



GLEAN artists Colin Kippen, Jessina (Tyner) Mehta, Malia Jensen, Willie Little and Caryn Aasness attend the 2021 artists in residence show at the Maddox Building in NW Portland.

Scenes from two GLEAN exhibitions

By Arashi Young

Feb. 11, 2022 4:33 p.m.

Leaning into chaos

At the 2021 GLEAN opening reception on January 21 at the Maddox Building in NW Portland, the artists in residence spoke about their experiences gleaning at Metro Central transfer station. Their task was to discover discarded objects and materials and turn them into works of art.

The GLEAN program is a partnership between Metro; Recology, the waste management company that operates Metro South; and Cracked Pots, a non-profit organization that focuses on art and waste reduction. The art program aims to inspire people to think differently about the things they throw away.

Artist Malia Jensen said that it has been very hard to make art over the last two years due to the trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic. When she was awarded the GLEAN residency, she said going to the dump became a working meditation and gave her space to

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inspiration to wrestle with trauma.

“It was like leaning into the chaos to imagine that I would get to go spend my spare time at the dump,” Jensen said.



Detail from Malia Jensen's "No Hard Feelings" piece. Made from chrome chair, carved bricks.



Malia Jensen, 2021. "Float" made from carved foam, fish tank, water, black rocks, gold watch, drywall and lumber.

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Malia Jensen, 2021. "Cat" made from Lincoln 60 fire clay, unfired.

Artist Jessica (Tyner) Mehta echoed similar thoughts about letting go of control. She talked about the difference between harvesting and gleaning. Mehta said harvesting implied control over the process, but gleaning meant gathering and making use of leftover things.

"A lot of the time I feel like artists might go into this having an idea of what they are going to create, I certainly did," Mehta said.

But as Mehta went to Metro Central transfer station to find discarded objects to turn into art, her plans changed entirely. Instead of making art that focused on eating disorders, she turned her attention to art that spoke about the Native American residential boarding school experience.

Artists Colin Kippen and Willie Little also took the opportunity to embrace change in their art. Kippen often makes concrete casts of found textures, but was able to pivot from concrete to a paper-based casting material.

"I really wanted to take away cement from my normal practice because it's the number

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two CO2 emitter,” Kippen said.

While Little felt confident that he could find whatever objects he needed for his art, he chose to go in a different artistic direction for the show.

“The work I've been doing for 20 years is about race and that is just so heavy,” Little said. “I know I'm not going to do anything about race at the dump.” Instead, he described conjuring childhood toys for his GLEAN pieces.

Artist Caryn Aasness chose to make some of their art about the experience at the transfer station. They wanted to show that digging at the dump was fun and exciting as well waste conscious. To celebrate the experience, Aasness created commemorative plates by illustrating scenes and patterns onto discarded dishware.

Celebrating 10 years of GLEAN

This month GLEAN also hosted a retrospective show celebrating more than 10 years of the program. The exhibition featured new artworks from the current artists in residence as well as artworks from every previous year.

Art enthusiasts explored the exhibition during the opening at Oregon Contemporary on February 5. Ben Dye's “Sculptured Sound Drum” from 2011 was a popular draw. A note next to the piece invited people to gently play on a drum that had been manufactured from propane tank parts.

Another striking piece was Lynn Yarne's “Oregon Area Underrepresented History Desk” from last year's GLEAN exhibition. The repurposed school desk was covered with graphite portraits of people of color and other underrepresented people with ties to the area who were activists, leaders and change-makers.

In the piece, Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce Native American tribe shares space near Kent Ford, co-founder of the Portland chapter of the Black Panther Party. An image of Teresa Raiford, who leads the Don't Shoot Portland organization, sits across from Peggy Nagae, the lead attorney challenging the constitutionality of curfews imposed on Japanese Americans during World War II.

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Malia Jensen, 2021. "Python" digital video, 3 minutes, 35 seconds.