

RECYCLED RUNWAY

SAIL students create fashion show with reclaimed materials

Amanda Karioth Thompson
Council on Culture & Arts

Every second, the equivalent of one garbage truck of clothing is burned or dumped in the landfill. Textile dyeing is the second largest polluter of water, after agriculture. Polyester garments shed microfibers in the wash that pass into our waterways and harm aquatic life.

The negative ecological effects of the fashion industry are numerous and, in an effort to address them, many designers are going green.

There is a global trend towards sustainable fashion. Brands as recognizable as Adidas and Nike have committed to reducing the use of natural resources and are instead using reclaimed plastics. New lines of sunglasses, shoes and even wedding gowns are being created from shoreline and ocean waste.

Students at SAIL high school are getting involved by exploring how to create stylish designs from an array of recycled materials.

Rosa Cefalu, fiber arts teacher at SAIL, initiated a fashion show last year to showcase her students' creations. Expanding on the success of the inaugural event, she encouraged her emerging designers to consider possible themes for this year's show.

They were inspired by the unconventional

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Using creative problem-solving skills, students created wearable ensembles from recycled materials.

PHOTOS BY AMANDA THOMPSON



SAIL students were moved to create fashion with a conscience.

Runway

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materials challenge from the reality television series “Project Runway” and they were moved to create fashion with a conscience.

“This year we decided to use recycled materials. We reached out to the community and we were overwhelmed with stuff. My classroom was full of cardboard boxes, bottle caps, those mesh bags that oranges come in and every possible thing you can think of,” said Cefalu who teamed up with Sheri Nilles, one of SAIL’s art teachers.

Nilles’ students used the same materials to create sculptures of endangered animals which were displayed during the fashion show.

To give her fiber art students some context, Cefalu introduced them to designers who are working in similar ways. “We looked at other artists who make entire gowns out of recycled materials. One of them pulled and used all the things that were recyclable out of one garbage truck. It was surprising to see all the things that shouldn’t have been in there.”

Students felt free to explore and experiment with the recycled materials which allowed for more innovative designs. “They weren’t worried about ruining the materials,” noted Cefalu. “They get really nervous about taking fabric out of the closet even though it’s all donated. I try to remind them that my classroom is made for mistakes. You’re not going to be great at this right away. You have to learn and practice. They feel a little more comfortable with the recycled materials.”

Though students were eager to use new media in their creations, they were faced with conceptual and construction issues that required creative problem-solving skills. “I had a lot of challenges,” admitted 12th-grader Theresa Hume. “There was the challenge of getting my ideas out and also the physical challenge of sewing and making my ideas a reality. I had to find a way to turn it into an outfit and make it wearable.”

Theresa upcycled an old dress that she restructured into a skirt. “I made the shirt from a party tablecloth and some mesh. I found these caps to something and thought they’d make cool accents. I try to find ways to reuse my old clothes but I never actually took stuff right out of the recycling and tried to make a garment.



Sheri Nilles' art students used recycled materials to create sculptures of endangered animals.

AMANDA THOMPSON

It’s something I’ve learned I can do” she said.

Kaleb Murphy, also has experience upcycling. The 11th-grader said “I reuse a lot of old clothes. I take my dad’s clothes and I alter them to fit me. I’ll do that for other friends too.” Kaleb worked with a partner to create a theatrical wizard ensemble complete with a dramatically oversized hat.

“We cut the big brim out of cardboard and reinforced it with wire and built the frame. Then we did a lot of layers of paper mache with newspaper so it would stand on its own. The capelet is made from plastic bags.” Kaleb hopes to refine his design skills beyond high school and said, “I’m planning to go into textiles and professional costuming.”

To some, the fashion industry can feel frivolous or shallow, but it has substantial cultural, social, economic and environmental impact. By engaging her students in the process and introducing them to the scale on which the planet produces fashion, Cefalu is inspiring them to think critically and be creative.

“I just want my students to not be afraid to try things and make stuff. If you can pull in materials that you don’t have to buy, you’re reusing things and helping the environment as well as getting to feature your creative side. That’s really great.”

Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Interim Executive Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area’s umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org)