

***“After the Future”, 2016. By Jim Lambie***  
**Spotlight Paper by Norm Schweitzer, 2017**



**Artist’s Background:**

Jim Lambie, Born 1962 in Glasgow Scotland.

**Education:** Studied Fine Art at The Glasgow School of Art (1990–94).

**Art Movement, Influences and Impact:**

The New Image Glasgow movement is the core movement in Lambie’s artistic development. New Image Glasgow came in to being in 1985, initiated by Glasgow’s Third Eye Centre and was intended to support artists at the start of their careers. Third Eye Centre also initiated the Centre for Contemporary Arts in 1992. These represented the vigorous Glasgow art scene which became, in part, synonymous with New Formalism, representing artists like Jim Lambie [and Eva Rothschild] who were involved in the seminal ‘Early One Morning’ exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery.<sup>1</sup>

Lambie quickly became an influencer and leader of the movement. The importance of the Glasgow art scene as an influence on Lambie, and of his influence on that scene is summed up by art reviewer Moira Jeffrey who states, “If you were to sum up Glasgow’s art scene in two words it might as well be these two: Jim Lambie.” Ms. Jeffrey, in 2008, states, “It’s a pleasure to see Lambie taking such a central role in his home town. He is, after all, the very definition of the city’s unique artistic voice.”<sup>2</sup>

Lambie, is a product of the 1990s period of reinvention within the contemporary art scene in Scotland. The New Image Glasgow movement explored a reaction to the European expressionism of the 1980s.<sup>3</sup>

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In an interview, curator Andres Tarsia<sup>4</sup> described the influence of the Glasgow School of Art in terms of its “emphasis on... working with a space or an idea suggested by a space.” This is a concise description of what Lambie has done with his Zobop works, as described below.

The influence of this New Image Glasgow movement was further enhanced by the influence of Lambie’s musical career, more as a DJ than as a performer. Glasgow artists began to see the role of the artist as “fans, mixers and samplers...”<sup>4</sup> which is also the role of a DJ. In creating art out of mixing and sampling everyday objects, Lambie plays games with the idea of authorship and has become, and remains, a true DJ within the art scene. Lambie continues to credit his musical and DJ roots stating "I want to suggest the way a space changes when you put a record on. I want to set up this intense psychological space."<sup>5</sup>

Lambie considers the artistic and musical culture of Glasgow to be an important part of his development. In a conversation on “Subway Sect,” a radio show focusing on music and art, Lambie speaks of Glasgow saying “There’s a village mentality. Even though it’s a city, it’s not a city like, say, New York. You don’t have to make appointments to meet people in Glasgow; if I feel like going out on a night on my own and no one immediately feels like going out, I’ll just go to a bar cos I know I’ll meet people and I’ll have a great or a good night at least....”<sup>6</sup>

Jonathan Jones ONART BLOG describes Lambie’s art as following Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) “exceptional ability to take ordinary physical objects and transfigure them into his own universe.”<sup>7</sup>

Lambie is an active participant in the Glasgow and international art scene, influencing and being influenced by the art movements of the 1990’s and on. In the 20 years since 1997, Lambie has had over 50 solo exhibitions and has shown his work in over 100 group exhibitions.

### **Medium, Technique and Methodology:**

Potato bags, acrylic paint, expanding foam on canvas.

Lambie has focused on creating assemblages of found items. As is well stated in the wall-text: “As part of the artist’s interest in turning household detritus into sculpture, the work featured potato sacks that have been filled with expanding foam and painted metallic gray.”

### **Impressions, Analysis and Jim Lambie’s Time-Line:**

This analysis will begin with *After the Future*, and then flashback to the beginning of his career, and then return to the present.

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*After the Future's* crowded configuration, to quote the excellent wall-text, “on a puzzle-like grid mirrors a crowded city block teeming with urban waste and industrial consumption. With their artificial metallic sheen and somber crumpled shapes, the repurposed potato sacks hint at a dystopian future defined by a scarcity of resources.”

It is a wall piece, aggressively jutting out into the viewer's space, styled in monochromatic metallic sheened coloring, serving as a warning as to the direction in which our urban environment is heading.

*After the Future* is remarkably different and more ominous than most of Lambie's earlier works. In fact, almost as interesting as *After the Future's* doomsday warning, is the evolution of Lambie's art beginning with his earlier works.

Lambie burst upon the art scene in 1998 with *Zobop*, one of his best-known works. This work has been created in many different versions, each one unique in its response to the architectural footprint of a given area. It consists of different widths of color or monochrome adhesive vinyl tape, which is applied directly to a floor.



Lambie however wanted to move beyond the comfortable success of these popular artworks. As described in Roberta Smith's 2001 review of Lambie's *Boy Hairdresser* artwork, she states that Lambie “doesn't want to be known as the tape artist, and so he is not repeating the mind-bending yet completely ephemeral commandeering of space that made his first New York show so memorable<sup>1</sup>.”

As Lambie's art has evolved, he has retained his fundamental characteristics of pursuing playful and imaginative work in collage, installation and sculpture. He uses, and continues to use, everyday materials and detritus, in the case of *Zobop*, colored vinyl tape. He has been described as creating a “gravitational field of sensory delight.... A clownish relentlessness just slightly unhinged<sup>2</sup>”

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His art is inhabited with his musical sensibilities based on his original career as a musician (self-described during an interview as “a bad musician”) Like rock-and-roll, his work shows an edgy and exuberant outlook, surrounding viewers with a mashed-up vision of the world in which we live.

In a 2011 interview Lambie states “I’m allowed to make what I want.”<sup>8</sup> This remains true of his art. However, he went on to state “My work is about the objects. It is not necessarily about anything.” This did not remain true of his works beyond 2014 such as the subject work of this Spotlight, *After the Future* which debunks the architecture of the future.

His art, although remaining abstract, is increasingly representational and is now “about something.

*Zobop*, a floor-art work, allowed the viewer to intrude into the artist’s space as one walked through it. Although not abandoning the *Zobop* environment, Lambie has increasingly turned to wall-art. His wall art pieces are not flat but extend out into the viewers space which is an important difference. Instead of the viewer intruding into the artwork space as in *Zobop*, the artwork now “...juts violently out of the wall”<sup>3</sup> thus invading the viewer’s space.

We also observe a softening of the edges. As compared to *Zobop* which could be seen as an ode to architecture, with the vinyl tape crisply highlighting the nuances of the architectural space, these works such as *Tangerine Dream* and *Plaza* show an increasing skepticism about our architectural spaces.



As we move forward in time, we observe a further softening of edges and a move toward cynicism regarding architecture and society. His use of media such as potato bags filled with

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foam and painted with acrylic paint provides a continued softening of the edges as compared to the crisp lines of the vinyl taped *Zobop*.



Between 2014 and 2015, Lambie continued his vibrant use of color and bright metallic sheens. In 2016 Lambie created *After the Future*, which can be seen as a further move from the exuberant celebration of architecture to a view of architecture as the dystopian product of urban waste and industrial consumption.

If viewed as if looking down from above, *After the Future* seems to portray a city block in the midst of urban decay. Gone is the glitter. The color is muted.

Unlike Lambie’s earlier works which do not appear to have a clearly defined societal viewpoint, this work speaks to our (and Lambie’s) dimmed view of our future of waste and decay.

When observing *After the Future*, a first reaction is that it might work better if placed on the floor so that the viewer, like an eye-in-the-sky, could peer down on this landscape. But as floor art, we would be intruding into this dystopian space. Perhaps Lambie would rather that as wall-art, the artwork jut out and invade our space as a warning of what comes *After the Future*.

**Compare and Contrast Artwork:**

The closest visual cousin to *After the Future* is *The Pile* [2004, Gavin Turk] which is a sculpture portraying garbage bags and which, like *After the Future*, is slow to reveal its meaning to the viewer.

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The found item assemblages such as *Random Walk* [2012, Sarah Sze] is comparable to Lambie’s piece. An interesting question to pursue is whether *Random Walk*, although more brightly colored, is more or less positive in its message.

The *Last Outpost* [1983, Llyn Foulkes] is an assemblage which, like *After the Future*, debunks some of our prized notions. The *Last Outpost* is a debunking of our past, the romanticized old west, much as *After the Future* debunks any glorious visions of our urban future.

### **Museum Owned, Purchased with funds provided by Donna MacMillan.**

*After the Future* fits in well with PSAM’s collection on at least two levels. It represents the role of art and artists in furthering social commentary, and it is an excellent example of assemblage art, found-item or otherwise.

### **Bibliography /Sources:**

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3. Jim Lambie Exhibition Description, Anton Kern Gallery, November 7 – December 19, 2015
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5. Art in Review; Boy Hairdresser, Roberta Smith, September 14, 2001
6. Serena Davies interviews Turner Prize nominee Jim Lambie about the inspirations for his work.
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9. Michael Bracewell, *Reflections on the Art of Jim Lambie*, Modern Art Oxford, 2004

### **Touring Suggestions:**

The body of works on an *After the Future* tour should include assemblages of found-objects such as *Random Walk*.

### **Suggested Touring Outline**

- This type of assemblage art is informed by Lambie’s musical career, especially as a DJ who performs as fan, mixer and sampler. Discuss connection between DJs and found item assemblers.

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- What is the mood of this artwork? Happy, somber, hopeful...?
- How would you describe the colors/hues/intensities? Does this support the mood?
- Is this abstract, representational, or both? (Discuss the terms)
- Let’s assume it is representational. What do you think it represents? How about if we look at it as an aerial view? Does that help?
- It’s a tough question. One of the things we might look to for help is the wall text. Read “The sculpture’s crowded configuration on a puzzle-like grid mirrors a crowded city block teeming with urban waste and industrial consumption. With their artificial metallic sheen and somber crumpled shapes, the repurposed potato sacks hint at a dystopian future defined by a scarcity of resources.” Ask whether they now see it.
- I like a good story and the good story of this piece is of how Lambie evolved to this type of art.
- He began with colorful floor art that embraced the architectural boundaries, [Show an image of Zobop.] He stated “My work is about the objects. It is not necessarily about anything.” The puzzle is how did he evolve, over 17 yrs, from crisp colorful optimistic floor art to subdued coloring, non-crisp shapes and dystopian messages. How did he evolve from art that, in Lambie’s own words, is not about anything to art that delivers a message and warning?
- We may never know the answer. But we see here a fine example, not only of art’s ability to transform ourselves, the viewers, but also to transform the artist him/her self.