

## SHRED IT and DON'T ASK ANY QUESTIONS

By ADELE WEDER

*Staff writer*

People who think contemporary art is garbage would not necessarily get an argument from Toronto artist Allan MacKay. A few months ago, MacKay approached Proshred Security, an industrial shredding company, with an unusual request. He asked them to shred an example of his work: a 600 foot-long series of portraits. MacKay filled three burlap bags with shredded remains, placed them against a wall of Toronto's Grünwald Gallery and mounted a reduced reproduction of the original on 23 panels above the bags. He called it Destruction/Transformation.

"The original piece needed a radical transformation," says MacKay, "and shredding seemed to be the way to go." Portraits of the two Proshred employees who carried out the transformation are featured in the new piece, for which the 45-year-old artist is asking \$ 10,000. So far there are no takers.

Most of the people who come to Proshred have more prosaic requests, but demand for the service is rising fast. As concern grows in the business world about privacy and confidentiality, more companies are shredding their trash before putting it out for the garbage truck. In the past three years, six shredding companies have opened in Toronto alone. Proshred, which charges \$185 an hour, shreds 20 tons of paper a day - a tenfold increase from two years ago. Competitor Greg Brophy, president of Shred-It Canada Corp., says his sales will double to \$1 million this year. "This type of garbage," he declares proudly, "is getting a lot of respect. "

Concern about the privacy of trash began rising after several garbage-pilfering incidents. In 1983, a reporter plucked the Ontario budget from a printing plant's garbage bags. In the years following, dozens of organizations, from the Bank of Montreal to the Children's Aid Society, blushed when personal information on individuals was discovered, jutting out of green plastic bags or drifting down city streets.

Shredders have been quick to exploit the new concern. Proshred's promotional video shows a flurry of papers blowing out of a torn garbage bag, while the narrator intones: 'If the media get their hands on this, they'll have a field day. "

Some shredding companies drive their specially equipped trucks straight to their clients so that they can watch the trash being destroyed. But clients tend to get bored after watching once or twice. Most - including Confederation Life Insurance Co., Touche Ross & Co., Spar Aerospace Ltd., Northern Telecom Canada Ltd. and many others - simply want an assurance that their sensitive trash will be chewed up beyond recognition. "We wouldn't want to see it flying down Bay Street," explains records manager Myrna Rogers of Confederation Life. "We'd get hit with a lawsuit very

quickly. " Adds Norm Luker, Northern's director of security: "There's too many cases of computer printouts flying around, or even someone doing a number on your garbage dumpster. "

Some companies now treat their trash with an almost paranoid nervousness. At one Toronto law firm, the shredder gobbles up every morsel of garbage every morning - including Big Mac containers, Perrier bottles, soda cans and leftover pizza. "It gets kind of stinky in here when that happens," sighs Proshred driver Martin Reinhold.

Shredders are often called into service when image-conscious companies try to hide their mistakes. Shred-It Canada spent six days grinding up 50,000 brand-new binders that had inadvertently been printed with an old company logo. Explains Jerome Boyer, Proshred's vice-president of marketing: "People hate to be reminded of their screw-ups."

Vancouver's Golden West Document Shredding Inc., which has a local bank as one of its clients, was once surprised to find a pair of men's underwear among the papers sent for shredding. It turned out that the bank had called in a customer loan, and the irate borrower expressed his disgruntlement by drawing out a makeshift cheque on the front of his briefs. The unorthodox cheque was shredded accordingly.

Proshred has mashed up boxes of condoms, pregnancy-testing devices and even whole computers. The merchandise may have been defective or expired, but the shredders never ask questions. Proshred stuck to that policy in its most intriguing case: one afternoon last fall, a man called and arranged to meet the shredding truck in a Toronto side street that evening. At the meeting site, two men wearing guns in holsters emerged from their car and proffered several boxes of pornographic videotapes to the shredders. After paying cash for the job, the mysterious clients vanished into the night. "As far as I'm concerned," says Proshred president Scott Smith, "the less we know about what's being shredded, the better." Rogers of Confederation Life. "We'd get hit with a lawsuit very quickly. " Adds Norm Luker, Northern's director of security: "There's too many cases of computer printouts flying around, or even someone doing a number on your garbage dumpster. "

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