

## Our Capability, Our Impact

by Spencer Fairgrieve

Can garbage be art? That is the question that we must all ask ourselves as we walk into the *Reduce, Reuse, Re-Imagine* exhibit in the de Saisset Museum, located on our lovely Santa Clara campus. The idea of taking old, forgotten objects and remaking them into beautiful pieces of art is not anything new; artists have been doing it for many generations. However, what makes this particular exhibition so different, so innovative, is that the artists only chose items and materials that had been discarded as trash, instead of recyclables, from their local communities. The participants used things that the public had deemed disposable and undesirable to create something striking and meaningful. In this way, the exhibit inspires us to question our own beliefs about what makes something valuable and what part we can play in preserving the earth.

Open from through February 2<sup>nd</sup>, *Reduce, Reuse, Re-Imagine* contains two segments. In the first spacious room that viewers step into, there is the sophisticated work of nine professional artists from around the Bay Area. Nestled on the right side of this auditorium is a small, cluttered room comprised of the art of current Santa Clara students. This was the part of the exhibition that drew my attention. Could twelve college kids really have enough maturity and wisdom to see the value of sustainable action? After all, the stereotype indicates that we are self-centered, uncaring, reckless individuals. But this concept was completely driven from my mind, as I stood surrounded by the beauty of what my peers had created. The behavioral attributes associated with “Generation Me” were disputed on every wall.

Sara Ryan’s “CD Fish” reminds us of the new life that can come from recycling and protecting the environment. Composed entirely of old CDs and Styrofoam, this piece depicts a large fish, stationary and simple. It is silver and shiny, with only the reflective backside of the CDs showing. However, if you take a step closer and simply move your head from side to side, it is not just silver. Suddenly, the fish is alive and gliding through the water. Its scales are a rainbow of color as red, green, yellow, and blue ripple swiftly down the body, calling to mind the movement of the tail as the fish navigates its natural habitat. The vitality of this creation is in stark contrast to what we normally think of as trash and items to be recycled: dirty, dead, and unwanted. The fish represents life, energy, and the magnificence of nature: the very things that we must work to preserve. Not only does the artist demonstrate her understanding of these important concepts, but she also challenges her audience. Standing close to the piece of art, unmoving, we are able to see our own reflection in

the scales of the fish. Ryan, our fellow SCU student, is asking us, what can *you* do about this pressing global issue?

The work of art titled “Invasion,” created by Cathy Suzuki, is an immediately eye-catching piece that demands your attention from the moment you walk into the small room housing students’ art. Reminiscent of a baby’s mobile, the work hangs from the ceiling by a piece of fishing line, with multiple strands branching off of it. At the end of each one these, there is attached either a small octopus constructed out of parts of colored plastic bottles or a cutout of chicken wire. The constant subtle movement of the mobile makes it seem as though it is in the ocean, being moved by the gentle pull of the current. The chicken wire is a menacing component of the art piece, towering over the glistening, whimsical sea creatures. The name “Invasion” could be a reference to how we, as human beings, have invaded the ocean and filled it with our pollution and garbage, destroying the ecosystems that had once thrived there. There is a satirical aspect to the piece as well, which comes from the fact that the delicate octopi were constructed out of the very thing that is threatening their home: plastic. This irony emphasizes the part that we have played in the devastation of our planet and its wildlife. But in this piece, we are able to appreciate the splendor of the sea in spite of our harmful influence. Additionally, Suzuki’s use of an ordinary, everyday object such as a plastic water bottle demonstrates the power of simplicity. We do not have to make any grand gestures in order to have a positive impact on our surroundings; it is the small, daily actions that make the real difference.

In recent years, environmentally conscious practices have become more and more common as we slowly realize that our poor treatment of the earth does not come without immense consequences. *Reduce, Reuse, Re-Imagine* exemplifies the potential value of items previously considered unworthy of our attention. It also shows us the necessity of our own participation in the movement to make the planet greener through the materials used and the bold statements they make about our own hand in the destruction of the environment. The artwork of our fellow SCU students is exquisitely made and the depth of creativity is something to be pondered. The exhibition demonstrates our capability as young adults to have a beneficial influence on the world we live in. Go and be inspired.