

AFTERLIFE

Main Gallery and Cardinale Project Room
November 7, 2009-January 23, 2010

Artists transform collected and recycled materials.
Guest curated by Kathryn Funk

Claudia Borgna
Mark Fox-Morgan
Elisabeth Higgins O'Connor
Lisa Kokin
Charlotte Kruk
Robert Larson
Scott Oliver
Beverly Rayner
Ann Weber

Opening reception: Friday, November 6, 6pm-8pm

Conversation with the Artists: Thursday, November 12, 7pm-9pm

Afterlife is supported in part by a generous grant
from Applied Materials.

Night Moves: Afterdark program in ICA's front window

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Video Work by Claudia Borgna

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Afterlife

Evidence of our consumer society is everywhere. Our thoroughfares are strewn with litter. Bits and pieces of detritus dance in the wind across our highways only to accumulate on the medians and shoulders in unsightly heaps. Even second-hand stores ooze with the abundance of cast-off objects.. The newest design, fashion, fad, gadget is cleverly marketed and pumped into our psyches, thereby quickly becoming the mantra for the next must-have item. Our economy and its growth has been fueled by, dependent upon and addicted to this consumptive behavior for decades. When we can find no other alternative the excess spills into landfills that grow into mountains.

Even before the green revolution took hold, artists have been reusing and re-purposing found materials. The affordable ubiquitous nature of discards can be appealing, but there are more significant reasons for the use of throw-aways in the hands of the artists in *Afterlife*. The discards and trash that constitute the main materials that are used here come laden with other pre-existing associations.

I was struck by a recent comment of an artist friend who stated that trash was merely another medium of expression, "just like paint." This comparison, however, may be too simplistic. Paint from a tube is just that - paint. It comes with no other association, no history of another nature. It is what it is. In contrast, an object, any object, that has been discharged from its original purpose carries an association with its past. When that association is altered or re-purposed it begins to speak a different language.

The artists included in *Afterlife* take advantage of these cast-offs from our contemporary life. With a conscious eye to the materiality of the chosen discards, they are creating works from materials that transcend the former life of that which otherwise would most likely have ended up in a landfill. They

are transforming items from the street, junkyard, second-hand and surplus stores into fresh, inspiring creations that give rise to thoughtful consideration and interpretation. One only needs to look at Mark Fox-Morgan's junk-mail house structure to see an evidenced dichotomy. Made from paper, a durable and ever abundant commodity, the structure is both fragile in reality, yet sturdy in appearance, giving rise to numerous questions about our own safe shelters. Another transformation takes place at the hands of Elisabeth Higgins O'Connor. Her "no name" creatures begin as ordinary cloth objects like blankets, pillows and tarps and then morph into other worldly creatures, some whimsical and others foreboding.

Each of the artists selected for *Afterlife* uses cast-off materials from unique perspectives and for different reasons. In the metamorphosis at the hands of each artist, from original material or object, comes an awakening to new associations - a new life, even if after an older one.

The choice of recycled materials each artist uses is relevant to the extent that the materiality of each discarded item in some way informs the direction they pursue. As a consumer society we will likely continue to generate a plethora of waste in the production of myriad items for consumption, some necessary to everyday life, others merely for a fleeting moment of gratification. And as consumers of art, we can be thankful for the provocative results that so much of this trash inspires.

Kathryn Funk
Guest Curator

Artist Bios

Claudia Borgna

Plastic bags are ubiquitous in the world today. Due to the growing awareness of their pervasive and intrusive nature in our landscape, they may shortly become a thing of the past. Cities are assigning taxes on the use of plastic bags in an effort to curb and eventually ban these unsightly environmental intruders. Claudia Borgna, however, has been collecting these bags for her art for several years. In the true nature of a recycler, she carefully gathers them after each installation or performance, packs them up and sends them along to her next destination where they again see the light of day in a new configuration. To Borgna the plastic bag is the cardinal symbol of our consumptive society. She plays with the remarkably contradictory qualities of plastic bags - worthless and useful, disposable and recyclable, flimsy and strong, ephemeral and eternal – but above all, universal. Borgna states, “By putting the plastic bag in an artistic context I would like to elevate it to another dimension that takes it away from the idea of the banal and obvious and for an instant transforms it into a poetic object. In other words it becomes an inspiring muse. A mass-produced muse with forms, lines and color, that can’t help but interact with the surrounding environment.”

Claudia Borgna was born in Hamburg, Germany and grew up in Italy. After graduating from Genoa University with a degree in foreign literature, she moved to London where she has lived for the past 15 years. Her work has been exhibited in London, the UK, Berlin, Europe, Mexico and the US. She is the recipient of both the Joan Mitchell and Pollock-Krasner grant and was awarded the Royal British Society of Sculptors Bursary Award. During her recent residency at the Djerassi Artist Residency Program in Woodside, California, Borgna created large-scale installations utilizing her plastic bags.

Mark Fox-Morgan

Upon entering graduate school, Mark Fox-Morgan moved from a spacious house in Sacramento to an 8 x 10 foot dorm room at San Jose State University. It was quite an unsettling adjustment that made the artist think seriously about the notion of “home.” In response to the anxiety about his new living quarters, as well as his deep concern about abuses to the environment, he created *Paper House*, using discarded paper to cast “beams” with the appearance of wood. The underlying structure of most houses is wood and despite the current housing crisis, houses continue to be built, while older homes are demolished. The waste is extraordinary. Fox-Morgan is fascinated with discarded materials, from office paper to remnants from a tear down, and has consistently used these materials in his sculpture. He is particularly interested in the remarkable dual nature of paper: both fragile and resilient and wanted to push the limits of the

material as a durable medium for his art. Paper House reflects that duality as well as the tenuous nature of "home." Fox-Morgan's beguiling skeletal structure appears to be quite sturdy despite its delicate nature. Is it being built up or torn down? Will it be salvaged or demolished? Is it easier to save or destroy?

Elisabeth Higgins O'Connor

Thrift-stores are among the sources Elisabeth Higgins O'Connor uses to gather her materials. As the artist stitches, binds and pins discarded blankets, bedspreads, cushions, clothing, stuffed animals, and any odd piece of fabric onto armatures, her "no name" characters emerge from their mundane source into creatures with distinct personalities. These figures have a familiarity that is uncannily intriguing and endearing, while at the same time foreboding. Art critic Jacki Apple fittingly described these works as "more than mere anthropomorphic stuffed-animal grotesquery," and went on to say, "While O'Connor's materials remind us of consumerist excess and capitalism's gluttonous waste, what she has constructed out of these materials also brings to mind the potential consequences that lurk just over the horizon. Whether these corrupted beings are the result of a poisoned habitat, destroyed ecosystem, or genetic experimentation and the perversion of biotechnology, they are of our own making, and they stand as warning." O'Connor's creations poignantly speak to the potential of a world gone awry.

O'Connor lives and works in Sacramento, California. She received a BFA from California State University, Long Beach and an MFA from the University of California, Davis. In 2005 she won the prestigious Joan Mitchell Foundation Award. Her work has been shown in numerous venues throughout California, including the David Salow Gallery, Los Angeles; the de Saisset Museum, Santa Clara University; the Richard L. Nelson Gallery, Davis, as well as the ICA's NextNew2007 exhibition.

Lisa Kokin

Lisa Kokin gathers her materials from flea markets and second-hand stores - that last-stop-before-the-landfill and never-ending conveyor of surplus discarded items. Carefully rummaging through the castoffs of others, she finds inspiration. Kokin reclaims these discarded items, particularly books, photographs and memorabilia from anonymous past owners. Books and the book format have long been a part of Kokin's repertoire - dissecting and reassembling books and lately pulping them. Often acknowledging their original intent, she works with the information at hand and reworks the content in manners that bring forth altered associations. She carefully manipulates texts that, transformed, express new ideas and speak to her personal politics and cultural views.

Kokin's artist's books, mixed media installations, assemblages and sculpture have been exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions in the US and abroad. Selected venues include Donna Seager Gallery, San Rafael; Jenkins Johnson Gallery, New York; and Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco. Kokin is a recipient of a California Arts Council Individual Artist's Fellowship and a Eureka Fellowship from the Fleishhacker Foundation. Her work was also included in *The Eureka Fellowship Awards: 1999 - 2001* at the San Jose Museum of Art and *Eureka Too* at the ICA in 2000.

Charlotte Kruk

Self-defined candy junky Charlotte Kruk confronts her cravings by meticulously unwrapping her favorite sweets and salvaging the wrappers. (She even teaches her friends how to properly unwrap the delectables so the paper remains intact for use in her art.) Using this would-be trash, Kruk carefully stitches the wrappers side by side to make new textiles, creating a new bit of eye candy in the form of wearable art. In her most recent work, Kruk addresses the issue of her own sweet-tooth with a bold gesture in the direction of the ramification of her cravings. By using the discarded toothpaste tubes and packaging and tooth brushes themselves, she creates a tooth fairy gown.

San Jose-based artist Charlotte Kruk received her BFA from San Jose State University. Her work has been exhibited extensively in the South Bay and Greater Bay Area including exhibitions at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, Works/San Jose, the ICA and currently an exhibition titled *Bejeweled* at the Olive Hyde Gallery in Fremont. Kruk teaches art at Lynbrook High School in San Jose, where she received the "Teacher of the Year" award in 2005.

Robert Larson

During his urban explorations Robert Larson gathers his materials - tossed cigarette packages and match books, weathered by the elements on the streets of our cities. The very fact that he can collect as many Marlboro packages as he does speaks volumes to the seriousness of cigarette addiction in our society. The familiar red, white and black Marlboro cigarette package is instantly recognizable. It has been branded in our brains thanks to the "success" of exhaustive marketing campaigns. Larson carefully dissects the packages into their respective elements. Taking individual segments, which he uses much as a painter would use paint to make a mark, he carefully constructs visually stunning assemblages. Instead of painting, he carefully selects each element and adheres it to stretched linen - each mark distinct from either previous or future - combining to form rich patterns of color, hue and texture. As we are seduced by the beauty of this restructured detritus, we consider the source and realize Larson's graphic observation of our culture's addiction to tobacco.

Robert Larson lives and works in Santa Cruz. His works have been exhibited in solo and group exhibitions throughout California. Exhibition venues include The Cannery, Santa Cruz; The Carl Cherry Center for the Arts, Carmel; Mission Art Engine, San Francisco; and Cabrillo College Gallery, Aptos. In 2006, he was awarded the Rydell Visual Arts Fellowship from the Community Foundation of Santa Cruz.

Scott Oliver

Scott Oliver explores the sculptural possibilities of common utilitarian objects. He carefully alters everyday objects, restructuring their materiality, thereby removing them from their functional and fashion-based consumer associations. For instance, *Loop* remains an identifiable table, fashionably popular from the 1960s. Never totally erasing the original object's identity, Oliver breathes new life into its altered state through careful craftsmanship and a sense of irony, successfully voiding its original functional state. Oliver also integrates social exchange into the art-making process. For the ICA opening, Oliver shared his collection of salvaged records from his San Francisco dump residency with a local DJ who played these Eighty-sixed thirty-threes for the exhibition opening.

Scott Oliver received his MFA from the California College of the Arts. His work has been exhibited at UCLA, Los Angeles; Pulliam Deffenbaugh Gallery, Portland, Oregon; and Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, New Jersey. He has also shown his work in local venues, including the Oakland Museum, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco Arts Commission, Southern Exposure, and the De Young Art Center. Oliver was artist-in-residence at SF Recycling & Disposal Inc. (a.k.a. the city dump) in the fall of 2007 and recently completed a Project Space Residency at the Headlands Center for the Arts

Beverly Rayner

Beverly Rayner's work addresses a number of issues revolving around her core interest in the foibles of human nature: in this case, the peculiarities of perception, obsession, and insecurity. Most recently, she has focused on our country's heightened obsession with security. Commonplace objects are transformed into devices that seek to penetrate our lives for the speculated benefit of our safety. Rayner pulls us into seeing just how clarity is compromised by the fuzzy lens of perception by manipulating such discarded items as turkey basters, baby nasal cleaners, battery testers, display signs, and electrical wire sleeving.

Beverly Rayner is a Santa Cruz-based artist. Her work has been exhibited extensively in West Coast venues including Cherry Center for the Arts, Carmel; Braunstein/Quay Gallery, San Francisco; G. Gibson Gallery, Seattle; and the San Jose Museum of Art. Her work is held in several public

and private collections including the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, the Oakland Museum of California, the San Jose Museum of Art and the Berkeley Art Museum. In 2006 she was awarded the Rydell Visual Arts Fellowship from the Community Foundation of Santa Cruz.

Ann Weber

After years of enduring the physically demanding process of sculpting large forms from heavy clay, Ann Weber discovered that simple, lightweight cardboard and staples offered unlimited possibilities as materials for creating the large-scale organic forms she envisioned. Employing cardboard as a medium was a breakthrough for Weber. Not only is she able to make very large work that is light and portable, but her medium is a commonplace, economically viable and environmentally friendly material that still allows Weber to retain a monumental quality in her sculptures. In addition to the irony of the base materials, Weber's sculptures, Topsy, Turvey, and Miss Priss, reflect the humor that is inherent in much of her work.

In addition to making cardboard constructed sculptures, Ann Weber is active in the public art arena and has won commissions for installations at the State Capitol building in Sacramento, a Public Library in Phoenix, Arizona and Skyline Park in Denver, Colorado. She has received a California Arts Council Fellowship Grant and was awarded a residency at the International Oberpfalzer Künstlerhaus in Schwandorf, Germany. Most recently, she had a solo exhibition at Donna Seager Gallery, San Rafael. Additionally, her work has been exhibited at venues including the ICA, the San Jose Museum of Art, the Triton Museum and the Boise Art Museum.

Hours

Tues - Fri 10 - 5
Sat 12 - 5

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