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A gluttony of trash, turned into treasure

BY ROB KLINDT

For textile artist Charlotte Kruk, it's frustrating to see so much trash in today's society going to landfills instead of being recycled or repurposed. Kruk cites consumer packaging, from candy wrappers and plastic food seals to plastics and double cardboard boxing, as major offenders.

In her newest exhibit, "Consumer Couture; Wrapped in Conversation," at Fremont's Olive Hyde Art Gallery, Kruk puts recycling and repurposing consumer products front and center. The show includes a creative and colorful

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Models Kate Malysheva (left), Skye Dumas (right) 1



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collection of unique clothes, accessories and sculptures made of candy wrappers, food packaging, cloths and plastics.

The goal of the exhibit is to get people to notice, think about and discuss mass packaging and waste in today's consumer culture. "It was a way for me to package my own statement about mass consumption," Kruk explained.

San Jose-based artist's interest in recycling started when she was growing up and watched one grandmother package lavish Christmas gifts while the other grandmother carefully removed the tape on each gift and repurposed paper every year. "It got me thinking about trash and about repurposing and recycling," she said.

Kruk eventually started to save and repurpose her own trash -- especially excess packaging -- as much as possible. "It became a narrative for me to talk about how everything we endeavor in our culture is mass packaged and produced in a way that we don't even recognize anymore," she said.

Since 1996, Kruk has been building, refining and growing her collection and had exhibits in numerous Bay Area art galleries, schools and museums. In addition to promoting recycling in her shows, Kruk tries to stimulate conversations about current events, including COVID-19 and racism.

An enthusiastic crowd turned up for the exhibit's gala opening on Friday, November 5 as part of Olive Hyde Gallery's effort to slowly reopen to in-person events following the COVID-19 shutdown. Most of the gallery's recent exhibits have been only available online.

Mingling among the crowd were high school models Kate Malysheva and Skye Dumas wearing two of Kruk's newest creations. Kate, dressed as "Lady Life Saver & The Covid Cure," wore a nurse's dress, stitched together from plastic Life Savers candy wrappers, along with a face mask, stethoscope and topped with a nursing cap covered with printed barcodes.

Skye modeled the second creation, "Caffeinate the Conversation; Racism, Let it Be Gone With the Wind." It featured a bright green hoop dress made from plastic Café La Llave espresso bags stitched together with a Black Lives Matter skirt jutting out from the bottom.

Because La Llave translates to "the key" in English, Kruk felt it was a good starting point to open a dialog about a sensitive topic. "The key to the conversation about racism is to sit down and have a cup of coffee with someone and look at them eye to eye and ask, 'why does this happen in our society?'" she explained.

Rounding out the show in the gallery's two exhibition rooms are dozens of dresses, clothing accessories and items made from common wrappers including M&Ms, Barnum's Animals Cracker boxes, C&H Sugar bags and many more. Figures including Frida Kahlo and Marilyn Monroe are also included.

Consumer Couture; Wrapped in Conversation

Thursdays – Sundays, through Dec 19

12 noon – 5 p.m.

Olive Hyde Art Gallery

123 Washington Blvd., Fremont

(510) 791-4357

olivehydeartguild.org

Free admission

Artist Charlotte Kruk, left, promotes recycling in her latest wearable art show.

