

Reduce, Reuse, Re-imagine: Anything can be Art

by John Wong

As I stepped from the heat of the afternoon sun into the coolness of the de Saisset Museum, located on the campus of Santa Clara University, my gaze was instantly drawn to the current exhibition situated to the left of the entrance foyer. The brochure in my hand intriguingly described the artists in this *Reduce, Reuse, Re-Imagine* exhibition, as “engaging a Zero Waste philosophy” to use trash and “re-imagine them in a new context to create original, enticing, and thought-provoking works of art.”

In the past, old worn-out items would be discarded and chucked away into landfills where they would remain buried for eternity. However, nine professional artists, many of whom have participated in Recology San Francisco’s Artist in Residence Program, and twelve of our own SCU students have stepped forward to remind us that everyday trash such as cardboard, Styrofoam, old clothes and even plastic bags have the capacity to be reused and transformed into ingenious art.

For me, the standout exhibit was Ryan Carrington’s *Class Pride Pursuit*, a rendition of the American flag, made from carpenter's pants, suits, collared shirts, and neckties. From a distance, the exhibit looked like an old, faded worn out flag but when I stepped closer, I noticed the background behind the stars to be an ordinary light blue collared shirt that had been folded into a rectangle, with the stars themselves cut out from various neckties and sewn onto the shirt. The stripes on this facsimile of the star-spangled banner were created using a combination of ordinary carpenter’s pants for the white stripes and suit jackets and pants for the dark stripes, alluding to Carrington’s focus on workers, both blue and white collared, collaborating to build the United States. The stitch-work on the flag further reinforced the mosaic nature of America and the diverse background of its people.

Carrington, perhaps inspired by Jasper Johns’ *Flag* (1954), a painting of the American flag on strips of collaged newspaper, chose an instantly recognizable image and added his own design elements to reflect his theme of the working class. Although his rendition of the American flag was primarily flat and hung on the wall like a painting, on closer inspection it revealed sculptural details of the everyday pieces of clothing – buttons, rivets, buckles and pockets – that comprised the piece. Because it was made from recycled clothing once worn

by real people, Carrington's version of *Flag* struck me as both deeply personal and universal all at once.

The collection of art pieces contributed by our University students did not disappoint either. Although they were less polished, I was nevertheless filled with a sense of awe to see the creativity of young minds bringing discarded trash back to life. Tiffany Lu with her sculpture entitled *Cardboard Duck* showed us that even the most basic material could be transformed into a pleasing product for the human eye. Using pizza boxes, Lu carefully cut and arranged flat pieces of cardboard to form a three-dimensional duck. Crystal Au went one step further than her fellow student to create *Sewn Teacups*, an ingenious sewing together of used tea bags to form a set of cups and saucers.

This was my first visit to the de Saisset since I joined the SCU community as a freshman last term. The exhibition *Reduce, Reuse, Re-Imagine* certainly lived up to its name and reinforced the idea that anything can be transformed into art, even everyday items considered trash by the common folk. This group of talented students and more established artists has created a series of thought-provoking works of art and provided us with a wonderful way to spend an hour or two to contemplate our lives, as well as our relationship with art and the environment.

The de Saisset is a gem within our SCU campus that is waiting in next to be discovered. Hurry over to enjoy this wonderful exhibit that runs through February 2, 2014. You will be enthralled.