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Alchemist artist turns trash to treasure

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If you see Lanny Lasky going through your garbage, don't be alarmed. She's taking your junk to a better place — her art studio.

For years, the Riverdale resident has gone Dumpster diving to give new life to trashed objects like the wheels of a tiny toy baby carriage or a severed doll head.

Back in her studio, she takes the prized possession, mixes it with natural materials like metal and wood, and makes it the centerpiece of her sculpture.

"There is always something that fascinates me, that gets me started," said Ms. Lasky. "In my studio there are boxes and boxes of things — things that are green, things that are blue."

Through Dec. 2, more than 30 of Ms. Lasky's most recent abstract pieces can be seen at the Upstream Gallery, a spacious brick-faced venue in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.

Ms. Lasky, who retired as arts administrator from the Museum of Modern Art in 2001, strives to make subtle comments with her work. "I would say all of my work has a human comment, almost a dark humor," she said.

That dark humor is evident in "Childe Harold," an eerie piece depicting a doll head in a square box with wooden shoe trees for arms.

Similarly, "Once And Future Things" is a box with shelves and thumbnails of old portraits.

But her work isn't all macabre.

Taking advantage of her son's job at a pinball machine repair shop, Ms. Lasky culled various pieces of an old pinball game to create "Circus," which she describes as "a whole big explosion of colors."

The piece is made from the targets on pinball machines, and Ms. Lasky threw in a small ladder for good measure.

While they may seem like a hodge-podge of items, Ms. Lasky's works allude to deeper meanings without spelling them out. "I want the visual to be important, not the story part or you could make your own story," she explained, on a recent tour of the gallery space.

Ms. Lasky has been a member of the cooperative gallery with 20 artists for the last decade or so. The artists share costs and responsibilities and take turns exhibiting their artwork.

Though the quaint studio in bucolic Dobbs Ferry does have its drawbacks. "I wish there was more traffic," said Ms. Lasky. "The opening is always packed but then there is very little traffic."

Still, audience or not, Ms. Lasky remains undaunted, creating artwork from objects many simply overlook, like miniature paper chairs. In her aptly titled piece, "Chairs," there are rows of neatly assembled tiny white chairs like ones a wee doll would use.

"It's a whole echo of a child's life," Ms. Lasky explained of the piece. "You can tell all sorts of stories about them."

Lanny Lasky: Recent Works' will be on display through Sunday, Dec. 2, at the Upstream Gallery, 26 Main St. in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y. The gallery is open Thursday through Sunday, from 12:30 to 5:30 p.m. For more information, call 914-674-8548. To see more of Ms. Lasky's work, go to www.lannylasky.com.



Photos by Claudio Papapietro

LANNY LASKY'S sculpture 'Childe Harold,' top photo, is one of the darker pieces she has on display at the Upstream Gallery in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y. Above, she discusses her mixed-media piece 'Circus,' a colorful concoction made from the old parts of a pinball machine.



'SUMMER WAGON' incorporates objects Ms. Lasky found at flea markets.