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ARTS

Burlington exhibition embraces the art of recycling

By **Regina Haggio**

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"Division of Labour," an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Burlington, asks us to make do with less. In this exhibition, however, more is the operative word.

Grand installations by 10 well-established artists fill the cavernous main gallery. I've curated two shows in this space and it is not easy to fill.

The artists, from Canada, the United States and Argentina, draw attention to how much stuff is wasted and how much more waste needs to be recycled. Positioning themselves as exemplars, they make art from materials that have been discarded, and recycle materials from their own earlier works.

Tradition is at the root of this movement. Using ordinary, mass-produced and recycled materials has been the aim of installation art since it began about 100 years ago. There's also a nod to Arte Povera, a movement that started in Italy in the 1960s. Those artists used pre-industrial materials to comment on the excesses of an industrial society. The AGB artists use industrial materials to make a similar point.

Lisa Meecham, an award-winning rug hooker and furniture maker, incorporates scraps from her studio and components of previous projects into a new work of art.

She also reworks a piece many times before she likes what she sees. That makes her process labour-intensive and highly repetitive, like handiwork, which is traditionally associated with women and the use of scraps and recycled materials.

In "Canvas," Meecham creates an abstract composition of geometric shapes by rug hooking. The surface is textured from the raised loops, some of which trail off into loose ends. Flat painted shapes and some exposed bare canvas add contrasting textures.

Atom Cianfarani, a self-described Discarded Commodity Artist, has been a major player in many recycling and sustainability projects.

"Survival Quilting: Operate with Less," a big, space-taking installation, includes some very obvious nonperishable materials: styrofoam and drink boxes. An arched structure constructed from variously shaped pieces of white plastic foam offers a sumptuous surface with pieces sticking out and others receding. We can enter the structure.

A quilt hangs on a wall inside. The quilt, a new fabric made by Cianfarani, comprises plain and patterned patches machine-stitched together. The patterned patches are plastic pouches filled with tiny shredded pieces from 600 Tetra Paks.

Lying nearby are his leftovers — bits and pieces he hasn't used yet. These serve as reminders of his working process. Cianfarani also wants us to know that not everything can be remade or repurposed.

By far the biggest installation belongs to Nicolas Fleming. "A House for Suzanne" — dedicated to Suzanne Carte, the exhibition's curator — is a two-storey house built, appropriately, from construction materials. But these materials are recycled from Fleming's earlier art projects.