

Crafting Conversations: Exhibition Interpretive Text



Fibers and Natural Dyes

Most natural dyes are from plant sources, such as roots, berries, bark, leaves, and fruit pits. Natural dyeing has been traced back thousands of years to China, and the process has changed little. Though the discovery of synthetic dyes overtook natural dyes in the mid-19th century, natural dyes have become popular today given public concern about the health and environmental impact of synthetic dyes. Synthetic dyes are hazardous to consumers and dangerous for workers in the industry. Natural dyes are a source of employment for the rural sectors of poor countries and are safe for workers and consumers.

(Sources: Wikipedia.com, ecotintes.com)



Remembering Hiroshima, Imagining Peace (RHIP)

Shibori Peace Quilt, 2014

Indigo-dyed cotton

Partnering with the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, RHIP organized a workshop in which museum visitors dyed cotton squares using the shibori resist technique. The squares were then sewn into quilts by the museum's Makeshop. One of three quilts was presented to the Shinfujin/New Japan Women's Association (Azumino, Japan) during the 2015 Peace and Planet Conference in New York City, in which RHIP members participated.



Joan Guerin

Sunprints, 2019

plant-based fabric

Plants depicted on hanging banners (left to right): Maple, Cattails, Honey Locust with Grass, Black Walnut with Fox Tail Grass, Timothy Grass, Virginia Creeper Plants depicted on pillows (clockwise from top left): Orchard Grass, Lady Fern, Devils Walking Stick, Sedge with Inflorescence, Lady Fern with Deer Tongue Grass, Deer Tongue Grass, Lady Fern with Deer Tongue Grass

"We take the exquisite designs inherent in nature for granted every day... We are so accustomed to the local urban plants that grow abundantly in Pittsburgh, they often go unnoticed. My hope is to get children and adults alike to start noticing, appreciating, wondering, and becoming more aware of our intrinsic companionship with plants. They are our allies."



Slow Fashion

As an alternative to “fast fashion,” slow fashion promotes a more ethical and sustainable way of living and dressing. Some elements of slow fashion include buying vintage clothes; redesigning old clothes; shopping from small, local producers; making clothes and accessories at home; and buying garments that last longer. Slow fashion also considers the life cycle of the clothing, from materials, through manufacturing, to disposal or recycling, taking into account natural fibers that can be broken down at the end of a product’s life.



Katy Dement

Pants from the Table (Jumper), 2018

Linen embroidery

As a lifelong seamstress, fashion is a recurring theme found in my work. “Pants from the Table” is a boutique line of functional fashion items, primarily pants, all crafted from vintage tablecloths. Embellished with intricate hand embroidery, fine table linens emerge from the linen closet, moth-like from the cocoon, reborn for a life in a new age. In a more casual era, these soft natural fibers become practical garments that might connect past and present gender roles.



Lindsey Peck Scherloun

Onomatopoeia #7, 2017

Silk curtains (rotting), antique Honduran skirt belonging to the artist’s mother, cotton, silk, and thrift store clothing

Something borrowed, something blue, something old, 2017

Found scrap of silk, antique bone buttons, antique silk scarves, artist’s bedsheet



Sarah Simmons

Cost Form, 2018

Mixed media: discarded dress, dictionary pages, ribbon, coat rack, hanger, thread, safety pin

Polished Off, 2019

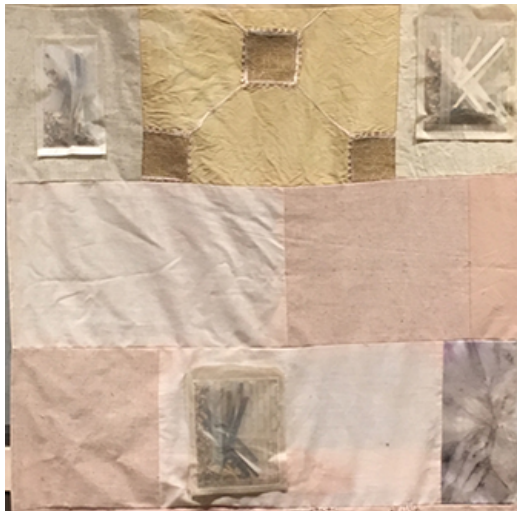
Mixed media: discarded dress, discarded nail polish, bottles and brushes, plastic bags from magazine mailings, pins, mannequin, microphone stand

“We can use our language of dress to describe a more hopeful option, where we keep our clothing longer, buy vintage and secondhand, and choose clothing and beauty products made with environmentally sound practices by companies that are ecologically responsible.”



Recycled/Found Metals

These works leverage Pittsburgh's industrial past by not only sourcing the vast supply of scrap metal found here in the center of the Rust Belt, but by repurposing these materials to pay tribute to this region's industrial history and environmental legacy. We discover the ephemeral nature of something thought to be indestructible as it slowly decays in response to nature and the environment while leaving its marks. Conversely, nature adjusts to the Anthropocene, blooming and producing seeds at times different than historically recorded, for example, when Thoreau kept copious notes on his natural history observations.



Laura Ramie (on wall)

Natural & Local, 2019

Found fabric quilt embellished with dyes extracted from plants, food waste, and minerals



The Mobile Sculpture Workshop (MSW)

Wishes for Hazelwood, 2019

Scrap metal

The MSW is the first community outreach program of the Industrial Arts Workshop and is currently instructing close to a dozen area youth on the safe and proper techniques of welding, metal working, and sculpture building. The goal of the MSW is to complete a large-scale sculpture for permanent installation in the Hazelwood area.



Rose Clancy

Francis, 2018

Rusty found objects, salvaged white cotton linens, exposure to natural elements, and handmade black walnut dye

53 Years Performance Dress, 2017

Rust-stained and black walnut dyed salvaged cotton linens. (Fabric was created by wrapping rusty found objects in salvaged linens, exposure to natural elements, and over-dyeing with handmade black walnut dye.)

"Dangerous Objects Made Safe is an on-going public art project that 'makes something out of nothing' by utilizing salvaged and discarded materials to create assemblage sculptures that turn negatives (dangerous rusty objects) into positives (brightly colored rust-stained fabric)."



Community Arts

Many artists, as evidenced in this exhibition, engage with communities to foster an understanding of and appreciation for the natural world. They seek to reconnect people to the plants, animals, and living systems with whom we share the planet and which makes all life possible. Such projects can take many forms from community murals, to reclaiming damaged ecosystems, and envisioning a public park or community space.



Elizabeth Ashley Kyber

Rituals, Rites, and Reclamation: Earth Spiral, 2019
Recycled mixed media

Rituals, Rites, and Reclamation: “Earth Spiral” is an installation of ceramic fairy houses and bee hotels composed of up-cycled materials and placed within an up-cycled glass, found object, and collected-stones landscape. The “water-flow” paintings are created by dripping beet juice onto paper in layers over days, with a final layer of nature's “glitter,” a powdered silver mica dust. The installation includes bisque-fired clay “hand-rocks” made by squeezing clay to form a leaf/petal. Over 50 sets of hands are included here.

Ashley has worked with community members gardening and growing food, with college students in landscape architecture, and with children teaching ecoart. Through these experiences, she has found that story-sharing, drumming, singing, and making the fantastical start, compliment and reinforce science-based learning, and promote an understanding of complex ecological systems, like storm-water harvesting.

“At this crisis-point of climate change, we must access the ancient, the alchemical, and the sacred to reveal a new understanding of how to live in this spiraling earthen world that is magical in its biodiversity and that connects us to ‘All That IS’.”



Re-claiming Pollinators: Bee Hotel Habitat, 2019
Up-Cycled cardboard, leaves, peat planter pots,
Japanese knotweed, reeds

Bee Hotels give the multiple species of solitary bees habitat while pollinating over one third of our food crops. Give a pollinator a home— make a bee hotel!



Handmade Paper

The oldest known archaeological fragments of the immediate precursor to modern paper date to the 2nd century BCE in China. In the 13th century, the knowledge and uses of paper spread from China through the Middle East to medieval Europe, where the first water powered paper mills were built. Artists who make paper by hand rarely purchase supplies, preferring to grow, collect, reuse, and modify fibers in relationship to the art work envisioned. Each material has a history that defines the object. No material is arbitrary when fibrous materials are sustainably sourced, reassembled, and shared.



Katy DeMent

Our Parents' Picnic, 2019

Encaustic on paper made with Kudzu

This is a cautionary tale of how, fresh from the Depression, our parents craved modern conveniences that may have contributed to the mess we are now in. Each piece is a vignette that holds a visual narrative. Through layers of vintage ephemera, tales are told. When etched images are included, the dialogue begins. Natural and found objects punctuate the story. No material is arbitrary; "I am influenced by overlooked materials found in my community and backyard. Rusty old tools are mashed together with deconstructed plants; this is where I find humor, combining these unlikely fellows."



Albert Pantone

Knotweed Lamp 2019

Japanese knotweed, molded and pressed hand made paper

Ohm, 2016

Japanese knotweed, molded and pressed hand made paper

Knotweed on Knotweed, 2019

Etching on handmade paper



Treewhispers (Pamela Paulsrud)

Treewhispers

Handmade paper, writing, collage

Treewhispers is an ongoing, international, multi-generational collaboration involving handmade paper, art, and personal stories relating to trees.

"Just as the rings of a tree embody the stories of the tree, so too do we carry the stories of trees. These stories inspire us to renew our sense of wonder. They connect us to one another through shared experiences as they deepen our understanding of our connection with nature."



Biophilia

The term “biophilia” was popularized by E.O. Wilson in 1984, which he defined as "the urge to affiliate with other forms of life." It was first used by Erich Fromm to describe a psychological orientation of being attracted to all that is alive and vital. He proposed that the deep affiliations humans have with other life forms and nature as a whole are rooted in our biology. In his book, “Last Child in the Woods” (2005), Richard Louv coined the term "nature-deficit disorder" and documented how it harms children and society. The book concluded that direct exposure to nature is essential for healthy childhood development and for the physical and emotional health of children and adults.



LUNA /Maya Guerin & Ann Rosenthal

Acrylic paint on vinyl

Flora and fauna depicted: Iris and Hosta; Crabapple and Robin; Eastern Birds on Redbud: Cardinal, Eastern Bluebird, Eastern Goldfinch, Bluejay; Woodpecker and Rhododendron; Chokeberry; Oakleaf Hydrangea

LUNA is a project-based ecoliteracy and arts program that engages children and youth in urban nature. The 2016 program, funded by a Remake Learning grant through The Sprout Fund, was based at the Kingsley Association in partnership with Penn State Extension/Urban 4-H and resulted in painted banners of flora and pollinators, and a community planting guide coloring book. In 2017, LUNA conducted four “Banner Blitzes” in the community in which anyone could drop in and paint a banner. LUNA continues as an “on demand” program and provided workshops this summer for Gwen’s Girls. The banners displayed throughout the exhibition are from LUNA’s 2016 and 2017 programs.

“My looking ripens things, and they come toward me to meet and be met.”

—Rainer Maria Rilke, Book of Hours, 1905

(Thanks to Wikipedia.com for some of the information included in this document.)