

finders keepers

Unique and imaginative furniture springs from lost-and-found items

By Pat Stein

A discarded piece of stainless steel, a cast-off copper plate and a paint bucket rescued from the trash are among the found items that inspired many of the one-of-a-kind furniture pieces in Two Schools of Thought II, currently on display at Divan + Studio in La Jolla.

The exhibit showcases 30 works handcrafted by students, graduates and faculty of the Mesa College and San Diego State University furniture design programs. The fully functional pieces feature innovative design and unconventional materials, according to Wendy Maruyama, the award-winning furniture designer who heads SDSU's furniture design program.

David Fobes, who is the chairman of Mesa College's furniture design program, challenged his students to use "an extravagance of imagination and an economy of means" in their designs. Each piece had to incorporate found objects and be made for less than \$40.

Rather than focusing on woodworking skills, Fobes, a well-known San Diego furniture artist in his own right, also encouraged Mesa students to develop "appropriate craftsmanship that is at the service of the efficient and professional completion of their projects." He discouraged the use of expensive, exotic tropical hardwoods and encouraged the use of sustainable materials and nontoxic finishes.

The result is a collection of side tables in which modest materials have been transformed by fine craftsmanship and innovative ideas into functional often fanciful artworks.

Cheryl Mitchell used a found 1-gallon paint can as the base for her side table with a colorful top that looks like a painter's palette. She crafted a large paintbrush to hold the "palette" tabletop.

Ramon Zarate incorporated a found piece of stainless steel hardware as a holder for a small plexiglass fish tank that sits atop his nicely crafted birch side table. A found Chinese head pillow was the inspiration for Virginia Abblitt's Asian-themed side table, and Ed Wright used a found brass Buddha head as centerpiece of a side table design that features the Chinese symbols for the four seasons.

Baseball fan Marvin Brown used a found bat for one leg of his "Field of Dreams" side table, which features an inlaid wood top that resembles a baseball diamond. In one of the more whimsical pieces, a found carved duck travels on a motorized bicycle chain through a tabletop slot. Found rope was used by Mitch Quina to create a side table with a built-in magazine rack.

Some of the more advanced Mesa students created pieces with a Southern California theme. For example, a chaise longue made of ribbon mahogany with tubular steel supports is Brittany Elliott's salute to San Diego's outdoor lifestyle.

The SDSU side of the exhibit features more sophisticated designs, pieces that combine fine woodworking skills with innovative materials and styles.

One highlight is Dina Rubio-lo's intricately carved wood version of a medieval chain mail vest. It's mounted on an antique dressmaker's form for display as a piece of art, but it's also wearable.

The "waterfall cabinet" by Kirby Jones combines etched glass and beautifully finished quilted maple set in a granite base that would make an artistic display case for small collectibles. Leigh Cotnoir's intricate piece combines copper etching, brass and mahogany with images of Wonder Woman

hidden inside the drawer of the pedestal cabinet.

Srdjan Simic used inlaid metal mill finishings in his finely crafted wood rotating curio cabinet. His birch rotating vanity with a beautiful pearl veneer is also displayed.

Cory Robinson created a

triptych of wall hangings featuring mirrors.

One of the most intriguing pieces is Kim Winkle's room divider made of plastic body bags hung from metal stretchers on casters. The "post-mortem" room divider is dark but elegant in spite of the modest materials employed.

Now in its second year, this exhibit gives the public a chance to view furniture as art. "We also wanted to support furniture design students by giving them a showcase," said Divan + Studio showroom manager Alida Bracker, who co-curated the exhibit with Fobes and Maruyama.

Most of the works are for sale at prices ranging from a few hundred dollars to more than \$1,000. The exhibition also fea-

tures pieces by program instructors Maruyama, who made a "Frog Kiss" cabinet, and Fobes, who displays an imaginative wall cabinet featuring a starfish design.

The exhibit continues at Divan + Studio at 7661 Girard Ave. through Aug. 30. Admis-

sion is free. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. For more information call (858) 551-0405.

Pat Stein is a free-lance writer.



Mesa College student Brittany Elliott crafted this chaise from tubular steel and ribbon mahogany. For his side table incorporating "found objects," another Mesa college student, Marvin Brown, used a baseball bat. Divan + Studio