

N.C. Museum of Art Presents Photography Exhibition Exploring American Consumer Culture
Three-part series by Brian Ulrich portrays consequences of overconsumption

Raleigh, N.C.—Beginning September 29, 2013, the North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA) presents *Brian Ulrich: Copia—Retail, Thrift, and Dark Stores, 2001–2011*, contemporary photographer Brian Ulrich’s decade-long investigation of American consumer culture. Organized by the Cleveland Museum of Art, *Copia* (Latin for *plenty*) features nearly 50 photographs from a series Ulrich started in 2001, after September 11, in response to a national call by politicians for citizens to bolster the economy by shopping.



The exhibition is divided into three parts—*Retail* (2001–2006), *Thrift* (2005–2008), and *Dark Stores* (2008–2011)— and traces a route from the exuberant excess of big-box stores to the bleak suburban landscapes of closed malls and empty shopping centers.

Documenting the decade from 2001 to 2011 that began with a consumer boom and conspicuous consumption and ended with the impact of the global financial collapse of 2008, Ulrich’s compelling images of the American consumer landscape were primarily shot in the Midwest, in cities including Granger, Indiana; Kenosha, Wisconsin; Cleveland, Ohio; and Skokie, Illinois, along with Chicago, Miami, New York City, and Las Vegas. There is also one image taken in Raleigh of the Rialto Theater.

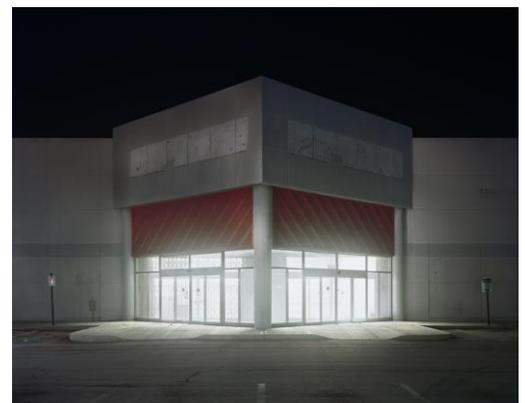
“Ulrich’s photographs deal directly with issues of contemporary consumer culture and its reflections on issues of class and excess,” explains Linda Dougherty, chief curator of contemporary art at the NCMA. “His work invites us to contemplate the broader ecology of consumer culture and the interconnectedness of consumers—what they buy and what they choose to leave behind.”

Retail portrays shoppers captured in a consumption trance after being bombarded by an overabundance of choices and an avalanche of advertising. “A suburban anthropologist, Ulrich prowls malls and big-box stores with a medium-format camera and a waist-level viewfinder that lets him discreetly capture images of consumers in their natural element,” says Dougherty.

Kenosha, WI, pictured above, portrays the glut of choices consumers are faced with—mountains of stacked soda cartons, endless rows of milk jugs—evidence of a society that has more than it needs exemplified by a large puddle of spilled milk left in the middle of the floor. Other photographs in the series hint at the overabundance of both products and choices by showing grocery shoppers staring overwhelmed at cases crammed with food, or children nearly disappearing behind piles of toys for sale.

In **Thrift**, Ulrich focuses on thrift stores, revealing them as collecting places for discarded and unwanted consumer products. The untitled images portray shoppers and employees standing amid heaps of used clothes, shoes, books, and obsolete computers.

Ulrich explores the impact of the 2008 financial crisis in the series **Dark Stores**, wherein he captures haunting architectural landscapes of abandoned buildings and empty parking lots that have become commonplace in towns across America.



Often shot at night, such as *Pep Boys 3*, pictured above right, the cavernous spaces glow with an eerie neon light. Other photographs present desolate images of shopping malls in ruins, filled with debris. There is uneasy irony in the image of an empty furniture store, *Klingsman's Furniture*, whose gilded show window still reads "Over 100 Years."

The three series presented in one exhibition provide a startling study of consumer culture throughout the first decade of the 21st century, bringing the viewer face to face with the resulting consequences of contemporary consumption.

As Ulrich explains, "The *Copia* project explores not only the everyday activities of shopping, but the economic, cultural, social, and political implications of commercialism and the roles we play in self-destruction, overconsumption, and as targets of marketing and advertising. By scrutinizing these rituals and their environments, I hope that viewers will evaluate the increasing complexities of the modern world and their role within it."

Brian Ulrich: Copia—Retail, Thrift, and Dark Stores, 2001–2011

September 29, 2013–January 5, 2014

East Building, Gallery 2

Free, No ticket required

Related Programs and Events

Gallery Talks by photographers Brian Ulrich and Carrie Levy

Friday, September 27, 7 pm

Meet in Entrance Lobby, East Building

Free

Photographers Brian Ulrich and Carrie Levy each give brief (20-minute) gallery talks in their respective exhibitions at the NCMA: *Brian Ulrich: Copia—Retail, Thrift, and Dark Stores, 2001-2011* (on view September 29, 2013–January 5, 2014) and *Reveal: Portraits by Carrie Levy* (on view through January 26, 2014).

Contemporaries Exhibition Tour: Brian Ulrich's Copia

Friday, October 4, 6:30 pm (tour starts at 7:30 pm)

Meet in West Building

Free; Register at www.contemporaries.org

Contemporaries members and other Triangle-area young professionals are invited to a happy hour and docent-led tour of the Brian Ulrich exhibition. Meet at the wine bar (wine, beer, and small plates available for purchase) at 6:30 pm in West Building.

Exhibition Catalogue

A full-color hardcover catalogue, *Is This Place Great or What*, published by Aperture, accompanies the exhibition.

Hours

Tuesday–Thursday 10 am–5 pm

Friday 10 am–9 pm

Saturday–Sunday 10 am–5 pm

Closed Monday

About the Exhibitions

Brian Ulrich Copia—Retail, Thrift, and Dark Stores, 2001–2011 was organized by the Cleveland Museum of Art. This exhibition is made possible by the Fred and Laura Ruth Bidwell Foundation. In Raleigh this exhibition is made possible, in part, by the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources; the North Carolina Museum of Art Foundation, Inc.; and the William R. Kenan Jr. Endowment for Educational Exhibitions.

Photo captions, from top:

Brian Ulrich, *Kenosha, WI*, 2003, printed 2011, ultrachrome inkjet print, 30 x 40 in., Courtesy of the artist, © 2003 Brian Ulrich

Brian Ulrich, *Pep Boys 3*, 2009, printed 2011, ultrachrome inkjet print, 20 x 24 in., Collection of Fred and Laura Ruth Bidwell, © 2009 Brian Ulrich

###

About the North Carolina Museum of Art

The North Carolina Museum of Art's permanent collection spans more than 5,000 years, from ancient Egypt to the present, making the institution one of the premier art museums in the South. The Museum's collection provides educational, aesthetic,

intellectual, and cultural experiences for the citizens of North Carolina and beyond. The 164-acre Museum Park showcases the connection between art and nature through site-specific works of environmental art. The Museum offers changing national touring exhibitions, classes, lectures, family activities, films, and concerts.

The Museum opened West Building in 2010, home to the permanent collection. The North Carolina Museum of Art, Lawrence J. Wheeler, director, is located at 2110 Blue Ridge Road in Raleigh. It is the art museum of the State of North Carolina, Pat McCrory, governor, and an agency of the Department of Cultural Resources, Susan Kluttz, secretary.