



## Turning Trash Into Art







Above: A portrait of a garbage picker from Brazil by internationally acclaimed artist Vik Muniz.

Friday, October 21, 2011

By [Angela Carone](#)



Above: Jason Rogenes stands by one of his sculptures made out of expanded polystyrene, electrical components, and eight fluorescent lamps.



Above: One of the pieces in NCM's TRASH made by The Institute For Figuring. It's called "Midden, 2007-2011," and it's made out of four years of household plastic trash and nets. Photo © the IFF.

Monday mornings in Rachel Teagle's household are a big deal. Teagle, who is the executive director of [The New Children's Museum](#) in downtown San Diego smiled: "We would wait in the driveway for the garbage man to come by with amazing enthusiasm."

A few years ago, when Teagle's son Zeke was 2, it was especially exciting because Zeke was fascinated by garbage trucks. "We have an awesome garbage guy who will honk and sometimes he would even let Zeke come into the cab."

After seeing Zeke's enthusiasm for trash, Teagle realized, "There's something about kids and trash that really works."

Teagle spent the next two years curating an exhibit around the theme of trash, pulling in 12 artists from around the world. [Vik Muniz](#), whose portraits of garbage pickers in Brazil was documented in the terrific film "[Waste Land](#)," is one of the artists featured in the exhibit.

Teagle says the artists in the show approach their work in a similar way. "So many of the artists want to take on the environmental sustainability theme, but they do that by engaging in that magical act of transformation."

They turn material that is overlooked, broken or forgotten, and transform it into beautiful artwork. Caves are made out of cardboard, sandwich ties become giant spiders, plastic bags become jellyfish. And garbage bags can come to life, as in artist [Chris Sollars'](#) work. Sollars' installation "Playfill" includes [a video of walking trash bags](#). Teagle explains:

Chris has asked kids to pretend that they're a piece of trash, so you'll see in the video they're pictures of people dressed up as trash - in literal garbage bags - and they're making the journey of what happens from the moment you put trash into your black or blue recycling can at home to how it ends up at Miramar Landfill.

I visited the New Children's Museum a few days before the exhibit, simply titled "TRASH," opened to the public. Artists and preparators were busy installing, including artist [Jason Rogenes](#), who stood in the center of a cave fashioned out of cardboard boxes. Three of the cave walls include a child-size climbing wall.

Rogenes was preparing to hang his large space-ship looking sculptures from the ceiling. The Brooklyn-based artist glues together white Styrofoam inserts used to package electronic equipment. The block forms, with their multiple cut-outs, create a surface not unlike that of Star Wars' Death Star, except white. Once Rogenes assembles the forms into tall towers, he lights them from within and suspends them in the air.

Rogenes is tall and rail thin, and seems to have the metabolism of a hummingbird, shifting constantly as we talked. He explains it was his love of science fiction and fantasy that sparked this series of work. Rogenes admits, "I really wanted to be making big space-ships...For me, the simple manipulation of the material into something completely different, something even other-worldly, is one of the, the real joys and fascinations that I have with working with the material."

San Diego-based artist [Jessica McCamby](#) faces a similar challenge, often asking herself "How am I going to transform something so ordinary into something extraordinary?"

McCamby has long been inspired by the foam waves create when they crash to shore. She waves her hands as if evoking the shoreline. "You know, that fleeting moment that happens and then it goes away, and all that's left is your memory and the experience you had with it."

McCamby created a hanging installation out of white plastic bags looped into a giant web. She says knew she wanted to work with plastic bags right away. "These bags, the reason we have them is because of this fast-paced culture and I find it interesting to use that same material, give that same object another life, that's actually asking the opposite of us."

McCamby wants kids to lie down under her piece and unwind. "I want them to get lost, the way that you would lay on the ground as a kid and get lost looking at a cloud."

Teagle hopes TRASH sparks discussion around the family dinner table. "We know that in the area of environmental sustainability, kids are already the leaders in their home, teaching their parents about why plastic grocery bags can really hurt sea life. And what I really hope we can achieve is to empower kids to help change the behaviors at home."



Above: A corner of "Float," an installation by artist Jessica McCambly, made out of reclaimed plastic bags and currently on view in TRASH.

The challenge is to first capture kids' attention. That didn't seem to be a problem on opening day of the exhibit. Children were climbing on sculptures and making their own sea urchins out of recycled materials.

Teagle predicted this. "I think there's something in that magic of the transformation of trash into something else that every kid connects to."

*TRASH will be on view at the New Children's Museum in downtown San Diego through 2013.*

*You can learn more about NCM's TRASH exhibit by watching Evening Edition tonight at 6:30.*

Video by Katie Euphrat

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**Peking\_Duck\_SD** | October 21, 2011 at 6:31 p.m. — 2 years, 9 months ago

Great story! It teaches kids to see art in everyday objects - even in objects people discard as undesirable. Kudos to an exhibit that will no doubt inspire a future generation of San Diego artists!