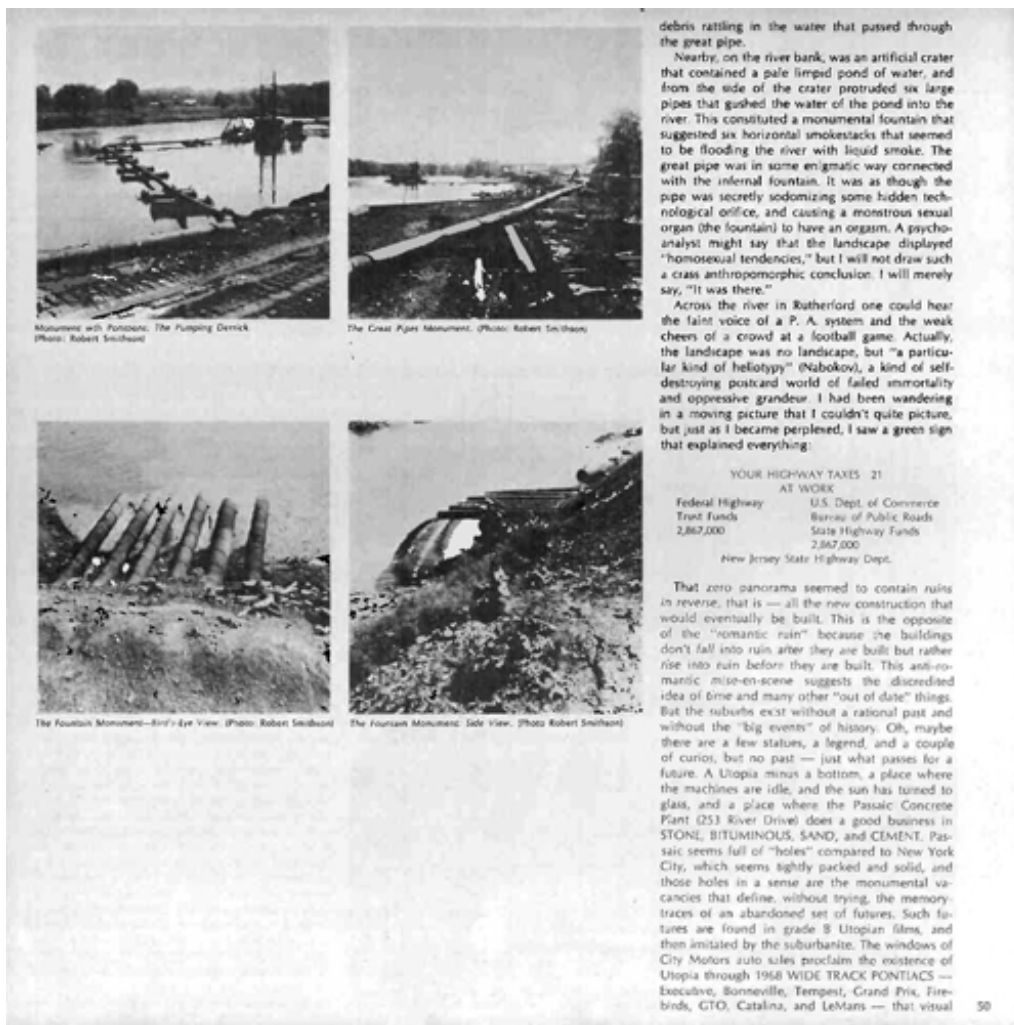






the series (that continues to this day), also titled Unmonumental, which includes photographs of cut-in-half doors, broken umbrellas, mangled and bowed sheets of aluminum, over-functioning pedestrian-crossing signs, a couch, numerous items stacked, rolled, and wrapped, tangles of rope, wads of paper, bricks, bottles, tape, and sidewalks stained by blotters of paint-in short, the city's detritus momentarily delayed en route to the landfill. Described by the artist as "re-locating found sculpture and sculptural objects through photography," the project originally positioned itself as a satire of the New Museum's exhibition. Designating found objects as sculptures that only exist as photographs has been and continues to be a popular approach. Several other artists (including Richard Wentworth, with his "Making Do and Getting By") are working on similar series. One project, by an artist posting on Flickr under the handle metamatic, even uses the same title (although Unmonumental is misattributed to being P.S.1's inaugural exhibition).

Garnett's satire, which began by mocking the style of artworks included in the New Museum show, ends up reaffirming, rather than negating, its target. Since the project began, the series has grown to include over two hundred photographs. The New Museum show is long gone, but Garnett's series pushes on; and since satire can only thrive while the kill is fresh, her Unmonumental has had to be born again. The transformation from satire to earnest endeavor played out on the public stage of a blog, and this made the process awkwardly performative. Instead of appearing as a contradiction, this shift of intent reveals a natural, if usually backstage, condition of art making: the fact that inspiration does not always come from a sweet-tongued muse, but instead sometimes springs from the Hilton Kramer within.



Robert Smithson, "Monuments of Passaic," *Artforum*, December 1967

Photographing the unmonumental, as it were, has a rich history. Two projects from the last century were even made for magazines. In 1933 Brassai published his photo-essay "Sculptures involontaires" in the Surrealist journal *Minotaure*. The photographs depict miscellaneous objects often shaped by worrying fingers: pillars of rolled ticket stubs, partially shredded tentacles reaching from wads of paper mashed in pockets, and the more indescribable stalagmite-like shapes of discharged globs of paste. Brassai enlarged each object within an otherwise featureless frame, giving the objects the stature of monuments. More recent, and bearing a closer resemblance to the contemporary rash of found-sculpture photo projects, is Robert Smithson's "The Monuments of Passaic," published in the December 1967 issue of *Artforum*. On a one-way bus ticket from New York to New Jersey, Smithson stopped in Passaic to photograph structures embedded in the landscape. He christened them with titles such as *The Bridge Monument*, *Monument with Pontoons*, *The Great Pipes Monument*, and *The Fountain Monument*. His Saturday perambulations resulted in the photos and a sort of travelogue, which, riffing on *The Sand-Box Monument*, concluded

with a brief meditation on entropy: A sandbox, consisting of equal and distinct halves of white and black sand, when stirred counter-clockwise into gray sand, cannot be returned to its original black-and-white state by simply stirring the sand in the opposite direction.



Metamatic, screen shot of Unmonumental photo set on Flickr

"The photographer," wrote Susan Sontag, "is an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitering, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes. Adept of the joys of watching, connoisseur of empathy, the flâneur finds the world ?picturesque.'" There's a certain pleasure in opening oneself to the fleeting tweaks of vision that transfigure otherwise banal mélanges into aesthetic reveries. Each found sculpture marks the point of multiple convergences, where the trajectories of the city's detritus cross the photographer's path. It's the moment just before the objects recede into the grayness of entropy. In an attempt to record such a heightened aesthetic state, Garnett's photographs grasp at these moments, but they do not preserve them. The ongoing series continues as an open stream of images, with each new arrival trumping the last, and they end as collections that outline a particular exercise of seeing, one that

transforms the everyday into the sublime-if only ironically and beneath a patina of satire.