

THEME

Nendo Design & Oki Sato's
Aha! Moment

Toy Story: Children
MAKING SOMETHING
OUT OF NOTHING

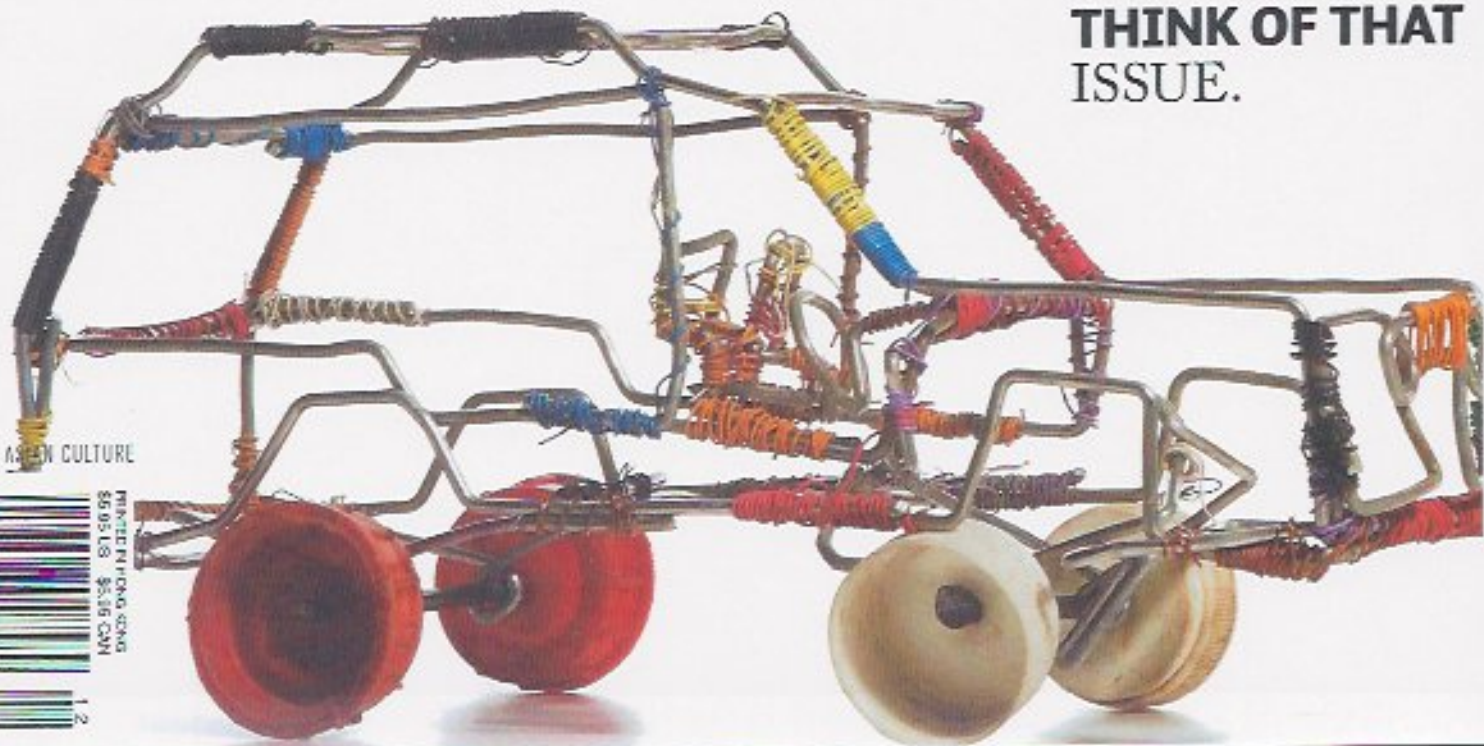
HUMDINGER WIND
GENERATES A GOOD IDEA

Kenji Kawakami & the Art of
Un-useless Inventions



Eureka!

THE
**WHY DIDN'T I
THINK OF THAT
ISSUE.**



GLOBAL ASIAN CULTURE





What Seems Obvious Is Not Always Apparent, 2006. In collaboration with Jeanne Quinn.

Finally, Art That's Useful

Story by Wendy Cheng. Work Images Courtesy of Yumi Roth.

Theme: Timothy Rogers, the curator of the Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe, once said, "By crossing wires of decoration and authority, [Yumi Roth] offered critiques of both semiotic fields." Was this conscious?

Yumi Roth: Yeah, I think so. The work he was referring to, specifically, was toying with modes of authority, and that was *Jersey Slipcover*, *Disco Barriers*, piñata traffic cones, and embroidered Homeland Security kitchen towels. I'm sort of curious what happens

when you put things that you never associate together, together—how does that provide you with a renewed idea of what, from those categories, you've come to accept without question.

Let's take *Disco Barriers* as an example. We happen to love silver, shiny things—

Yes, [laughs] it's the magpie effect.

Applying what he said to that—there's both a critique of authority and of the disco-



PinataJahr Very Nager, 2004.

ARTIST YUMI JANAIRO ROTH has a mom from the Philippines, a dad from the American midwest, and a Korean first name. Her piece *Disco Barriers* puts a shiny '70s spin on the sense of restriction created by objects that crowded the streets after 9/11. Her mahogany *Pallet* and furniture dollies stick up for the things that are usually used just to move other things around. And her *Small Acts of Public Service*, installed in a number of vehicles and buildings in Manila, expose the randomness of jeepneys and speak to her appreciation of maps as quirky drawings. Roth's work, which has been exhibited from New York to Munich, Manila and onward, transforms the meaning of simple, daily objects and emphasizes the importance of freedom of movement in today's world.



Dressing up the mundane.



ness of things. Does the silver-ness reflect your personal style, or is that something that you feel alienated from?

As you're saying this, I'm looking at my house and I'm looking at all the chrome pieces. [Laughs.]

Can you talk about how you started to notice the pallets and furniture dollies?

I was building crates all the time to hold all this other work, so I became hyper-attuned to all these objects that were used to contain

other objects and move them around. That inspired this sort of tangential thinking about crates, pallets, furniture dollies, and that family of objects.

Pallets are interesting because you see them in such random locations. They can be in a store, containing objects, or they can be next to a dumpster. It's interesting how they start to sort of fan out and move around and become repurposed as different sorts of objects. When I went back to the



Yumi Roth and her Dizzo Barriers.

...Some Sort Of Strange Hybrids Between All Of This Furniture And These Kinds Of Objects That Really Talk About Movement Between Places.



To Site Houston: Officer Jay, 2005



Meta Maps, 2007. In collaboration with Andrew Blackstock and Casey McIsaac.

Pallets Are Interesting Because You See Them In Such Random Locations. They Can Be In A Store, Containing Objects, Or They Can Be Next To A Dumpster. It's Interesting How They Start To Sort Of Fan Out And Move Around And Become Repurposed As Different Sorts Of Objects.

Philippines, there were all these objects that were ornately carved or inlaid with mother-of-pearl or bone. And I was like, here's my idea: I'll have pallets carved—some sort of strange hybrids between all of this furniture and these kinds of objects that really talk about movement between places—and not just domestically, but internationally.

The jeepney was adapted from the American jeep. Are the paths that you made in *Small Acts of Public Service* reflective of the paths that the American jeeps actually took?

No, I don't think so—the jeeps are really interesting because they're the de facto public transportation system of the Philippines. There's a relatively reasonable metro system throughout Manila that gets you around pretty well. But if you want to go door to door, you take a jeep. And you may have to take five jeeps to go door to door, but you can go door to door. [Laughs.]

So it's not that the maps trace real paths, it's more of a response to the fact that there aren't any.

Well, they trace real paths, but the stops are arbitrary. If someone wants to stop "between" the stops, they can. The way that I constructed those stops was where people generally seemed to stop. And it's funny because I

remember my cousin and I installed them on a bunch of different routes. And people were like, "Oh, are you doing this as a public service?" or "Oh, do you work for the Manila Department of Transportation?" And conversely, I think the Manila Department of Transportation was doing this whole thing on the unification of Manila where they were like, painting abstract forms on top of graffiti throughout the city. So they were doing "art" and I was doing "transportation." Which I thought was a funny reversal.

So what are you doing now, and what's in your future?

In 2005 I was driving around Cubao, and it had all these street names that are US cities and states, like New York, Potsdam, Minnesota—I mean, completely random. When I think of Minnesota, I don't think of the tropics. So I was interested in taking the names of all those places and all those streets, which I think are named after US regiments that fought either at the turn of the century or during World War II, and merging them with the sort of "Welcome to..." style highway signs that we see, like, "Albany! Mayor Kennings welcomes you to the city of the Champions of Superbowl 22," or something. It's a little abstract, I know. I'm hoping it'll come together. ☺



Untitled (furniture object), 2007