



Artist Katherine Huntoon's mixed media sculpture, "Smack Dab in the Middle," is part of the "Household Media" exhibit at the Virginia Beach Arts Center. Staff photos by JAMIE FRANCIS

HOMEMADE ART

Artists dust off household objects for exhibit that's offbeat, fun

By **TERESA ANNAS**
Staff writer

FOR AN EXHIBIT with a downright domestic title like "Household Media," the work is rather untamed.

The art, in fact, nearly shakes the rafters of the ramshackle galleries at the Virginia Beach Arts Center. Scattered about like a herd of frisky calves are conglomerations by 11 artists, nine of whom are from Hampton Roads. They've used sewing machines, game boards, shavers, place mats, brooms, clothespins, toilet flush gadgets — even indoor/outdoor carpeting.

Everything but the kitchen sink.

Sydney "Chip" Jenkins, the Arts Center's curator, admits he's responsible for the exhibit. Standing tall and sober-faced in the middle of it, he was saying fairly serious things this week: "When I came up with the idea last fall, I was thinking in terms of an assemblage show — and wanted to limit it to using familiar media in an unfamiliar or amusing way."

Jenkins noted precedents for the idea, from Dadaists like Marcel Duchamp — who, from 1910 to '30, made art out of bicycle wheels, chairs and urinals — to the Pop artists like Andy Warhol and his '60s re-creations of Campbell's soup cans.

Something of a straight man to the surrounding work, Jenkins began to lighten up.

"Household Media," he said, had been a charmed endeavor: Though most works were made expressly for the show in the past two months, the majority turned out well enough to be included.

As an exhibit, "I don't think it has earth-shaking relevance," he finally conceded. "Nearly everything has a humorous bent. It's silly, light, winter fun." What impact the show has besides a few giggles "is in the element of surprise once you figure out what the medium is."

Monday morning a conservative-looking couple was perusing the exhibit (which will remain on view through mid-February) and doing just that: Trying to discern what the works were made of.

"What is that? Oh, it's clothespins!" said the man. "Now that's something — something for your leisure moments. More fun than a clothesline."

He was referring to a "bowl" made of wired-together clothespins made by Los Angeles sculptor Karyl Sisson, the only out-of-state artist in the show.

Jenkins' inspiration for "Household



FROM TOP: Nancy Prichard with "You Are What You Eat"; Arleen Cohen with "Pillow Becomes Pin Cushion Becomes Birthing Bed for Men"; and Lynne Sward with "Broomba Fetish."



Please see **ART**, Page B7

ART

continued from Page B1

Media" came partly from seeing Sisson's work in magazines and in New York exhibits. "I had seen her stuff for a long time and it triggered a thought in my head," he remembered. "They're kind of elegant in a way. Elegant clothespins."

Little else in the show, however, could be called elegant.

"That's right pretty, isn't it?" continued the man, who was now eyeing "Broomba Fetish," a lavishly be-decked broom by Virginia Beach fiber artist Lynne Sward. "Probably not particularly useful in that shape," he added dryly.

Sward was displaying a common household sweeper as if it were a rare artifact. Doll-sized copper pans dangled from it, as did colorful toothpicks, thumbtacks and tassels. Sward's work even included a fictitious map of the region where the broom had been "found," as well as a tongue-in-cheek museum label.

Using household materials has not been the norm for Sward — or most of the other artists in the show. Yet the uniqueness of the project resulted in offbeat solutions. The artists — judging from their behind-the-scenes tales — obviously warmed to the challenge.

■ **Sward on "Broomba Fetish":** "This is probably the most fun I've had doing an art piece in years. What I did was transform the broom into a tribal piece of art. You know, any tribe. Well, it's the broomba tribe.

"Just before I finished it, I ran across this after-Christmas sale in a crafts shop and there were these little copper utensils. I figured, 'Why not?' So I have them hanging on the broom like charms. I figured: 'You have a fetish, you have charms.'

"This was kind of a catharsis piece for me. I haven't used a broom in a whole year because I'm a terrible housekeeper. It's not one of my strong points and I don't believe in it. I think the house will take care of itself."

■ **Arleen Cohen** on "Pillow Becomes Pin Cushion Becomes Birthing Bed for Men": "I wanted to do a transformation kind of thing where something becomes something else. So I had wheels and a cushion I had made. And I've always wanted to put a cushion on wheels.

"Then I had this doll's body lying around, and I draped it over the cushion. It looked so ghastly and strange. Then I found this head on a stick, a little Mexican thing I bought in a shop. It seemed to transform into a birthing bed for men. Then it just seemed right to stick pins in it, then a needle with the thread cascading over the side like an umbilical cord.

"It was all such a natural progression."

■ **Katherine Huntoon** on "Smack Dab in the Middle": "These are mostly things I've found in junk stores," she said, referring to a seamstress's fitting form, picket fence, Astroturf, plaster casts of friends' hands and arms and polyester resin foam for wall "splats" she's painted fluorescent orange and yellow.

"It's about my extended family and about giving to people. And how it's messy and it ends up being an explosion." In her rear gallery installation, Huntoon depicted the difficulty in maintaining both a family

life and outside friendships: Witness the hands reaching at the mannequin from the wall.

Huntoon's one of the few who has been dead serious about her work in this show. "I don't like joke art. I don't think it's very funny. Home art is a very basic thing. It's real stuff: home and marriage and children and love."

■ **Robert Sites** on "Grotesque": "My first idea was to make a French poodle out of French bread. But my recipe wouldn't work. The bread had to rise, and that sort of threw off the form.

"Then I went to a hardware store and found the perfect medium: black indoor/outdoor carpeting. I discovered that when you paint on it, it's like painting on velvet. It's just got a little more nap.

"So that's what I did, and I put it in this lovely gilt frame that cost \$40 10 years ago. It's this sort of over-the-couch painting. I started to make a companion piece for it. But I don't know.

"This may ruin my reputation."

■ **Martin Johnson** on "The Lost Upper": "It's about language as a found, everyday object. Language that can be transformed, given a double edge."

His work offers an unusual mix of objects related to Christ — from sails ("fisher of men") to a brass door knocker ("Jesus knocking at the door of your heart"). These embellish a cheap plastic depiction of "The Last Supper."

"None of it was consciously intended to read like that. I just had these things and picked them up and put them together. I don't know how I put it together. Maybe that's saying something about the unconscious."

Johnson consistently uses found objects in his art, which has been shown at New York's Phyllis Kind Gallery and is currently on view at the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, N.C.

Johnson sees his inclusion in "Household Media" as apt, but for a different reason than one might imagine: "The art was in my house, so that was the household media."

Making art from everyday objects, he continued, "is inevitable, just a natural progression of art, life, the world. Art is not paint and canvas. Art is your consciousness, and how you think and how you make something out of that."

■ **Anne Bousquet** on "Singer": "I wanted to make something about what was going on with me at the moment. I just moved, and one of my friends dropped my old Singer sewing machine and broke it. So I thought I ought to do something with it besides throwing it away.

"So I put it together with a painting of clouds and sky, representing heaven. And the sewing machine sits on a sculpture stand in front of it. There's also a neon tube that floats over the whole thing like a halo. And I have a tape loop of Aretha Franklin singing gospel music.

"I call it 'Singer.'"

She thinks that humor's important.

"Why? Because I can't handle how disastrous life can really be."

"Household Media" continues through Feb. 3 at the Virginia Beach Arts Center, 1711 Arctic Ave. Gallery hours are Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Sundays, 1 to 4 p.m. Free. 425-0000.