmistakable sense of substance and energy. The trails of plastic bottles flow in swirling curves like ocean waves and the white plastic bottles, hollow inside, lie heavy and solemn amongst the rocks.

Of course, Durán has reason to be concerned: [Greenpeace estimates](#) that over one billion people living in coastal locations are dependent on the ocean for their daily survival, and this demographic is the group most affected by oceanic pollution. Durán has made no secret of the fact that he wishes for the Washed Up installation to inspire greater care for environmental activism:

*"More than creating a surreal or fantastical landscape, these installations mirror the reality of our current environmental predicament. The resulting photo series depicts a new form of colonization by consumerism, where even undeveloped land is not safe from the far-reaching impact of our disposable culture... The alchemy of Washed Up lies not only in converting a trashed landscape, but in the project's potential to raise awareness and change our relationship to consumption and waste."*

Durán has collaborated with many groups who share his eco-friendly vision, including [Amigos de Sian Ka'an](#), [Global Vision International](#) and [Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas](#).

For those interested in taking a closer look, Durán exhibits his photos regularly in New York City, where he currently resides. Keep an eye on [the official Washed Up Facebook page](#) for updates about the ongoing project.