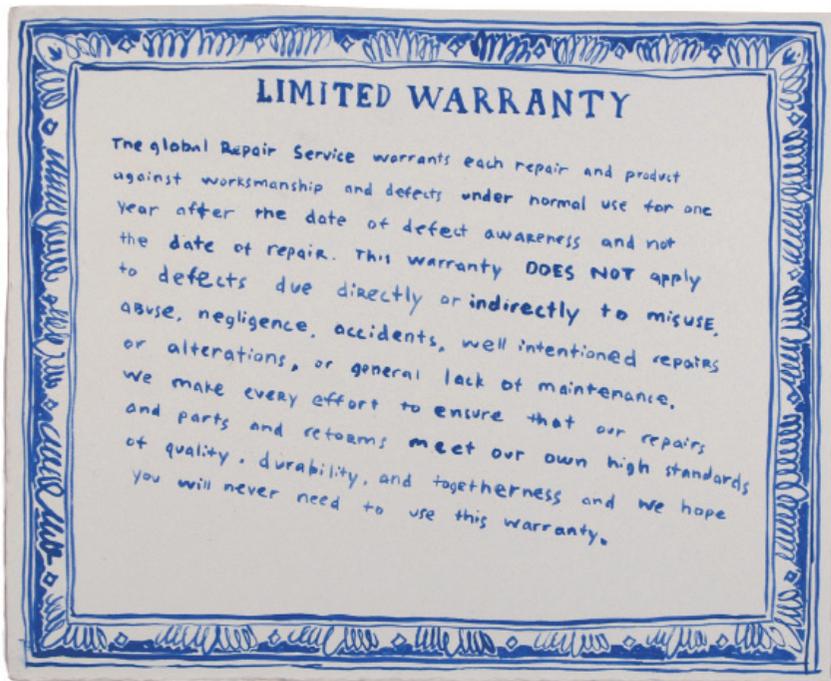




Global Repair Service Fleet: Fixer Upper Van, 2007, watercolor on paper, 10x 15 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Bruno David Gallery.



Is there a warranty on this thing?, 2008, Flashe on blue paper, 7 x 8 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Corey Escoto (born 1983, Amarillo, Texas)

Corey Escoto has exhibited nationally, internationally, and widely throughout Texas, his home state. He has been included in the Texas Biennial, Dougherty Arts Center, Austin; Selections From the Texas Biennial, Blue Star Art Complex, San Antonio; Souvenirs, ACC Galerie, Weimar, Germany; 7 Days Brunch (a satellite exhibition to Art Basel), Basel, Switzerland; Lucky Stars, Fauftown Projects, Santa Monica; Biennial Southwest, Albuquerque Museum of Art and Art History, Albuquerque; How to Be a Leader, Dallas Public Library, Dallas; and the Amarillo Biennial, Amarillo Museum of Art, Amarillo. Mr. Escoto is a recent graduate of the Master of Fine Arts program at Washington University in St. Louis.

Artist Acknowledgments

Special thanks to my family, Elizabeth Ferry, Steve Wright, Ron Leax, Patricia Olynyk, Washington University, Bruno David, and all my friends and supporters; to Ian, Dave, and the two random guys off the street who helped us unload a really heavy table saw; to the Contemporary staff, and of course to the Gateway Foundation.

The Great Rivers Biennial is an artist awards program designed to strengthen the local arts community in St. Louis by supporting and celebrating local emerging talent. Three artists, selected by distinguished curators from around the country and individually awarded a \$20,000 grant from the Gateway Foundation, have each created new work on the occasion of the 2008 exhibition at the Contemporary. The goal of this innovative awards program is to provide these artists professional support, as well as to raise the visibility of their work in the Midwestern and national arts community. This year's panel of jurors included Cheryl Brutvan, Curator of Contemporary Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Lilian Tone, Assistant Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art, New York; and Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson, Director and Chief Curator, Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, Colorado.

The Great Rivers Biennial program is funded by the Gateway Foundation.

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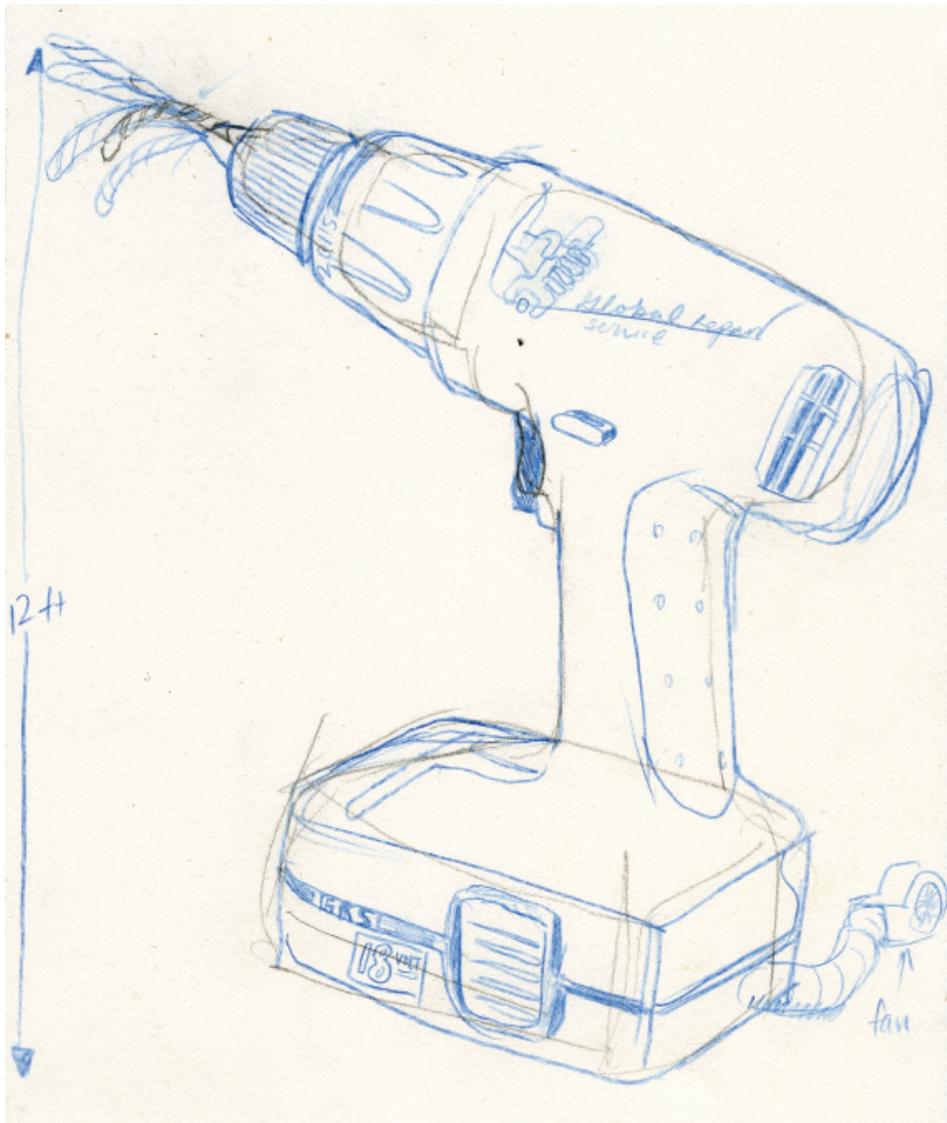
cover image: Global Repair Service Fleet: Tool Truck, 2007, watercolor on paper, 15x 13 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Bruno David Gallery.



Great Rivers Biennial 2008
Corey Escoto: GIT It Together

February 1 - April 20, 2008

CONTEMPORARYARTMUSEUMSTLOUIS



Drill Sketch, 2007, blue pencil on paper, 8 x 6 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Corey Escoto: GIT It Together

Corey Escoto's work explores the inevitable conflict between idealism and futility that results from endeavoring to better a troubled society. For the Great Rivers Biennial 2008, Escoto has created new works on paper and a sculptural installation, drawing from the style and utopian ideals of United Nations memorabilia, the Do-It-Yourself movement, and self-help culture. From a Lilliputian "inspired individual," to a series of watercolors depicting a fleet of Global Repair Service vehicles, his work offers a complex critique of world-reform organizations through the lens of economics, religion, and global politics. Here Escoto and Assistant Curator Laura Fried discuss the Global Repair Service aesthetic, Claes Oldenburg, and the role that drawing continues to play in his work.

Laura Fried: The Global Repair Service (GRS), your invented world-reform organization, has been "in operation" for a while now, to the extent that you have been able to brand it fully into your current show, GIT it Together. Here you continue to develop the GRS identity with logos, slogans, even a characteristic color palette, which is clearly informed by the United Nations memorabilia you collect. Could you elaborate on the GRS movement, and your interest in the phenomenon of the global governing body?

Corey Escoto: My interest has developed from observing the growing unrest in regards to a confluence of problems or buzzwords such as global warming, war, terrorism, security, and experiencing anti-American attitudes first-hand in trips abroad. While shopping for self-help tapes (another topic of interest) at thrift stores, I encountered a United Nations cookbook that embodied a sort of optimism and interest in cultural understanding that was contrary to the pervasive negativity that makes up 90 percent of "news." The cookbook began my collection of vintage UN memorabilia and led to my imagining of The Global Repair Service. My conceptual goal for the work was to develop a sort of (a)political art approach which emphasized the importance of people/the individual, and offered an honest and often humorous appraisal their/his/her hopes, capabilities and flaws.

LF: Right Tool for the Job—you had spoken of this new work, this monumental inflatable, and an interest in Claes Oldenburg. Indeed, here you have the measure of two classic Oldenburg terms: the iconography of every day life and the vocabulary of monument. In recent studio visits I pressed you about your interest in promotion and advertising—campaigning for The Global Repair Service—which I see very much linked to this elephantine power-tool. But it seems that it is the grand-scale gesture itself that interests you here...

CE: Not so much the grand scale specifically, but more a general nod to Claus Oldenburg's Lipstick (Ascending) sculpture (1969-74) at Yale, which was placed near the WWI Alumni War Memorial and adopted as a landmark of student dissent for both anti-war movements and women's rights movements. Some say history repeats itself.

LF: Could you speak a bit about the other "tools" in this show? On the one hand, you have this giant drill, a monument to The Global Repair Service. On the other, you present two more functional extensions of the GRS. The first is a hand-made coin funnel that you discovered is promoted as "the most profitable fundraising device of all time," and the second is a vintage GRS detector. How do these objects function in The Global Repair Service scheme?

CE: Given the hardware store, Tonka Truck feel of the show, there is a sort of Mr. Fix-It quality—with one hell of a problem. The intention is to give the overall feel of a well-intentioned organization, whether the job is construction or repair involving a drill or mine detection using the metal detector. In the case of the metal detector, I was thinking that it was more like a finely-tuned instrument that seeks the quiet whisper of one's conscience. The coin funnel speaks specifically to my ambivalent feelings toward the booming practice and business of buying and selling carbon offsets, which I refer to in my project as Global Misuse Offsets. My funnel operates on an honor system of self-recognized guilt, betting on the strong likelihood that more than a handful of us will forget to turn off the TV or worse. To take the words of Friar Johann Tetzl, "As soon as a coin from the coffer sings, a soul from purgatory springs."

LF: This year you have turned your attention to a more sculptural, object-based practice, when your focus until recently has been tied largely to the drawn image. And yet, we have had several conversations about your work that still very much tied to, and rooted in, the practice and process of drawing. I wonder if you could reflect a bit on this new work in these terms, and perhaps elaborate on your process in relationship to drawing. I certainly see your GRS Fleet drawings, for instance, as autonomous works.

CE: Drawing is central to my process. It is a way for me to work through the construction of a project—be it 2-D or 3-D—so that the content and form work in support of each other. As I progress in my work it seems that I move more toward the realm and practice of design, where I envision a project by drawing it or even just seeing in my mind's eye and then executing it. There normally is not a lot of deviation from the envisioned idea and the outcome, which in all honesty can be dull sometimes, so that is why I love working in my sketchbook. I do all kinds of stuff from listing, noting random thoughts, stream-of-consciousness drawing, project proposals for things I'd like to do but may never get the chance, and of course more finished drawings. In contrast to painting, which is burdened by the history of painting and often carries a goal of trying to fool the eye through a process of layering and covering up previous marks, I find drawing interesting because of its honest simplicity, where every mark is apparent along with the paper on which the marks sit. The display cases, which hold the small drawings, are a better way to view small work—orienting the viewing plane at an angle more suitable for rigorous examination. It adds an element of seriousness to the work which otherwise may be dismissed as "just silly drawings."

LF: GIT stands for "Gross International Togetherness," a slogan that appears in your works on paper and one that works to raise questions of cooperation and progress that you continue to pose in your work. Following that, the tension between disenchantment or skepticism on the one hand, and genuine idealism on the other, is evident throughout the Global Repair Service project. Do you see your work, especially as it aligns itself with the grassroots culture of the Do-It-Yourself movement, situating itself in a particular camp: that of the cynic or the dreamer?

CE: I am often asked to pick a side and I do my best to sidestep the question or at least answer the question in a way that reflects how I really feel, which is not so black-and-white. I am pretty rational and I will often take contrarian viewpoint for the sake of thinking things through from different angles. It seems, however, that in the field of contemporary art, especially in political work, artists tend to express their feelings primarily through negativity, completely ignoring the good in the world. For me it is easier to be a "cynic" while surrounded by the calm and security of my suburban hometown. I am definitely much more optimistic than pessimistic, so long as I have a problem or project to work through... I see myself as an observer and participant of a rapidly changing global culture. I think there are many shifts that are quietly happening all around, from social entrepreneurialism to digital activism. I am hopeful that systems of all kinds are reorganizing themselves with respect to a growing self-awareness and increasingly audible world conscience rather than operating strictly toward profit, growth, or security to the exclusion of all else. I am interested in basic human qualities such as tolerance, understanding, fairness and a pursuit of subjective life satisfaction.



Pencil, 2008, Flashe and pencil on paper, 2 x 16 inches. Courtesy of the artist.