

April 27th, 2014
SMPII Final Paper

“Save the Environment, Help the Economy. Reuse, Repurpose, Recycle”

Aside from an education, hard work, and talent the most important thing for mental growth is experience. With the help of my family and my Bolivian and Portuguese background I have been blessed with the opportunity to not only learn and live abroad but also to study my true passions at one of the best colleges in Maryland. My experiences abroad, my family background, all combined with an American education have enhanced my persona and lead me to believe enough in myself to chose art as a career. From my infatuation with the Tiahuanaco ruins in Bolivia to my love for protecting the environment I have traveled a long way this year regarding my artistic concepts. My studies in the Art major have lead me to create an environmentally friendly piece for my St. Mary’s Project. While researching on both the artistic and social aspects of economic and environmental sustainability I was able to create an interactive trading center, similar to a store, encompassing everyday functional items made out of found and recyclable materials.

The act of becoming self-sustainable is a challenging one, but I believe that by embracing the interconnectedness of art and nature is a great way to start bringing awareness to people about the negative effects of consumption and waste on our environment. I create everyday objects with recycled and found materials to promote both economic and environmental sustainability. I remember watching small communities abroad reusing recycled materials and other objects which would normally be considered “trash” to build everyday items and homes. In one project in Colombia, people hand built homes out of layers of plastic bottles and cement. A

small community in Costa Rica started making mats and pillow cases out of plastic bags. I remember going to school in Bolivia during my early childhood and creating toys out of anything we could find. Over time I started seeing communities arranging larger projects by reusing recyclable material such as bags, bottles, paper, cardboard, jewelry, and even dry plants and sticks. The people making these “arts” were called artisans. Usually one would find these artisans in the markets sitting on small wooden stools with their work set on top of bed sheets or a small table. You might even consider architects artisans because even some architects in Uruguay and Venezuela designed homes out of plastic and glass bottles for the working and lower classes. From my own experiences I have seen that many countries have been starting to look at ways to reuse or repurpose objects in order to become more financially stable and to protect their natural resources.

The volume of trash amounting in the United States has increased over the years not only due to overconsumption but also because of our uninformed society. We have created a consumer based society where the purchasing of materials is highly based on aesthetics. Our materialistic society has raised many concerns with economy fluctuations and the exhaustion of natural resources. I want to use art to bring awareness to the public, specifically the St. Mary’s community, regarding the harmful effects of waste on the environment. I want to help people realize that they can help both the economy and the environment by reusing materials to create functional objects such as clothes, tables, chairs, bags, lamps, candles, etc. Art is a great way to change personal attitudes about the environment, it enhances motivation and it makes the experience a lot more personal for the viewer. Unlike environmental and economic policies art promotes a more visual and hands-on experience. Current policies provide communities with blue recycling bins but they do not inform or educate them on where the material is going or how

it is being discarded. I want to help my community look into their creative side and use their imagination. We tend to lose creativity as we grow up but the more we embrace it the more positive change can be made in our society. By repurposing found materials and recyclables into something useful everyone can collaborate to create a better future for ourselves and the environment.

For this interactive piece I have used all the materials available to me, transformed them, and generated a Create or Trade-In center containing everyday objects. Alongside these various items I have added specific instructions about the time spent and the materials used to enforce the concept of labor. The concept of labor is a huge aspect to my project. The United States gets most of their supplies from other countries where the labor is a lot cheaper and the things that are made nationally decrease each year. I asked the St. Mary's community for donations of materials and recyclables and used them to create things like mirrors, bags, and candles. I also used found materials lying around campus and repurposed them into common objects people purchased regularly. I then created the trading center out of shelves from wood pallets and plywood and added a small working station with several boxes named after the materials they contained. The public could go into this working station and create something out of the available materials. To serve as a guide I placed instruction tags on the items with the time spent per item and also situated creating and trading instructions on the entrance to the center. The act of trading was meant to get people to think more about the purpose and the action behind the piece rather than the monetary and marketing aspect.

When entering the Create or Trade-In center the public could either repurpose an object and place it on the shelves or repurpose an object/material and trade it in with an item of equal size and time spent. The labels on the items were there for guidance but each individual could

create whatever they pleased as long as it was functional. During the making of this piece, I moved away from the traditional artist role and the institutionalized gallery in order to make a community project. I was not only an artist but a merchant, a designer, a creator of everyday objects and an environmentalist. I wanted to stay away from what society deemed as art by looking at my work as ordinary objects and placing them in a familiar setting without constituting them as artwork. I believe this helped me better get in touch with the audience while giving them a personal experience and a new way of looking at art –they were now not only taking the role as the viewer but as participants. Two artists that have influenced my work heavily are H.A. Schult and Claes Oldenburg. Although they vary in conceptual goals both artists have impacted my own ideas and helped me understand my project and fulfill its purpose.

Ha Schult takes it upon himself to make the public aware of environmental and social issues by means of what he calls “action art”. He is a conceptual artist known primarily for his object and performance art and more specifically his work with garbage. He brings environmental awareness to different communities by making some things as small as sculptures of human (replicated a thousand times over) to a big hotel structure, which is all created out of found trash. His *Trash People* represents the people of today, consumed by materials that inevitably are thrown away and claimed as useless. His willingness to show over-consumption by consumers (especially in America) by gathering and utilizing all the trash he could and create art from these materials was very mesmerizing. Not only is Schult aware of the damage that is being caused to the planet by all the garbage but he is also trying to help the public become aware of what kind of impact their actions have. By using creativity and making something new out of it, the waste the public usually throws away can be used in a more healthy and productive manner. In a statement on his website, Schult stresses the fact that artists today are free as never

before to use the materials they like, even trash. And, using something we are so connected with seems obvious to Schult:

“During the past three decades, everyday elements have been influencing art more and more strongly, and art has been responding to everyday life more and more quickly. In no other era has been anything like this dialogue between art and everyday life.” (haschult.de)¹.

At the core of Schult’s activities is the questioning of our relationship towards the natural world and the function of man in the world. The environmental concept of ecological citizenship, correspondingly, is based on the need for human beings to acknowledge their obligations towards other members of the biotic community. Many artists who engage with the contemporary notion of sustainability “share an understanding for ecological equality and exercise care before embarking on any project likely to have adverse effect on the eco systems they inhabit” (Gomez, 26)². Similar to my conceptual ideas of my work, HA Schult embraces the interconnectedness of art and nature and aims to use these theories and concepts through art to make people aware of how much consumption and waste affect our natural resources. The combining of science and the arts might be a possible solution for bringing the passionate implementation of sustainable development. Sustainable organizations need to look into the arts and reinforce creativity and innovation. I believe that it is important to incorporate the arts into sustainability like HA Schult did in his past global influential works.

In the past I tried to utilize all the materials I could find that others discarded in order to challenge my creativity. For example, last semester I presented a piece that contained all used

¹ Schult, H.A. “Action”. 1993. Web. <http://www.haschult.de/picture-boxes>

² Gomez, Aurelia. “Instructional Resources: American Art of Conspicuous Recycling.” *Art Education*. Vol. 52, No.3. The Practice of Art Education. National Art Education Association. May, 1999. 25-40.

and found materials I collected around campus, within my room and “junk” box. I created a tree-like sculpture out of colorful tissue paper pieces, a cardboard I received from an art student’s pile of trash, and an interesting object made out of wood and cement that I found on the “T” parking lot on campus. This “action art” has a strong impact on the viewer because s/he actually visually experiences the effect that one is causing the environment. Like, Schult, I also believe it is important to take action by using art and impacting or interrupting the public’s thinking and actions. But instead of reproducing mass quantities of art made out of trash to demonstrate how consumerism affects the environment I am more interested in applying the concept of sustainability. I believe that sustainability is very important in our current society especially with the increase in population and global warming. This project allowed me to use my creativity and passion to make innovative functional work while bringing awareness to the public.

Claes Oldenburg has very interesting conceptual ideas dealing with his interaction with the formality of objects, the role of the artist, and consumerism. His well-known installation and later performance piece, *The Store* that derived from his previous piece called *The Street* demonstrate his ideas and conceptual goals expressively. Oldenburg and I share some common ideas specifically within his *Store* piece but although our ideas might be similar our reasons or purpose behind our work varies. Oldenburg and I both use common materials to create everyday objects but the difference is that Oldenburg thinks of the store as a human body part; a container for objects which he refers to as organs. A similarity is that we both look at the effects of consumerism on society and challenge the role of the artist by creating replications of everyday commercial and manufactured objects through art.

Claes Oldenburg once asked himself “why should I even want to create “art” – that’s the notion I’ve got to get rid of. Assuming that I wanted to create something, what would that thing

be? Just a thing, an object...” (Store Days)³. Oldenburg seems to have deconstructed the term of “art” and has simply chosen to create materials that pull apart from the institutionalized art world. With his passion and interest in everyday life situations Oldenburg strives away from the iconic art form and focuses more on the making and creation of the specific material and object he is making. Oldenburg believes that objects (in art form) can be taken away from the maker, from life in general, to freeze in space (Oldenburg and the Feeling). He wanted to give life to his work by creating everyday objects out of simple materials such as cardboard, clothes, bottles, etc. and covering them with plaster.

The Store (1961) was an interior that suggested the “unconscious, an intimate, personal “elsewhere”” (Hochdorfer, 34)⁴. Like a body, the store enclosed materials and the public could only get a sense of the whole once they were within the piece. Oldenburg planned to bring life to his objects by making them interact with one another within the same setting. Although I want to transform common materials into everyday objects like Oldenburg I do not necessarily base my objects on forms that interest me but create them based on materials that are harmful to our environment. I want to bring awareness to my community by using the store to represent everyday consumer objects made out of recycled and found materials. So, in other words, Oldenburg and I share the same conceptual goals in that we make site specific work, referring to the store, and transform objects with our available materials in order to question a specific societal way of living. But whereas Oldenburg uses his objects to demonstrate the superficial

³ Oldenburg, Claes & Emmett Williams. “Claes Oldenburg’s Store Days: Documents from the Store and Ray Gun Theater 1961-1962”. Something Else Press, NY. 1st edition. 1967.

⁴ Hochdorfer, Achim. “Claes Oldenburg: The Sixties”. Prestel Publishing. Pg. 34. March 20, 2012.

theatrical aspect of his objects and store to represent consumerism, I use the objects and store to bring environmental and economic awareness on the piling trash within our community.

Specific works that I believe have succeeded in resonating my ideas are the notebooks and the handbags I have made out of plastic bags. They show that with a little creativity you can repurpose materials and create a functional object. Both are everyday functional materials that can be recycled, they make the audience think about the things they have laying around and gives them ideas on how they can repurpose them. The handbag is made out of yellow, orange, and blue Washington Post bags each cut into small strips and then loomed one after the other. The total time of the work was around six hours. The bag is similar to something we all have seen before in the market and I made it so it is aesthetically pleasing, functional, and reusable. It is easy and fun to make and serves a purpose. Similarly, I created notebooks out of cardboard, recycled paper, thread, buttons, and wrapping paper. On the outside the notebooks look stylish and decorative. The bright and contrasting colors as well as texture on the wrapping paper, the buttons, and the strings attract the viewer in and its functionality makes the viewer think further as to how the item was made. Although they are not completely original and are similar to other notebooks that exist in stores they are made out of recyclable and found materials, help the environment, and save money.

Overall I am proud of what I accomplished this semester. From my artist influences to portraying my adventures abroad I have found a way to express my ideas vividly. There is no greater happiness and joy than to see the ideas from my head rise into reality and see them succeed. While questioning the role of the artist and of myself I was able to find a middle ground where I did not necessarily have to fit the standards of the artist or change the context of my work to fit within traditional art. Instead, I combined my passion and interest in other fields

including social issues and the environment with the artistic concepts and aesthetics I learned in previous classes. I was able to combine my other interests creatively by integrating both analytical and artistic worlds. Art helped me reach out to others in my community at a wider scale and gave me an opportunity to communicate with the public through engagement, interactivity, and a good cause.

Annotated Bibliography

Axsom, Richard H. "Printed Stuff: Prints, Poster, and Ephemera by Claes Oldenburg A Catalogue Raisonne 1958-1996". Hudson Hills Press. 1st edition. September 2, 1997. Print.

This book is a short summary of Claes Oldenburg's artistic career, mainly discussing his extensive printmaking development. Oldenburg is described as a leading pop artist and influential creator of public monuments. He used a wide variety of materials such as book jackets, business cards, announcements, and other objects that do not fit into traditional print making. This book further describes Oldenburg's wide interest in varied media and forms of expression while expanding the artists printing boundaries of woodblocks, etching, lithographs, and screenprints. Oldenburg experiences with various materials to create art within certain boundaries, in this case print making. Similar to my project where I question the role of the artist in using art to bring awareness, he questions the traditional role of the artist when it comes to printmaking and the materials and technique used. Like Oldenburg, I want to expand my technique by thinking outside of the box and using everyday materials to create art. Oldenburg creates his objects out of plaster (or covers materials with plaster) and modifies them into his own portrayal of the object. I also am using other materials to create art but I am using art to bring awareness to people instead of simply creating *art* based on aesthetics and gallery placement. I want my work to have a specific effect on the viewer and community as a whole.

Dockstader, Fredrick J. "Indian Art in South America" Pre Colombian and Contemporary Arts and Crafts. New York Graphic Society Publishers Ltd. Greenwich, Connecticut U.S.A, 1967. Pg. 46-48. Print.

Fredrick Dockstader discusses the different cultural ideas behind the early art in South America specifically referring to Peru and Bolivia. He talks about the existence of city-states monolithic stone structures, major political organization, and elaborate material wealth as well as the relationship between men and their cultural environment. Dockstader also offers information on the history of the ruins of Tiahuanaco in Bolivia, Cuzco, sacasahuaman, machu picchu, chan chan, and similar well-developed urban centers in Peru and the different languages as well as education barriers. This book enhanced my knowledge on the history of the ruins of Tiahuanaco, their stone structure, and how they built their empire.

Gomez, Aurelia. "Instructional Resources: American Art of Conspicuous Recycling". *Art Education*. Vol. 52, No. 3. The Practice of Art Education. May, 1999. 25-40. National Art education Association. Print. Accessed January 10, 2014.

In this article, Aurelia Gomez looks at various artworks made of recycled materials including jars, quilts, and installations made by various artists. The article also characterizes the use of recycling "junk" as a means for creating art by exploring various recycling traditions that are present in the United States. Gomez demonstrates to students that "junk" can be fashioned into beautiful works of art and offers four works of art and provides discussion questions and project

ideas for each artwork. It is time I refer to myself as an environmentalist. Like HA Schult, I aim to use art in order to bring environmental awareness to my community. I believe that it is essential that my community start thinking about the harmful materials around them and use their own creativity to make purposeful art. I strive to help my public become aware of how repurposing recyclable material into functional objects will not only help the environment but also save them money.

Hochdorfer, Achim. "Claes Oldenburg: The Sixties". Prestel Publishing. 320. March 20, 2012. Print.

This extensive book discusses the complex early work of Claes Oldenburg and the idea of using public space to form interactivity. It examines his early exhibitions and how his work changed through time, his influences, as well as the development of his conceptual ideas for future projects. The book features works including *The Street* and *The Store* and their accompanying performances; "the highly influential spectacular sculptures of everyday objects as well as drawings and preparatory collages for public projects from the 1960s" (9). Since this is my first installation project where it is both interactive and a performance piece, I think this book is great in helping me better comprehend how Oldenburg managed to be successful when exhibiting his work, specifically *The Store*. Oldenburg installs his *Store* with weirdly shaped objects made out of plaster. The objects he chose to portray in his store were ones that fascinated him based on its form and size. I want to make an interactive piece where the viewer will be more engaged in the work than in Oldenburg's *The Store*, and where s/he will be able to become aware of their actions by creating functional objects. Whereas Oldenburg then starts to create a theatrical performance within his piece I want to make the viewer part of the work but not as a performance but as an act to bring awareness and enforce interactivity.

Leslie, Esther. *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry*. London, UK: Reaction Books. 2005. Print.

Esther Leslie offers new insights into the place of the material object and the significance of the organic and inorganic within the realm of science. She discusses the development of chemistry into art and how its studies have strongly created the base of materials artists are currently very fond of. Leslie also talks about the structure of different materials and its extent of artist manipulation. Through Leslie's comments and reference to historic chemistry and art, I found a better understanding on the makeup of materials and how they interact with each other when in a whole. Since I am using mostly synthetic materials for my project I wanted a better understanding on how specific materials or objects harmed the environment and how I could represent that by transforming these objects. Lisa suggested I concentrate on the materials or objects that are actually harming our environment such as plastics, newspaper, and detergent bottles. The more I understand the function of the object the better I can transform it to become something creatively useful and simple, especially when presenting it to an audience (within the "store" setting).

Oldenburg, Claes & Emmett Williams. "Claes Oldenburg's Store Days: Documents from the Store and Ray Gun Theater 1961-1962". Something Else Press, NY. 1st edition. 1967. Print.

Claes Oldenburg talks about one of his well known works called *The Store*. He discusses his inspirations and his conceptual ideas as to where the idea of the “object” derived from, his obsession with certain forms, and his manipulation of it. Oldenburg wanted to create a functional store where he constructed popular objects of merchandise out of materials that were easily accessible to him. After using everyday materials such as clothes he added plaster in order to create sculptures. He would make these objects in the back of his store and then sell them in the front. Oldenburg replicated sculptures that looked like food (ex. *Big Sandwich*) and coffee-shop goods and clothes. He used creativity to transform everything he had into popular consumer products which is related to what I want to do. Although Oldenburg is working with the idea of consumerism and it is not the focal point of my work, a similarity is the idea of the store as a place to hold everyday object. Similar to his artwork, I want to create a functional and interactive store that embodies everyday objects such as clothes, shoes, chairs, and mirrors, only I do not necessarily transform objects based on the forms that attract me (like Oldenburg) but, instead, I create objects based on what is possible to build out of the material I gather.

Oldenburg, Claes, & Germano Celant. “Oldenburg and the Feeling of Things”. *Claes Oldenburg: An Anthology*. Guggenheim Museum Pubns; 2nd Edition. 12-28. September 1995. Print.

This biography talks about Claes Oldenburg as one of America's most influential artists. His subject-matter is the everyday object -food, clothing, and mechanical devices- which he recreates with sculpture, drawings and performances. The book talks about Oldenburg’s exhibition of his works by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Guggenheim Museum. Oldenburg's earliest work represented the street life of New York where he came up with the idea of *The Store* “an array of painted, plaster sculptures of food and clothing, and to his soft sculptures, drawings for fanciful monuments, and large-scale public projects made with Coosje van Bruggen”. To Oldenburg, objects have a mind of their own. Objects are given a specific meaning to them based on their contextual surrounding not solely based on the artist’s actions. Oldenburg takes out the contextual meaning within an object (such as an ice-cream or cake) and concentrates on the form itself to recreate the same object with other materials or create the same object with a different purpose. Oldenburg then makes a performance piece within *The Store* to enhance the theatrical essence of humans interacting with certain objects and materials in a very sensual way which is not at all similar to my work. I do not intend to make my work theatrical. I want it to be a work by itself but by maintaining the interactive aspect to it. I am attacking real threatening issues that I’m hoping I can get people involved in.

Oldenburg, Claes. “I am for an art...”. *Claes Oldenburg’s Store Days*. Something Else Press, NY. 1st edition. 1967. Print.

Claes Oldenburg vividly describes what type of art he is into and the type of artist he strives to be. He talks about the various ways objects can be looked at and that they do not have to necessarily be inside a museum or gallery in order to be considered “art”. Oldenburg questions the physicality of art and recreates weird situations that others wouldn’t constitute as art. Some interesting visuals he mentions are “art out of a doggy’s mouth” or “art that sheds hair”. To

Oldenburg, the art itself does not have a specific form but instead a relation to something else, the context within and outside of the art. I like how he uses everyday material and events to bring them to people's attention. He sees creativity in everything and questions his passion and attraction towards certain things. Some of his conceptual ideas are similar to mine because I am also looking at art from a different perspective. I am not only challenging the role of the artist by making community art and engaging those around me but I am also using art to show people how to become economically and environmentally sustainable.

Redstone, Louis G. "Public Art: New Directions". McGraw-Hill Inc, 1985. Print.

Louis G. Redstone discusses on the physical space of modern art and how it is connected to the everyday environment. Today's public art aims to express the multifaceted character of our society, and this trend has been influenced by the public interest in the arts, sponsorship and support of art by government. This book offers steps we should take in order to become more aware of public art and how to help those around us become more aware of the benefits that come with it. It encourages leaders of all levels to advance public art as environmental art in order to stimulate the general public to become aware of the value of beauty in everyday life. Since this is my first interactive instillation that I will be creating for our community I believe it is very important for me to have a background on the realms of public art and what others before me have done. I am planning on using the campus center, a popular public space where most of our students gather up, in order to present my environmentally friendly store and recyclable objects. In hope to bring environmental awareness I will create a small table with a set of materials for people to create things. The store will be open to everybody and anybody who is willing to get creative as well as informed.

Warburton, Diane. "Community & Sustainable Development: Participation in the Future". Routledge. 224. October 1, 2009. Print.

This book focuses on the most important idea within my project, the art of sustainability. It adds meaning to the concept of sustainable development while deepening our understanding of this very important economic and environmental challenge. Diane talks about development as the most important aspect of the future -a future in which people have the resources to meet their needs. This basic message of sustainable development recognizes the need to conserve environmental resources, but also to support and build human needs through recycled and easily attainable materials. The idea of creating economic and environmental awareness in my community is very important to me. The reason I chose to use art to demonstrate this importance to the public was not only because art is what I am passionate about and because I understand it but mostly because it make the experience a lot more personal for the viewer. Art does what political and social regulations cannot, it helps the viewer look at these types of issues from a different perspective; it gives them an opportunity to be creative and have fun.

Young-Sanchez, Margaret. "Tiwanaku: Ancestors of the Inca". Denver Art Museum, University of Nebraska Press. Lincoln and London. 2004. Print.

Margaret Young-Sanchez dives into the explicit cultural traditions of the Tiwanaku people. It explains their love for the natural world and how they praised it within their very geometric architecture. The Inca enhanced their pedigree by claiming Tiwanaku as their own place of origin. Architectural building was based on highly intensive physical labor from building water canals to walls made from finely cut and fitted stone, the Tiwanaku people were very hard working and most of their encouragement came from their beliefs and religion where they often made sacrifices in honor to the Sun god, the moon, water, and other figures they worshiped. This book delves into the history of their lives and the labor put into their architecture such as that of their stone walls.