

"The Litter Sweater"

-Susannah J. Felts, Chicago Reader, August 26, 2005

It takes Jonathan Gitelson less than a minute to blanket his car with the sort of square glossy flyers that are to cars parked near nightclubs what bird shit is to those beneath certain trees. Last summer, shortly after he moved across the street from the Funky Buddha Lounge, Gitelson began finding his Honda Civic bombed by as many as ten flyers daily, often the same ads over and over. (Green Dolphin Street and a strip club on 144th Street are repeat offenders, he says.) The nearby sidewalks were littered with hundreds more that had been removed from other cars or abandoned in stacks by derelict distributors. "I had the idea that I wanted to do something with them, but I wasn't sure exactly what," says Gitelson, who is, among other things, a photographer. "Over time I got the idea of making it look like my car was buried under a mountain of them."

He began collecting them and by January had enough to begin fastening them to a canvas car cover he'd bought at an auto parts store. After botched attempts with a staple gun and "a bunch of crappy techniques," he hit on the idea of threading the cards through the middle, as if sewing on a button, which allows them to overlap and bend to the shape of the Civic.

This spring Gitelson began photographing the car and cover parked in front of some of the businesses responsible for the ads--Excalibur, Tini Martini, Ontourage--and posting the photos on his Web site, thegit.net. After shooting outside the 144th Street strip club he was pulled over by a cop who had watched the shoot. He wanted to know what was up, and had radioed his buddies to come take a look. Gitelson says his shoot at the Congress Theater caused a bit of a traffic jam on Milwaukee. He's often enlisted passersby to help him get the cover on and off the car (it only takes ten seconds, he says), and lots of people have used cell-phone cameras to take their own pictures, which Gitelson doesn't mind. When he photographed the car in front of the Funky Buddha, several neighbors told him how much they hated the flyers. There, he says, "everyone really quickly picked up on what it was, quicker than anywhere else."

He hasn't gotten too much flack from club management. Green Dolphin Street is the only place that's given him the boot. "They weren't sure what I was doing there," he says. "They were like, 'What is this thing parked in front of our place?' I was trying to explain it while I was photographing it. Once I felt like I'd gotten enough photos I was like, 'Y'know what, I'll just leave.'" That film got ruined at the lab, but Gitelson plans to try again someday soon.

The project's made him much more aware of where all the clubs are in town, he says, but he's never patronized any of them and doesn't have any plans to. I ask

him if he's ever bought anything or gone anywhere because of a flyer left on his car. "I would have to say no," he says.