



Plastic Detritus Washing Up on Beaches is Redistributed as Art Material

By Adrian Emery, Earthscope Reporter

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Ordered bands of flamboyant colors float in a clear glass jar. Upon closer inspection, it becomes apparent that these bands are composed of the tattered remains of deflated balloons, their garish colors composing a kind of water-bound synthetic rainbow. However, these balloon fragments — once mere clutter on the shore of Kehoe Beach — are now being reused as art.

"In every square mile of the oceans on this planet there are 46,000 pieces of floating plastic," said artist Richard Lang, a resident of San Geronimo Valley.

This very same debris is beginning to appear in Lang's art. The plastic appears in various forms, stuck together in a long wall hanging, shaped into the silhouette of a dog, or set afloat in glass jars filled with water. These examples are part of an ongoing series of Lang's that incorporates plastic and other objects found on the beach as a means of artistic collage.

"What we do is clean up the beach, and in the meantime there are free art supplies," he said.

"Found art" has existed for a long time. For Lang, it serves as a means to inspire and encourage people to waste less, not to mention providing a nearly endless resource of art supplies. Some people, though, view reusable litter as a necessity.

"Teachers need these materials. I have art teachers saying, 'I need to buy art materials with my own money,'" said Jamie Yosha, education director for the Marin Conservation Corps' For Earth's Sake program.

The program distributes a wide range of discarded materials to schools around the county, keeping them out of the landfill.

"We collect the material from businesses, bring them to our depot, and then we take them out into the field, distributing them to teachers and also taking them into classrooms and doing projects with kids," said Yosha.

The second-hand materials come from quite a number of places and range from binders to pine cones, outdated calendars to lawn ornaments. Most of the objects are not damaged and are suitable for classroom use.

Yosha and his resourceful team of educators find a use for everything; old calendars become origami boxes, pinecones transform into bird feeders, cash register drawers can be used to play "store."

“We will always have waste, as a people,” said Yosha. “If we find some creative way to use that waste, that is the best.”

Don Ross and Sharon Siskin of SF Recycling and Disposal Inc.’s artist-in-residence program share this sentiment. For three months, Ross and Siskin have worked in their dump-side studios to create art out of trash. On July 23, they will open their studios to display their work in an attempt to raise awareness about the importance of recycling.

“In order to get to the studio, you have to look at the garbage,” Said Paul Fresina, director of the artist-in-residence program.

He hopes that when people see the enormous pit of trash, they will have a better sense of how much rubbish is produced in San Francisco and become inspired to help by reducing the amount of garbage they throw out. Fresina said the program itself is directly reducing a significant amount of trash in the landfill but transforming it into something far more pleasing to the senses. “The payoff is long term,” he said.

On a recent afternoon, Ross tinkered with an old Victrola record player, while Siskin strung together record jackets to make a quilt-like design. Ross said he hopes to play the records during the art opening. If not, he said he plans to play the grand piano, also excavated from the landfill and given new life.

The exhibit takes place 5 to 9 p.m., Friday, July 23, at 501 Tunnel Avenue in San Francisco. Call 330-1414 for more information about the show or visit: www.sunsetscavenger.com/artist_in_residence.htm