

Trashformations - New England Crafts Connoisseur

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In artists' hands, discards become keepers. Transforming found objects or ordinary materials into visual art is not a post-New Age phenomenon. Some of the 19th century's most treasured quilts are made from fabric scraps. In the early 20th century, Marcel Duchamp turned the art world upside down when he displayed a toilet and called it art. Modern abstract artists like Robert Rauschenberg create massive installations using recycled elements.

A contemporary continuation of making art from found and recycled materials is on full display with "TrashFORMATIONS East" at the Fuller Craft Museum in Massachusetts. Curated by Lloyd E. Herman, the exhibit enhances the never-ending discussion of what is craft, what is art, when is trash art. In the catalogue, Herman, director emeritus of the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C., said he viewed 1,400 slides by 350 East Coast and New England craftspeople before he selected the work of 112 artists. The exhibit is dedicated to the late Jennifer Atkinson, the director who began changing the Fuller from an art museum to today's Craft Museum.

In the catalogue's opening essay, museum director Gretchen Keyworth said, "Transformation, redemption, renewal, and transcendence are central to the exhibit and contemporary art and artists. By manipulating 'junk' the artists challenge the viewer's focus -- between trash and fine art." Herman, who lives in Seattle, explained the selections in his essay. "They were chosen because they were fresh, imaginative, ironic, witty and/or because they exemplify the tradition of making art from trash," he writes. "The emphasis is on objects with a certain refinement of form, workmanship, and/or idea -- rather than funky assemblages that might more correctly be considered folk art."... In all of the exhibit pieces, the artists connect with the finished objects.... Robert Rizzo captures the essence of "Trashformations" in "The Spirits," his trio of figures built over seven

years with found objects, mementos and gifts from friends. His wall text says it all: "--Everything means something."
(Excerpt from larger article)