

Phossils

For *Phossils*—or “fossilized phone”—Stern subjects media devices to intense conditions that “weather” and turn these materials into...something *else*. Through research, experimentation, and craft, Stern tries to transform phones into crude oil, coal, or other fossil fuels; into synthetic archives; and into simulated relics for a future time. He cooks, freezes, burns, smashes, and blends, and puts the results on display as futuristic archeological finds. Through these pieces, Stern reminds us that information always has a form and a cost. The digital domains we so often imagine as immaterial have both a physical presence and an afterlife that we are responsible for.



Server Farms

Server Farms are computers and other technological equipment repurposed as planters. These sculptures and photographs take cues from journalist Alan Weisman's provocative book *The World Without Us* (2007), which also inspired the title of this exhibition. In his book, Weisman explores how quickly non-human life might re-take the planet if humans were to suddenly disappear, and he finds that the answer is simply, not very long. Inspired by implications such as Weisman's, Stern creates his *Server Farms* by rooting trees in laptops, breeding fungi in tablets, implanting cameras with shrubbery, and effectively animating concepts of how nature may overcome remnants of civilization. These cybernatural works suggest alternatives to our modes of life and living and challenge us to reconsider the current scale of human production and waste.

The Wall After Us

What if electronic waste itself were to replicate and multiply? What could that look and feel like? The playfully titled *The Wall After Us* is a site-conditioned installation that attempts to bridge the unfathomable concept of an end to civilization with an individual understanding of our responsibility to the Earth. Totalling over 300 square feet, *The Wall* includes laptops, keyboards, tapes, drives, phones, circuits, and other degraded electronic waste. These objects, intermingled with cables and plants, cling to the wall, resulting in an overwhelming and effective sense of what we use and throw out, what it might grow into, and how the Earth may (or may not) claim it. Beyond *The Wall*, towers of e-waste between 8 and 12 feet tall disrupt our space, implicating us in the impact our technological waste has on humans and nature, as well as the politics surrounding waste, media, and utility.



Utilities

Utilities see electronic waste re-thought as raw materials and transformed into different (somewhat) usable forms. In *Phoney Prints*, for example, mobile phones are ground into a fine powder and mixed with extender to turn them into ink for fine art prints (of phones, obviously), on paper made from Stern's old t-shirts. *Applecaitons* are composed of melted aluminum iMacs from the late 2000s cast into a hammer, screwdriver, and wrench. And *Circuitous Tools* are computationally carved circuit boards turned into a saw, axe, and trowel. These pieces ask viewers to be curious and imagine how we may test, play with, and transform discarded electronics. We should not only ask what digital media will be and do after us; we must reinvent what digital waste *can* be and do in the present.



Documentary: *The World After Us*

This 8-minute documentary by Nathaniel Stern's studio assistant and filmmaker, Nate Romenesko, explores some of the artist and his team's intentions, processes, and findings over the last several years, from conception through production, to documentation and installation.

Rather watch it on your own device? Find the full video here:



The project doesn't end in the gallery!

Circuit Boardwalk

Be sure to head to the south entrance of the Engineering Building to see Stern's site-conditioned project, *Circuit Boardwalk*, which was made specifically for this exhibition. It provides an opportunity to consider a way in which our waste can be recycled into composite concrete tiles for artistic and/or practical purposes. The installation oscillates between the realms of utility and aesthetics, encouraging the viewer to consider the use-value of our garbage while operating as aesthetic objects.

Interested in seeing how these issues are impacting our local community? Check out these resources for more information:

