

The zen of art-upcycling maintenance: A show of teamwork

Jennifer Levin | Posted: Friday, November 14, 2014 5:00 am

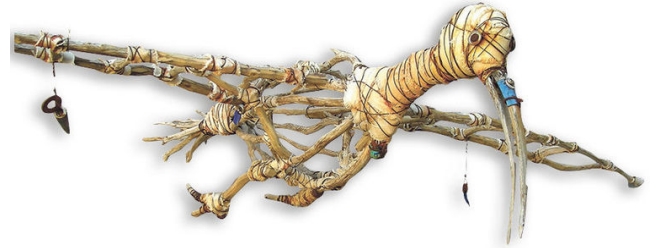
Imagine you are a piece of unfinished art. Someone began you but then became stuck, unsure how to complete you. You exist in every artist's studio as a canvas leaning against a wall, as pieces of sculpture shoved in a corner. You have no will of your own; you are at the mercy of an artist who may or may not return to you.

Art Collision & Repair Shop, opening on Friday, Nov. 14, in the Muñoz Waxman Gallery at the Center for Contemporary Arts, asks what happens when artists relinquish their unfinished pieces and let others determine their fate. Curators Susan Begy and Kathryn M Davis, working with Erika Wanenmacher, put together teams of local artists — known, for the purposes of the exhibit, as art mechanics — and handed them “stalled” artwork from other local artists, all of whom officially remained unknown to the “mechanics” until days before the opening, and who have given up the rights to their original works. The show is a who's who of the Santa Fe art scene. Originating artists include Matthew Chase-Daniel, Bob Haozous, Bunny Tobias, and Nora Naranjo Morse. Art mechanics include Paula Castillo, Jamie Hamilton, Christopher Jamie Johnson, Michael Lujan, Cyrus McCray, and Jerry Wellman.

Medium is a free-for-all at the *Art Collision & Repair Shop*. Paintings have been turned into performances, while videos, poetry, and sound have been added to sculpture. Some teams retained and built off the original piece, while others used it only for inspiration. The riskiest part of the exhibition is that the curators have no idea what the show will look like in its finished form.

“It's artists at play,” Begy said. “You take away a lot of the concerns about the personal failure of their own body of work, yet they're still bringing their own skills and their own mediums to the table, and they have to work together. It's a simple concept, but it can open itself up to so many incarnations.”

“We got four paintings, and some of them had barely been started but were definitely stalled,” said Willy Bo Richardson, a painter and art mechanic, along with Nina Mastrangelo and Don Kennell, on Team Reverse Waste Stream Renovators. “We wanted to build an altar to honor those paintings, but our concept fell apart. We discovered that holding to our original concept would hold back the work, because not only do you want to honor the original work, but the artists who are working on it now as well. We decided to



Geoffrey Gorman

"Stalled" piece by Geoffrey Gorman before repurposing

trust each other and trust our instincts and the creative process.”

Judy Tuwaletstiwa, a mixed-media artist who works with fiber and natural materials, donated a piece to the project that became part of Team Reverse Waste Stream Renovators’ failed altar. She doesn’t believe in the idea of a piece being stuck, preferring instead to view it as exploration that comes to a natural conclusion. “It is simply a question of waiting to see if the piece will resolve itself or not over time, or whether it will offer an idea that I might investigate further years later, when I have had other experiences both in and out of the studio. In other words, a connecting of the dots.” In the case of her piece, she said, “I was complete with it for myself, as one way to think about life, and I wondered where the art mechanics might take it.”

But what about the art objects being “repaired?” What is at stake for them in the moment of transition?

“I would say that the art object is transitory,” Davis told *Pasatiempo*. “Not to get into art talk, but it’s not this object that has meaning embedded in it that is immutable.” And yet, she and Begy agreed, to actually be an art object would change things dramatically. What, for instance, do the art mechanics want the piece to do? It would be nerve-racking.

In an attempt to empathize with the art, Begy and Davis decided to respond as art objects to a series of questions loosely adapted from what is known as the Proust Questionnaire, a 19th-century European parlor game that was popularized by some of Marcel Proust’s contemporaries as a way of revealing participants’ true natures. (It’s used most famously in this country by James Lipton on TV’s *Inside the Actors Studio*.)

Pasatiempo: What did you dream last night?

Kathryn M Davis: I dreamed I was taken from my mommy, and I don’t know what’s going to happen to me.

Susan Begy: I dreamed I was on vacation with all these members of my family, and the vacation lasted for years, and we went through all these different ages and phases. We were always on a boat.

Pasa: What is your greatest fear?

Davis: I’m afraid no one is going to look at me, and that I have no meaning or purpose.

Begy: My greatest fear is that no one will take me home with them.

Pasa: What is your idea of the greatest happiness?

Davis: I see a light shining on me, and people are standing around, talking and pointing at me, and I feel so happy because they are excited about me.

Begy: My greatest happiness is when a person is walking by, and they see me out of the corner of their eye, and they turn around and look at me and laugh, and then go home and tell their partner what they

saw.

Pasa: If you could be anything, what would it be?

Davis: I would be a giant outdoor public installation that made people happy for years and years, or at least made them think.

Begy: I would be an outdoor sculpture that could withstand all the elements for a long time.

Pasa: What were you in a past life?

Davis: I was a basket. I was a canvas with string. I was a clown. I've lived in hell and I've seen heaven.

Begy: I was a child's toy. I got to travel a lot in the back of a car. I was inside a dog's mouth for a little while.

Pasa: What is your motto?

Davis: "Fail better," to quote Samuel Beckett.

Begy: Use what you have. ◀