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Trash to Treasure in Robert Larson's "American Bloom" at Joshua Liner Gallery

From across the room, Robert Larson's mosaic-like works are delicate and luminous—it's only when you step closer to an individual piece that you realize it's been crafted out of discarded cigarette packages. The California-based artist, self-defined as a scavenger, collector, wanderer, and urban alchemist, has been turning trash into treasure, so to speak, for more than two decades.

His inaugural exhibition with Joshua Liner Gallery is aptly entitled "American Bloom." "American" is a reference to the American Spirit cigarette brand, whose signature yellow, green, and fire-orange tones are easily recognizable in Larson's work, and "Bloom" suggests Larson's predilection for flowers—and his impulse to salvage overlooked objects and turn them into something beautiful, just as a seed becomes a flower.

And beautiful they are: the vibrant *Gold Traverse* (2014) is a mosaic of shiny gold cigarette packaging, arranged in vertical zig-zag patterns. *Blue Green Honeycomb* (2014), also made of cigarette packaging artfully arranged on linen, is an almost wallpaper-like pattern of flowers in lush tones of emerald green and royal blue. Given the material Larson is working with, the subject of the whimsical *Camel Vision* (2014) was ripe for the picking.

But the works featured in "American Bloom" are more than pleasing to the eye—they carry a message about the nature of beauty, and the unexpected places we find it. As Larson himself says, "In this show, I'm working with forgotten materials collected from the streets, sidewalks, empty lots and back alleys of America. All of my work takes an object's original physical form, along with its inherent and topical meaning, and turns it into something entirely new."

In working with so-called trash, Larson is exploring the story behind it—and raising questions about human consumption. Starting in the gutter and ending up on the gallery wall, Larson's work is refreshing and visually appealing, mildly provocative and culturally engaging.

—Bridget Gleeson

"American Bloom" is on view at Joshua Liner Gallery, New York, Jan. 15–Feb. 14, 2015.



Jan 2015. Web. Jan 2015. < <https://www.artsy.net/post/editorial-trash-to-treasure-in-robert-larsons-american> <https://www.artsy.net/post/editorial-trash-to-treasure-in-robert-larsons-american> >