Trash Mirror

Daniel Rozin

Trash Mirror is made of 500 pieces of trash collected between February and June 2002 on the streets of New York and in my pockets. These pieces were flattened and connected to motors, and with the help of a computer they are orchestrated to reflect whomever stands in front of the piece.

Like many of my other works this piece attempts to combine more than one level of information. From afar the image of the reflected person can be vividly observed and the contents of the trash cannot. Up close, the trash becomes visible and interesting while the image is too coarse to be comprehended.

This piece is quite similar in some aspects to my previous piece *Wooden Mirror,* 1999, and though this piece was built later (2002) it was conceived first. I decided to build *Wooden Mirror* first as a proof of concept as I was not confident that the extreme concept of *Trash Mirror* would technically work.

As the trash pieces have irregular shapes, the surface is very different from the orderly X by Y grid that is used for digital displays and the trash pieces do not come through as "pixels." Instead the piece celebrates the ability of computation to make sense and orchestrate even the messiest of substances. Because the trash that comprises the surface of this piece has many shades and colors and varies in shape and size, the computer needs to be extra smart to decide how to move each piece in order to create the best reflection of the viewer. In order to do so the computer has to have a very intimate knowledge of every piece of trash; in fact, the first stage of programming the *Trash Mirror* involved having the computer teach itself the exact placement of each piece by pointing a video camera at the piece itself rather than the viewer.