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Print

Visual Arts

Reclaiming waste

Artists wave discarded matter into fragile commentary

by Roberto Ontiveros



Photo by Bryan Rindfuss

A detail of Ivano Vitali's "Gomitolo il Sole 24 Ore" in Blue Star's Main Gallery.

In the main gallery of the Blue Star Contemporary Art Center, viewers are confronted by underwater-inspired wall pieces that assault the retina with a sense of ecological terror and the weight of environmental responsibility.

Crossovers: Materials and Metaphors is a joint effort curated by Meredith Dean, which brings together the distinct innovative energies of two master textural manipulators. Ivano Vitali, an Italian performer, paper artist and sculptor who hails from Florence, and Joan Hall, who lives and works in Missouri, have combined their considerable talents to turn Blue Star's Main Gallery into a celebration of impossible texture and arresting hue. It seriously looks like what the Batcave would look like if Batman were into earth tones and pastels, and his trophy room housed fabric samples from the looms of lost gods instead of the capes of vanquished foes.

Vitali's work, which extends to paper planets and oversized paper mittens, appears as durable as hemp rope statues, but he assures us through his translator that the pieces are as delicate as the folded and crimped newsprint they are painstakingly comprised of. He uses no glue or ink — a large ochre display took nearly two years to assemble, as the right shades of yellow paper had to be acquired.

Hall's work comes from an ocean of world consciousness as well as the ocean itself — her global technique involves the combination of paper products and materials such as nets and dissolving plastics gleaned from the sea. In the ultimate act of recycling, she creates wall-sized objects from materials that poison our world that change shape depending on where they are displayed. Both artists are terribly committed to environmental messages, Vitali going so far as to stress the lack of survival of his art. No preservation techniques go into his gorgeous weave.

Beyond the main floor, Blue Star exhibits shows that retool the concepts of gender, duty, and home.

Angelina Mata, a self-taught fashion designer and mother of



Photo by Bryan Rindfuss

"Tree of Useless Knowledge," one of Angelina Mata's *Creatures* in Blue Star Contemporary Art Center's Project Space.

three, brings a bit of the uncanny to the dinner table. Her installation *Creatures* employs mannequins, hairpieces, and fabrics in a manner that feels as if that doll-obsessed German surrealist Hans Bellmer had been allowed to design the initial sets for the Addams Family.

Marilyn Lanfear — whose *What is Lost/What is Found/What is Remembered* is fraught with utilitarian household objects that seem infused with the PBS warmth of *Antiques Roadshow* and the wit of Marcel Duchamp — considers herself a storyteller, according to her artist statement. A teller of ghost stories, I would say, or parables wherein the objects that punctuate a home, a memory, a lifetime have a density of their own, a half-life that hums with a kind of radiation. In fact, the objects of wood and metal seem to belong to one of those Los Alamos nuclear testing homes, scavenged and arranged in a way that tests our notions of place and memory.

Libby Rowe's section *Selections from Pink* is a powerful visual argument for a total reassessment of gender politics. Within the room of challenging full body images, and ironically charged tropes of femininity, there is a set of towels, recalling that His and Hers setup of bathroom diplomacy that we've come to accept as kitschy TV imagery. On the towels are a stitched list of complaints from the Hers section directed at the absent His section, phrases that accuse the man of eating fast food and hiding the wrappers, speaking to the power play of matrimonial roles. •

Crossovers: Materials and Metaphors

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Blue Star Contemporary Art Center

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