

RECYCLED AND RE-EVALUATED

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VIRGINIA BEACH CENTER FOR THE ARTS
2200 PARKS AVENUE, VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

Sponsored by

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VIRGINIA BEACH ARTS AND HUMANITIES COMMISSION*

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

In this day and age recycling has taken on lots of connotations arising from economic, sociological and ecological considerations. The contemporary emphasis is on disuse and waste of potentially reusable objects abandoned by our society. Because these objects lay like a historical shadow in the wake of our development, they are apt symbols and metaphorical spokes-objects for us as a species and for our mode of existence.

These considerations are certainly reflected in today's arts in many ways. There are artists whose perspective is socio-political, taking the position of public conscience through advocacy. Other artists approach the problem through methods of reuse, offering us various visions of how adaptable discards can be when applied as "artists' materials." Some artists look at the problem as discards from the inside out. They ask the dangerous questions. What is valuable? When does an object lose its value? How can the worthless be revalued? When and why does it reach that state?

Through various formats and technical approaches the artists of *Recycled and Re-evaluated* focus our attention on the purely aesthetic qualities of objects. These objects of "refuse" are complex with textures, colors and patinas. There are the objects of nature, relics and junk from the forest, isolated for scrutiny, revealing their overlooked and forsaken beauty and individuality. There are the objects from the scrap heap of industry, the domestic waste bins and the roadside pickings. Their visual eloquence disowns their original identities and references while combining to form surprising visions not otherwise possible.

These objects of art provoke the viewer's aesthetic reevaluation of the worthless and invoke at least their intuitive appreciation of the world at large around them.

Neill Hughes

Curator, Recycled and Re-evaluated

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

In **Stephen Bickley's** minimal, elemental sculptures, carefully placed man-made and natural forms coalesce into constructions that seem as inevitable as human life on earth. In his form, content and method, Bickley is strongly influenced by ancient hunting and gathering cultures. Walks through the rural Appalachian landscape surrounding his studio turn up those found objects which make their way into his sculptures. The names and indeed the monolithic forms of the finished pieces are inspired by ancient ceremonial sites and tombs, places where men confront their gods and their questions. They suggest mankind's close ties with the earth: the mysteries contained within it and the sciences and religions man has evolved to explain them.

Bickley is an Associate Professor of Art and Art History at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, VA. He received his MFA from the University of Georgia. His work has been recognized through numerous grants and fellowships.

A longtime practitioner in the "found object" genre, **Wally Dreyer** has developed three distinct artistic formats which incorporate discards: sculpture, relief prints and photographs. His sculptures are arrived at by mounting or assembling rusted metal objects, removed and isolated from their original contexts. The collographs (prints) are created by softening paper (often handmade) with water; laying it over a printing plate on which he has composed flattened, metal, found objects and running it through a press. The photographs are multiple exposures of domestic refuse, still-life elements arranged to take on an environmental or anthropomorphic presence. Though the process in each of these formats is markedly different, the works share Dreyer's interest in primal, masklike, fetishistic human and animal forms, influenced by his exposure to Mayan masks at a young age.

Dreyer is an Adjunct Professor of Photography at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA and has been an Artist-in-Residence at the Hermitage School since 1975. His award-winning work has been represented in numerous exhibitions and collections.

Martin Johnson's junk aesthetic has roots in the Pop Art "environments" and "assemblages" of the 1960s which are indebted to the irrational anti-art aesthetic of the dadaists. Aware that anything symbolizes anything else, Johnson has created labyrinths of meaning from found and inexpensively purchased "kitschy" objects. In these twenty-nine panels, part of an installation entitled "Forty-four Four by Fours," logical paths of object associations and symbolic connections become blocked by other objects in the same matrix which stubbornly confound a given line of reasoning. In response, art critic Donald Kuspit has called his work "organized irrationality." To compound matters, the panels are alternately labeled "he" and "she" suggesting, but not defining, gender issues. Like the surrealists, the successors to dada, Johnson has said that he works in a kind of stream-of-consciousness manner, feeling successful if he, like the viewer, is baffled at the outcome. And like the dadaists, "patron saints" of Pop Art, his anti-art aesthetic is perhaps meant to communicate something of the profane nature of contemporary society, in both aesthetic and social terms, while incorporating ironic wit, if not sardonic humor.

Prior to returning to Virginia, Johnson lived in New York City where he had a studio at PS1. His work has for many years been represented in the Phyllis Kind Gallery stable.

*Betsy Gough-E Julio
Director of Education*

Some concepts in these statements are adapted from articles by Teresa Annas Phyllis Kind, Linda McGreevy and an unknown author on Steve Eckley.