



Margaret Suchland, *Postmark N.9*, collage

RE-VISIONS:

Art Made from Reclaimed Materials

Tohono Chul Park Exhibit Hall
May 21-August 23, 2009

They say one person's trash is another one's treasure. Nowhere is this truer than in *Re-Visions*, the Park's fourth foray into the sometimes-wacky, sometimes-poetic, and always surprising

world of art made from "reclaimed" materials. An apt title for the exhibit, "re-vision" refers to the process artists go through to create this type of work because, in the act of creating art work from discarded items, they truly are "re-seeing" the objects in entirely new contexts from their original functions.

Re-Visions: Art from Reclaimed Materials features the imaginative expressions of 31 local artists who are inspired to produce art from our culture's disposable objects. They have created beautiful and captivating works made from such unassuming items as discarded books and newspapers, an old fire extinguisher, bicycle gears and rims, computer cords and cables, plastic grocery bags, canceled postage stamps, produce stickers, neckties, out-of-date sweaters, aluminum soda cans, scrap steel, bottle caps, and a variety of stuff that many people would consider as junk! In the process of transforming castaways into works of art, the artists demonstrate that things contain visual significance and symbolic value even if they are decrepit, defective, or taken out of their original context. By reclaiming discards for their art works, they *revise* the functions of the objects and provide us with a new way of *envisioning* them.

It seems like eons now since some early Hippie stitched that first patch on his pants, and sallied forth into the light of a new day sun. Hence was born the golden age of recycling as we know it. It has only been a snippet in time since I reached to the ground to retrieve some cast off remnant of contemporary society seeing infinite possibilities for rebirth. **Royce Davenport**

There is an aspect about collecting and arranging materials that is like meditation. The process of gathering material, creating sheets of paper and the design process are just as important to me as the completed piece.

Marie Long

These days, we frequently hear the phrase REPAIR-REUSE-RECYCLE and many of us have learned the value in repairing items before buying new, reusing things whenever we can, and have become avid recyclers. The *Re-Visions* artists share this mindset, **reusing** all kinds of thrown-away objects as their art media. Technically, they are not recycling the objects, as in melting them down to make a new product but, symbolically, they are **reclaiming** used items for their art, transforming them from their original form and function into fresh, new ideas.

Why use reclaimed materials to make art? While economics and social politics may be factors, ultimately most artists reuse salvaged materials for expressive reasons. They LIKE the patina of old rusted steel and weathered wood, the intriguing shapes of car parts and industrial materials, the rich colors and patterns of broken glass, and old rusted metals. They are excited by the visual and storytelling possibilities of using these elements in works of art, and by the challenge of figuring out what they can make from intriguing objects they collect.

Expressing their individual visions, assemblage artists **David Adix, Kyle Johnston, Marie Long, Dave Newman, Selina Littler and Imo Baird** work in a similar manner as poets, but instead of using words,

they build their thought-provoking compositions from a myriad of scavenged objects. **Julie Sasse's** works explore how we associate symbols, colors, and marks to represent memories, the passing of time, and cultural perceptions—and how these images can arouse feelings and associations in each of us. Artists **Sara Spanjers**, **Wall Batterton**, **Royce Davenport** and “produce sticker artist,” **Joan Davidson**, have fun combining objects into humorous pieces that inspire chuckles.

Rand Carlson, meanwhile, creates “tin mosaics” from colorful, scavenged tins and the lettering from car insignia, exploiting the words and images from the tins into visual puns. **Mark Ramsour's** pins in our exhibit are constructed from cleverly edited text from aluminum cans, combined with his metalwork artistry.

Transforming textiles is the creative work of **Karen Lukacs**, who remakes clothing into new garments and handbags, and **Jenni Pagano**, who creates jewelry from bits of felted sweaters and recycled beads. **Vicki Schwager** clearly relishes juxtaposing a variety of found textiles such as potholders, along with sewing implements and vintage jewelry findings to make her old-fashioned-style bags. The source of rug hooker **Janet Soares' material** is thrift store clothing that she over-dyes and cuts into strips; one would not suspect the humble origins of the wool contained in her richly colored upholstered chair and cube.

These materials are already charged with significance, with a meaning they acquire in the context and practice of everyday life. I take these objects and assemble them into a figurative form. A metamorphosis is reached, a poetical transition takes place, this reveals the internal workings of a figure, based on the human form—a “native figure” with a new meaning and a new memory of its own.
David Adix

LIKE MOST ARTISTS MY STUDIO IS FILLED WITH ALL KINDS OF UNUSUAL THINGS. MINE JUST HAPPENS TO HAVE MORE OF WHAT OTHERS MIGHT CALL JUNK. MY FINISHED WORKS ARE NOT MADE OF PRECIOUS MATERIALS YET I STILL FEEL A BIT LIKE ONE OF THE ANCIENT ALCHEMISTS WHOSE QUEST IT WAS TO TURN LEAD INTO GOLD. **ELIZABETH FRANK**

Most artists, however, do not obscure the original identities of the reclaimed items they use in their work, rather they exploit their physical and visual qualities to make a completely new and different statement. Ironically (excuse the pun), **Beata Wehr** created her serene artist books in our exhibit from crude pieces of salvaged steel. And in a surprising twist, **Don Baker** uses discarded metal in a surprising and new way by disassembling the components of old metal objects and allowing them to rust their imprints onto the surface of white-painted canvas, inspiring a new appreciation for the objects' forms. **Ira Weisenfeld** sincerely loves the challenge of welding scraps and metal objects into oversized rocking chairs and sculptures, two of his imaginative chairs are visible through the windows looking into the Exhibit House patio.

Kenneth Armstrong is a born collaborator who is energized by working with other artists; for *Re-Visions* he created frames of welded bicycle parts and cranks to border **Titus Castanza's** oil paintings. **Troy Neiman** also used bicycle components for the monumental saguaro and companion century plant visible outside the window in the Exhibit Hall.

Landscape architect **Greg Corman** is inspired to reuse salvaged wood and steel for his Zen-like garden sculptures that actually are native bee habitats. **Gavin Troy** picks up evocative pieces of wood while riding his bike around town and reassembles them into lyrical story-like constructions. **Elizabeth Frank** also collects fallen wood which she carves, then combines with a dizzying

As subjects, newspapers and books are ideal source material because they already tell stories. The regeneration of the printed word into another form—turning a book or newspaper into a sculpture—is a way of breathing new life into it. That's what my art is essentially about: renewal.
Nick Georgiou

array of found tin and visually interesting objects to create figures that have their own distinct personalities.

Nick Georgiou, fresh off an exciting solo show at the University of Arizona, shares with us his fascinating work made from discarded newspapers and books. **Barbara Brandel** has found a delightful use for cancelled postage stamps and snippets of maps in a series of Stamp Collages. **Susan Fehlow** embellishes her Precious Piñatas, beautiful art objects which go far beyond the typical party game

object, with salvaged paper. Also working with paper is **Margaret Suchland**, whose collages bring together stunning composition and evocative ephemera. **Jennifer Eschedor's** beady paper-mâché Gila Monster contains paper, and, it seems, bits and pieces of everything but the kitchen sink!

Collage seems to be a medium of this modern world. It mimics the elements of thought, emotions, and even a diverse society. A collection of similar and dissimilar pieces quilted together to form a new larger whole, a composite reality. **Rand Carlson**

This approach to art-making is not new. Although it is popular today, art works made from found and reclaimed materials have been a part of the art scene since at least the early 20th century in the art of the Cubists, Surrealists and Dadaists. Found objects were used by Joseph Cornell in his box compositions and by Louise Nevelson in her mesmerizing sculptures, while John Chamberlain created huge sculptures from crumpled car bodies. Another art genre, folk

recycling has taken place in the creative expressions of people all over the world, such as houses and grottoes built from glass bottles, ubiquitous "muffler men" standing on the curbs of almost every U.S. town, or the resourceful mid-twentieth century practice of stitching flour sacks into dishtowels, quilts, and clothing. These expressions are refreshing antidotes to the mass production of bland, soon-obsolete objects and the depletion of the earth's resources.

The artists of *Re-Visions* share this spirit of reclaiming found objects to create new visions in their art work. I hope you enjoy the fruits of their ingenuity and imagination on display in our summer-long exhibit!

Peggy Hazard
Assistant Exhibit Curator