

Art: Disposable miracles

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At one level, "Journey to the Surface of the Earth," the latest Minnesota Artists Exhibition Program exhibit at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, is just a collection of fun things that a couple of clever artists did with stuff they found around the house.

There's a loopy ribbon of masking tape that got free rein to run crazy along a gallery wall. There's a long bed of plastic grocery bags and some prettily folded magazines. A stepladder that appears to have been severely gnawed by beavers. A paper plate much doodled upon with a red pen. And a whole room of tables full of little paper models of cones, pyramids, tetrahedrons and other shapes whose names went bye-bye from the brain when we signed out of geometry class decades ago.

It's all quite curious and more fascinating than might seem likely. Made by Max Schollett (ladder, grocery bags, masking tape, etc.) and Margaret Pezalla-Granlund (the 3D geometry lesson), the objects surprisingly reveal qualities traditionally associated with beauty, whether it's the gaunt elegance of the anorexic ladder, the delicate fragility of a 30-foot-long ribbon cut from a single sheet of legal paper and suspended from the ceiling, or the unexpected silken sheen of ordinary Cub Foods bags bathed in the soft glow of museum spotlights.

The bags are especially noteworthy. Schollett has arranged hundreds of the crumpled plastic sacks into a puffy floor mat about 25 feet long. Their many shades of taupe, peach, ivory and butter cream have a fleshy warmth, while their black logos blend into six long stripes, like garden rows. Remarkably strong, flexible, feather-light and (as seen here) ball-gown gorgeous, this is stuff we unthinkingly toss out every day. To his credit, Schollett doesn't seem to be moralizing, but his ephemeral constructions inevitably raise gnawing questions about contemporary culture's profligate use of disposable miracles.

Pezalla-Granlund helpfully grounds her geometry lesson with two cases of geometry texts, from Euclid to a contemporary illustration of Mobius strip conundrums. The textbooks are something of a footnote to her magical array of mutating forms. Apparently geometers 150 years ago liked to fabricate 3D models to illustrate mathematical formulas and figures, a concept she amplifies with her own constructions. Hers begin with tiny cones, cubes, pyramids and then progress into complex accordion-folded triangular scrolls, curled shell shapes, knots and twists. Like conceptual architectural models, they illustrate the endless mutability of forms in space. She made some from paper printed with glossy landscape photos, which introduce both polished gleam and socio-geographic undercurrents. A sophisticated merger of origami, mathematics and conceptual art, Pezalla-Granlund's miniature sculptures bring fresh intellectual vistas into design.

Leaving Northeast for downtown

After more than three years on 13th Avenue NE., **Gallery 13** has decamped for downtown Minneapolis where it is now ensconced in attractively unfinished digs with raw concrete

floors, safety lighting and exposed ceiling girders and ductwork. The closing this summer of the Minnesota Center for Photography, which had been across the street in NE, effectively ended that neighborhood's hopes of developing as a gallery district, said Steve Sugarman, who co-founded Gallery 13 with his wife, Karen.

Advantages of the downtown site include more foot traffic, easy ramp parking in the same building, and two-block proximity to the trendy Chambers Hotel, with its splashy international art and stylish gallery. While it's too soon to imagine a mass return of art galleries to the city's core, the new site's potential synergy makes it "a win-win for everyone," said Sugarman.

The gallery moved in August in time to stage a political show for the Republican National Convention. Its second exhibit is in two parts: contemporary ceramic sculpture by 15 Midwestern artists and drawings and installations by Michael Wong, a recent University of Minnesota student.

The ceramics range from huge slab sculptures by Marshall Maude to delicate porcelain "paper" plates sporting Wedgewood-style bas relief profiles of First Ladies by Todd Severson. Eileen Cohen's minimalist sculptures are especially noteworthy, both comic and elegant in their resemblance to the tops of cartoon heads complete with perky, textured ear knobs.

Wong's remarkable monochrome drawings incorporate allusions to his Chinese heritage, from an elaborate mountainous installation featuring Chairman Mao to an extraordinary 48-foot-wide, 12-foot-tall panorama of a clown-like figure hurling comets.

Male call

New York artist Wardell Milan honed his rough drawing and colorful collage style while a 2006-07 resident at the Studio Museum in Harlem. His recent work, on display at **Franklin Art Works**, continues his preoccupation with hyper masculinity, evident in sketches of boxers in action and collages of body builders and wrestlers mingled with family photos, contemporary flotsam and muscular Renaissance-era sculpture by Michelangelo and contemporaries.

Butterflies flitting over one scene appear to allude to both the butterfly-wing designs of contemporary British sculptor Damien Hirst and boxer Muhammad Ali's famous injunction to "Float like a butterfly; sting like a bee."

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