

Gahlberg Gallery
Jeff Carter CATALOG

Thursday, Oct. 16 to Saturday, Nov. 22, 2008

The Gahlberg Gallery/McAninch Arts Center would like to thank the artist, Jeff Carter, and the writer, Marc LeBlanc, for their generous contributions and creativity in developing this publication.

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Barbara Wiesen
Director and Curator

Except where noted, all works courtesy of Kavi Gupta Gallery, Chicago..

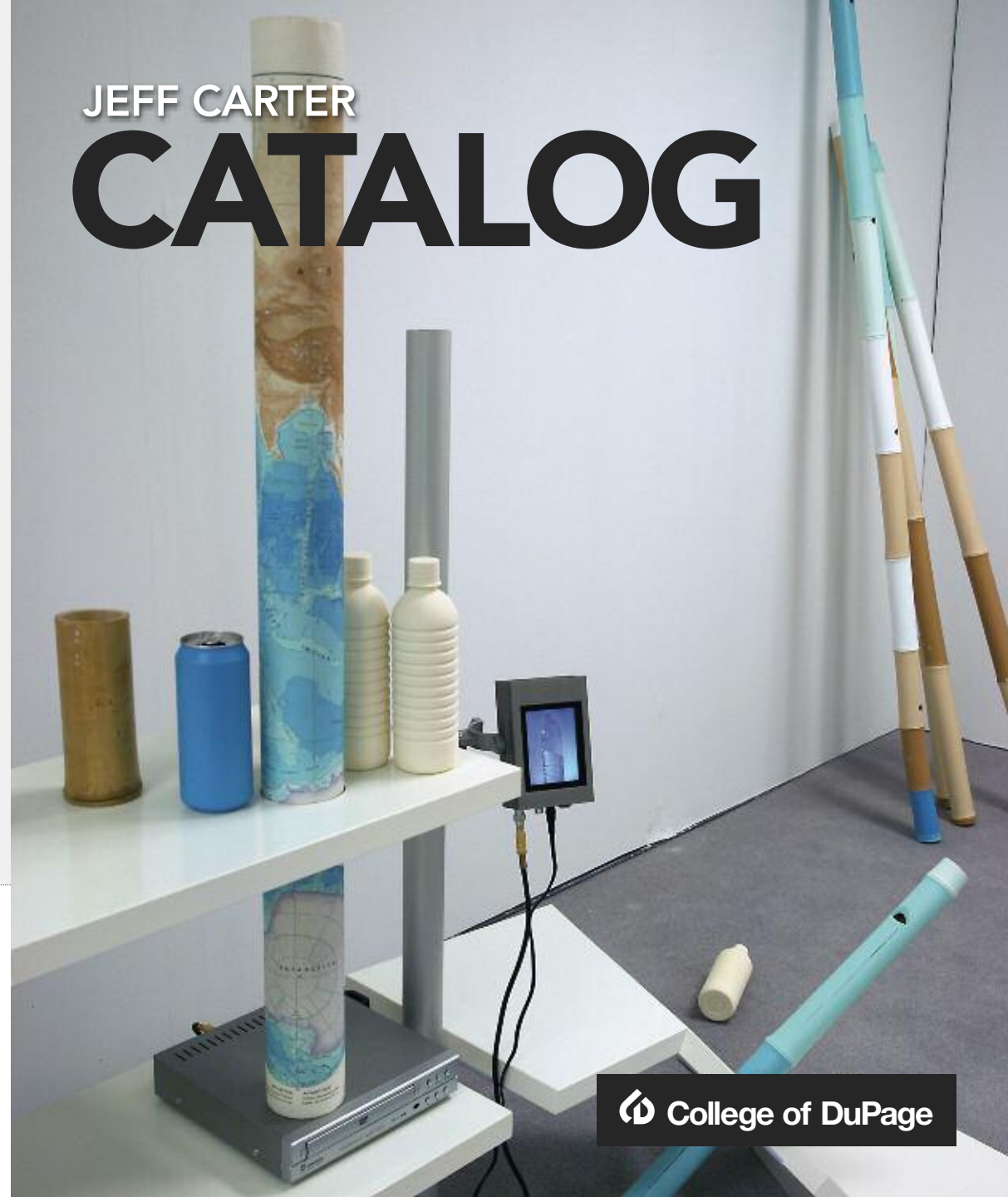


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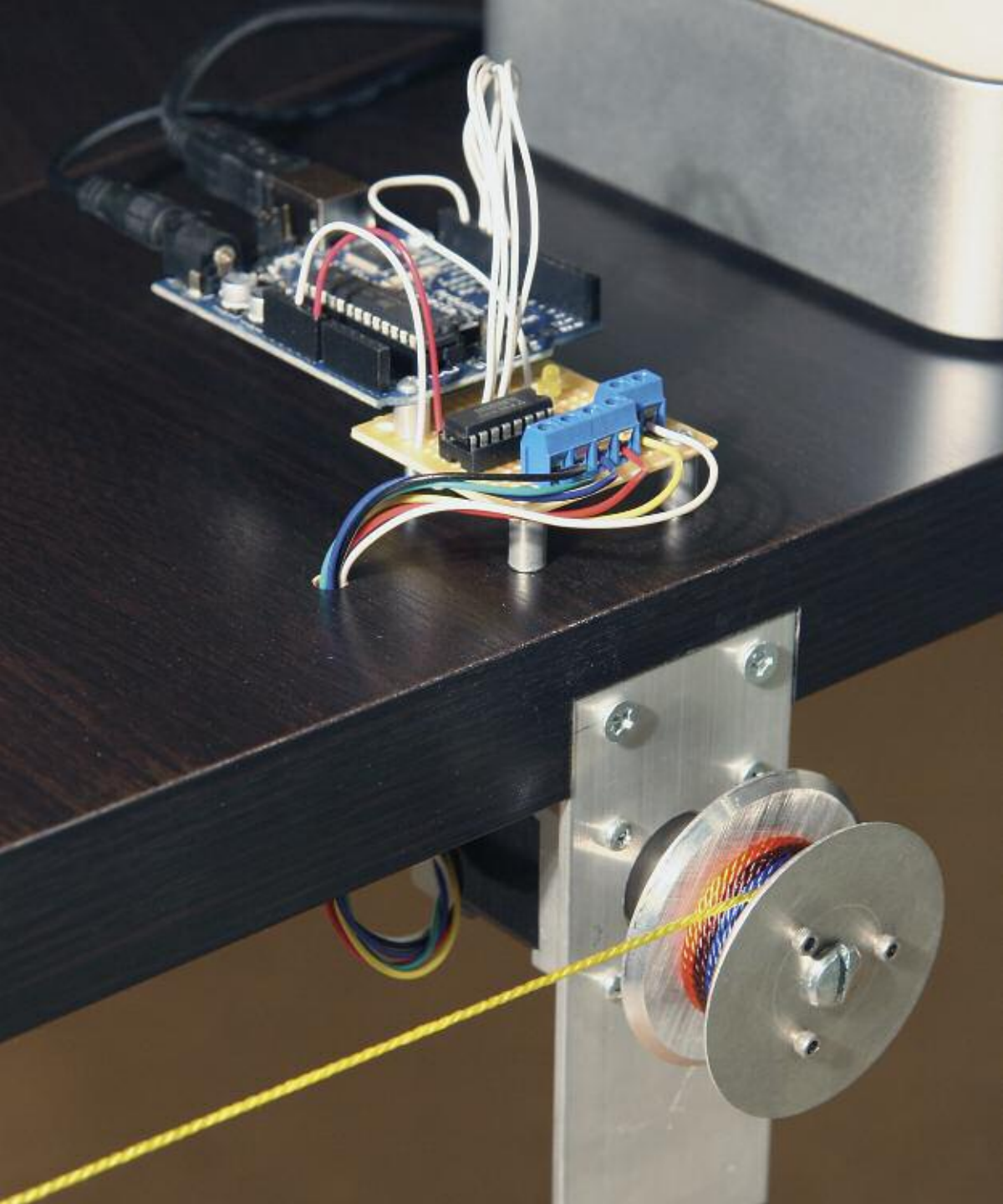
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Gahlberg Gallery
College of DuPage
425 Fawell Blvd.
Glen Ellyn, IL 60137-6599
(630) 942-2321
www.cod.edu/gallery

JEFF CARTER CATALOG



 College of DuPage



Jeff Carter and IKEA: Movement as Material

Heading north on Interstate 5 from Los Angeles, it is nearly impossible to miss IKEA's Western American Distribution Facility. The blue and yellow gilded building imposes itself on the tawny chaparral landscape. Plopped down amidst acres of agriculture, its squat and boxy scale is unexpectedly monolithic. However, despite the building's size, it is simply a basic node in IKEA's global distribution network. A number of facilities like it dot the globe, and parked around each are fleets of IKEA semi-trailers, waiting to take everything from flooring to tea kettles to sheepskins hundreds of miles to consumer stores. The Western American Distribution Facility along Interstate 5 is just one stopping point, a weigh station, in IKEA's transnational economy of objects.

In IKEA's extensive array of products, there is one crucial item that has made it possible for the retailer to wrap the world and stake out such a commanding position. Like the many department store

juggernauts that are IKEA's predecessors, it is the catalog, the tried and true cornerstone of marketing that has made IKEA so incredibly successful. Since 1951 the catalog has been IKEA's primary way of representing itself to consumers and of eventually making IKEA's vision into everyone's reality. Whether one is discussing fine art or consumer goods, the catalog serves an invaluable purpose. It is the portable representative of a specific series of objects; the catalog groups items by kind, form, genre, and function. The catalog contains images and is itself an image of the series as a whole — the translated embodiment of the included objects' physical movement through the world.

Built primarily from the affordable design retailer's furniture, Jeff Carter's new sculptures — all appropriately entitled *Catalog* — use IKEA not only for its modern forms, but also for its conceptual content. Like Apple, Target, or any other corporation that has harnessed the political power of

Catalog (White Shelf), 2007 (detail), modified IKEA shelving units (aluminum, MDF, enamel, paper, hardware), bamboo, latex paint, urethane plastic, map, beer can, LCD monitor, DVD player, video loop

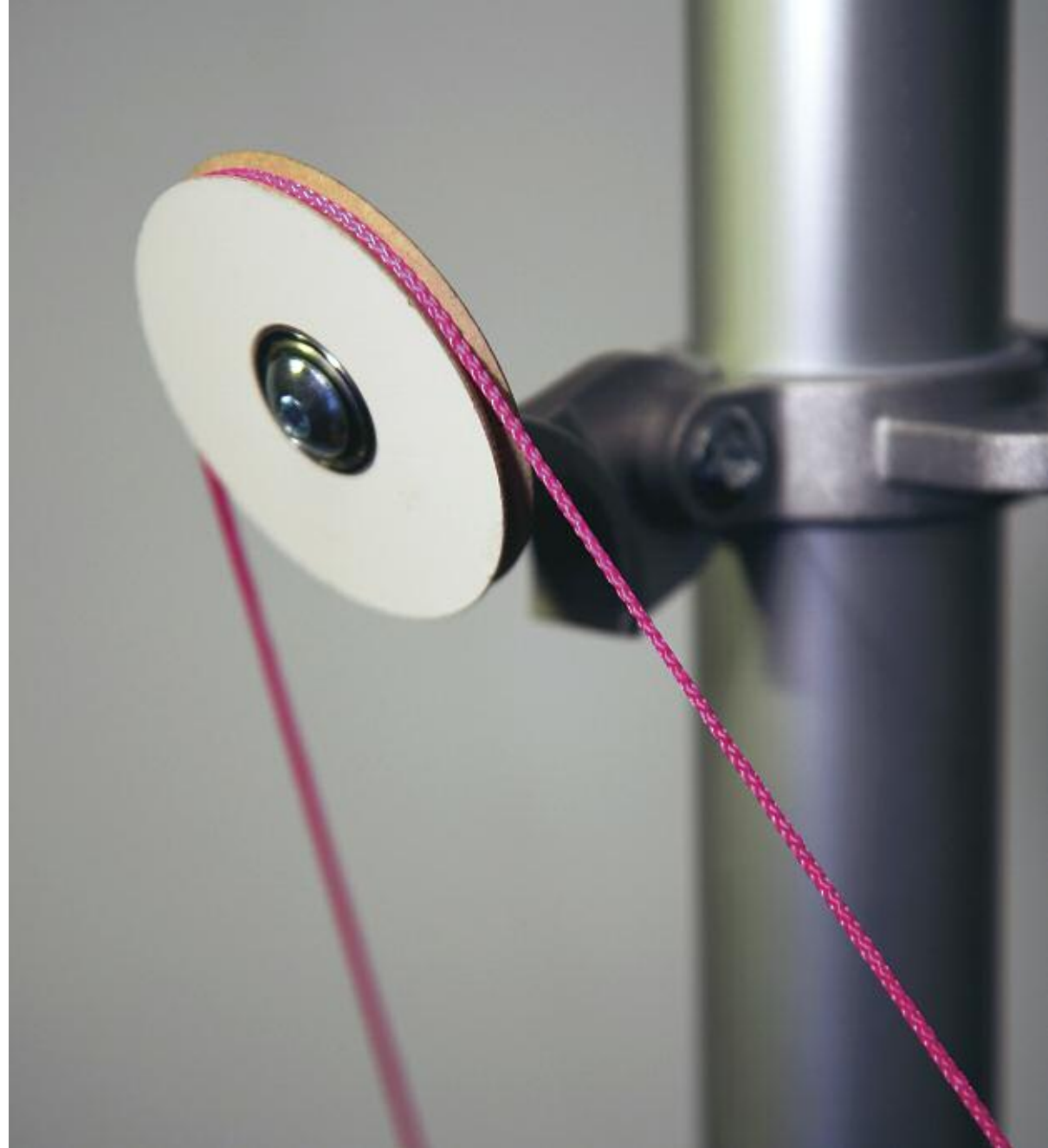
simple utilitarian design, the aesthetic of IKEA has been absorbed into the everyday. Carter's use of the brand's signature items is a clever extension of his ongoing study of how tourism and movement relate to the construction of place. Where past works employed items from Carter's experiences in China, Sri Lanka and Indonesia, and focused on the experience of cultural difference, the *Catalog* series is the inverse; it examines the experience of repetition and the production of the same.

The LACK shelf is undoubtedly one of IKEA's best-known items. As a near-perfect rectilinear solid, the shelf is mounted in offices and homes around the world. Along with companion items like the LACK coffee table, it is one of IKEA's basic units of measure — the stereotype of IKEA's aesthetic vision of the world. Skillfully cutting and reassembling the product's thin laminate shell and honey-comb cardboard interior, Carter animates each sculpture with custom-built kinetics.

Kinetic movement has often played a central role in Carter's practice. In the past, Carter's kinetics spoke to the movement, travel, and subsequent memory of the artist as tourist. In this newest body of

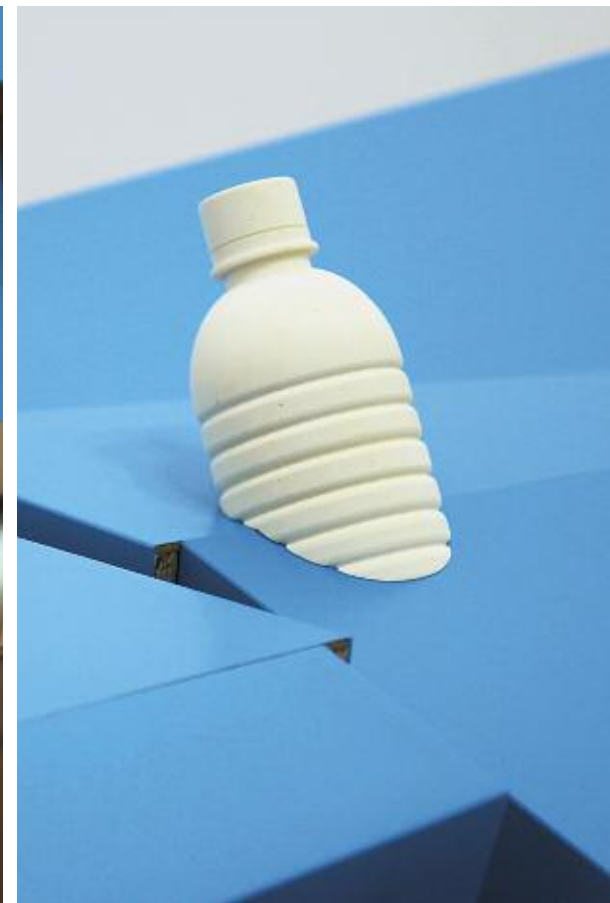
works, Carter's personal experience is nearly absent and the movement of the object is the primary focus. The sculptures oscillate and undulate; they have an organic motion, a gentle ebb and flow. While the movement immediately signifies IKEA's global economy of objects, it is not expressed as a mechanical, artificial system of operations, but as fluid and natural movement. Each work conjoins and then conflates the movement of cultural objects with the movement of nature.

In *Catalog (Green Shelf), 2007*, a series of green LACK shelves descend toward the floor. The fifth and lowest shelf is fallen, cut at a precise angle; it meets flush with the floor. Extending from it and connecting to the remaining chunks of shelf spattering the floor are two long stalks of bamboo. They smoothly move back and forth to suggest not just the staged collapse of the shelf, but the global travel of the LACK shelf itself, the tourism of the object. With *Catalog (Blue Tables), 2007*, Carter reassembles a blue LACK coffee table so that its surface becomes liquid. Not unlike Carter's previous works, *A Vague Sensation of Paradise, 2002* and *Cultivation of Distance, 1998*, the table mimics a small patch of ocean and the blue laminate





Catalog (Blue Tables), 2007, modified IKEA tables (MDF, enamel, paper, hardware), Finnish plywood, urethane plastic, electric motors, hardware, Courtesy of The West Collection.



becomes its tide. Partially emerging from the shallow water is the white replica of a plastic water bottle. The clear plastic water bottle is a recurring item in Carter's *Catalog* sculptures. Complimenting IKEA's vision of an affordable and modular world, the water bottle is the premier disposable object.

It has come to represent the consumption and recycling of plastic, as if each individual bottle is involved in the continual process of becoming another bottle. Carter's plastic bottle is a negative object separated from its typical use and presented to suggest any and every bottle. Like the LACK shelf, the



bottle is an object of continual movement. Carter's investigation of movement as a material comes to a pinnacle with *Catalog (Brown Desk)*, 2008. Using a computer program to repeatedly pull the barometric pressure in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, from the Internet, the sculpture performs an abstract conversion, showing the pressure as the rise and fall of a measuring tape purchased in the same city. What the work shows so clearly is not necessarily the data, but everything that is lost when a translation is attempted between two places, between "here" and "there."

It is economies of objects that truly shape the world. Familiarity or strangeness with objects constructs one's perception of time and place. The movement of objects provides the experience of being "here" and being "elsewhere;" it forms memory and manages recollection. With their objects filling every corner of the world, IKEA's aesthetic has a profound effect on the experience of place and location. IKEA represents a reconstruction of place; one can travel throughout the world and find the same objects — the LACK shelf or the disposable water bottle — providing individuals from different countries and cultures the same experience. In Carter's work, one finds a critical interpretation of how, from IKEA's Western American Distribution Facility or any other node in its massive economy of objects, our experience of the world is relentlessly reformatted to a new standard of efficiency, adaptability, and IKEA's motto of "affordable solutions for better living."

— Marc LeBlanc



Video still from *Catalog (White Shelf)*, 2007, modified IKEA shelving units (aluminum, MDF, enamel, paper, hardware), bamboo, latex paint, urethane plastic, map, beer can, LCD monitor, DVD player, video loop

Page 6: *Catalog (Green Shelf)*, 2007 (detail), modified IKEA shelving units (MDF, enamel, paper, hardware), bamboo, Finnish plywood, teak, urethane plastic, electric motors, hardware

Catalog (Green Shelf), 2007 (detail), modified IKEA shelving units (MDF, enamel, paper, hardware), bamboo, Finnish plywood, teak, urethane plastic, electric motors, hardware

Marc LeBlanc is a curator and writer. He has organized exhibitions in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago and regularly writes features and reviews for *Beautiful/Decay* magazine and *Artillery* magazine in Los Angeles.

Jeff Carter lives and works in Chicago. He is associate professor in the Department of Art, Media and Design at DePaul University. Jeff earned his B.F.A. at the University of Colorado, Boulder (1992) and his M.F.A. at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (1998), where he received a Trustee Scholarship.

Jeff has exhibited his work in Chicago at the MCA, the Renaissance Society and the Chicago Cultural Center. His work has been included in group exhibitions at Museum 52 (London), the Kunsthalle Hamburg (Germany), the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts (Taiwan) and the Hayward Gallery (London). His solo shows include Kavi Gupta Gallery (Chicago and Leipzig, Germany), and Spencer Brownstone Gallery (New York). Jeff has received several grants, including the 2001 Artadia Award. Reviews of his work have appeared in *FlashArt International*, *Tema Celeste*,

The Art Newspaper and the Chicago Tribune. His 2001 kinetic sculpture, *A Vague Sensation of Paradise*, has recently been added to the permanent collection of the Smart Museum of Art (Chicago).

Inside cover: *Catalog (Brown Desk), 2008 (detail), modified IKEA desk (MDF, plastic, steel, paper, hardware), aluminum, teak, wenge, zebrawood, jatoba, electric motor, custom electronics, custom software, MacMini, Internet connection, string, tape measure*

Cover: *Catalog (White Shelf), 2007 (detail), modified IKEA shelving units (aluminum, MDF, enamel, paper, hardware), bamboo, latex paint, urethane plastic, map, beer can, LCD monitor, DVD player, video loop*

