

It started off small: the transformation of an abandoned gas station in Seattle's Georgetown neighborhood into a public green space. What was not to like? SuttonBeresCuller's *Mini Mart City Park* project promoted community-consciousness and conservation, and was oh so doable. Or so it seemed. After more than a year of snafus that included the discovery of on-site toxic waste, it seemed the project might not fly. But the trio of artists is proving that, taken in small enough doses, what doesn't kill you might just make you stronger.

John Sutton, Ben Beres and Zac Culler have been working together for more than a decade, ever since meeting as art school students at the Cornish College of the Arts. They've created performance experiences, (appearing as bedraggled businessmen aboard a floating "desert island" off the 520 bridge), large-scale sculptures constructed of castoffs, and politically charged works that raise questions about the way we dispose (or don't) of waste in the modern age.

For their 2012 art installation at Land of Tomorrow Gallery (in Louisville, Kentucky), the trio put a call out on Craigslist for donated household objects, then worked the received goods into a large installation titled *Small Moons*. Giant geodesic dome armatures were bedecked with (among other things) working lamps, bicycles, televisions, and ceiling fans. "It's amazing the amount of items that are tossed simply because they no longer meet an aesthetic requisite," says Sutton. "They're still fully functional." Interest in how junk is tossed, moved, rehabilitated and/or disposed of is at the heart of "You knew it was wrong... but you did it anyway," their new fall show at Greg Kucera Gallery. The exhibit not only includes an overview of the group's now five-years-in-the-making *Mini Mart City Park* project, but also proposes a solution.

After the contaminated land was subjected to four environmental assessments to identify responsible parties, SuttonBeresCuller stepped up to the plate and purchased it outright—making them potentially liable for more than a million dollars in damages. Those are dollars that the trio believes could be better spent elsewhere. "Cleanup of the site isn't about cleaning per se," explains Sutton. "The contaminated soil is simply removed from Seattle and relocated to Oregon. Doing so is an incredible waste of petroleum." But a blame game the exhibit is not. It's an opportunity to ask viewers to accept a portion of responsibility. The works in "You knew it was wrong... but you did it

anyway" include a '50s-inspired infomercial about the history of the project and a purchasable product: a can of the site's contaminated dirt.

For the better part of the last century, the *Mini Mart City Park* location was hit from multiple sides and with different toxins that include runoff from gas stations, dry cleaners and greenhouses. Hence, for those seeking the most bang for their buck, SuttonBeresCuller's canned goods will be a particularly stellar deal. Priced at under \$50 apiece, five million cans sold would pay for the cleanup of the site and then some. "Buying one means that you're a shareholder in the site," says Ben Beres. "And even though it's still a transference of toxins as opposed to an actual cleaning remedy, it distributes the responsibility among us all."

As a trio, SuttonBeresCuller has not only learned how to generate ideas jointly, but how to physically execute them. The exhibit includes blue-collar objects (brooms, mops, plungers), cast in bronze alongside drawings in which the individual hand of the artist has been obliterated. "It was trial and error," says Culler. "We pass images back and forth and use pointillism instead of lines in order to hide any individual style." At the center of the exhibit is a large-scale sculpture, *Ring of Fire* (2014), a heap of discarded lamps accompanied by a fire soundtrack. Sensors track visitors' proximity, and as a response light up. It was inspired in part by the Titan Prometheus, who in Greek mythology steals fire for the human race, thereby enabling the progress of civilization. SuttonBeresCuller proposes a different tack:

closing ranks and accepting responsibility for past eco sins in order to collectively take back the power. Now there's an idea that could catch fire.

—SUZANNE BEAL

"You knew it was wrong... but you did it anyway," a solo show by SuttonBeresCuller, can be seen at Greg Kucera Gallery, in Seattle, from Sept 5 – Nov 1, 2014. [www.gregkucera.com](http://www.gregkucera.com)

"RING OF FIRE (DETAIL),"  
2014  
LAMPS, STEEL AND ARDUINOS,  
DIMENSIONS VARIABLE  
PHOTO: COURTESY GREG KUCERA GALLERY

