MINJI KIM

Sculpture Park Moves into Boston Shipyard

The recent craze to "go green" has motivated people to buy snacks wrapped in biodegradable plastic, use fewer paper towels, and recycle obsessively. But an organization founded just over a year ago adds art into the mix to give recyclables a more exciting fate than being converted into cubes of crushed cans and ground paper pulp. Taking the proverb "One man's trash is another man's treasure" to a whole new level, HarborArts of East Boston shows works made from recycled materials in its first-ever exhibit at the Shipyard Sculpture Gallery.

When Steve Israel, the founder of HarborArts, wandered across the Boston Harbor Shipyard one February afternoon, he was inspired by the beauty of the waterfront and the feeling of being in the right maritime context for his mission. Combining his love of the water and a strong belief that the ocean holds the future for sustainable living, the ex-organic-farmer envisioned his plans in the unconventional exhibition space.

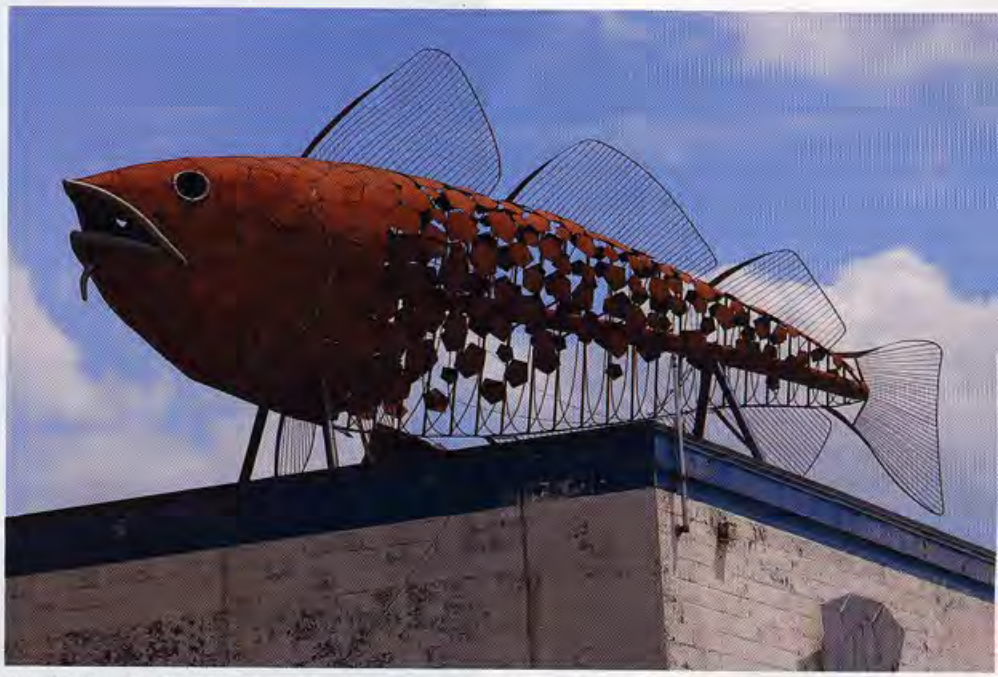
"Using the shipyard as a gallery provides a very unique opportunity for people to view and work in. As a working shipyard, it's already a sculpture unto itself. We're just adding some shapes," Israel said.

Israel's experiences with the repurposing of materials extend back to decades of work in the architectural salvage business. However, Israel decided to turn to art as the medium for his call to action because of its versatility and rich potential for innovative ideas.

"Oftentimes, things get thrown away because we think we have no use for them. But it seems an artist can find a way to a creative use for it," said Israel. "We're also thinking of supplying repurposed materials for art classes. It teaches people to think creatively about reusing, not discarding."

Among his own art projects, he conceived the idea to grab the public's attention by having a huge cod float through Boston Harbor. The whale-sized fish, lit and powered by solar panels, set sail in September 2009, stopping by the Boston Children's Museum and the New England Aquarium.

"What we work with is that wherever water and land meet is a canvas," Israel explained. "If you're driving by and see a monumental sculpture in the water, you're going to start asking questions. I figured if I built a giant fish, people would start asking why."



HarborArts Team (Steve Israel, Roger Baker, Marc Casasanta, Bill McCormick), *Codfish*, steel and mixed media, 40' long. Photo: Gregg Anderson.

The historical cod now rests on top of one of the warehouses facing the entrance to the shipyard. With a long series of lampposts making up its formidable spine, visible through its wire ribs, the rusted fish loyally stands guard and adds whimsy to the otherwise conventional shipyard. Its circular eyes, lined with silver, cylindrical pipes, gaze majestically upward, and except for some metal supports, it appears just about to swim into the sky. The cod's head is covered in a tight framework of hexagonal steel pieces, but the rest of the body sports a sporadic spread of the rusty plates, giving the feeling of movement and elusiveness towards the tail.

With the cod retired now from swimming the harbor, Israel and his team are working on a second fish, an eighty-foot-long sturgeon, to sail down New York's Hudson River in 2010. The sturgeon's voyage will begin in New York and end in Boston, fostering an intrastate dialogue that the HarborArts team hopes to spread internationally.

"It's been an age-old issue. Environmental concerns have been ongoing even twenty years ago in Germany, where I grew up," said Christina Lanzl, who headed HarborArts' international call for art. "It is a very important topic and something that will rise to the forefront. Even with the Gulf catastrophe right now and people are saying that everyone needs to get more involved. It just seems that it's not happening quickly enough."

But the new organization has made lightning progress in its own right, including the acquisition of nonprofit status a couple months ago. The organization is funded by personal donations, and supported by allied organizations including the New England Aquarium and the Urban Arts Institute. HarborArts will eventually be weaned off of Israel's and his friends' funds and transition to targeting private sectors, which they hope will further their progress.

With the help of Lanzl, who works with the Urban Arts Institute, HarborArts took its first steps making the international connection. HarborArts received about fifty entries from around the world in response to the extensive, international call for art. Randi Hopkins, associate curator at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art served as the head juror, and HarborArts was able to glean the absolute

best from an already impressive array of submissions.

"The main criteria were that artists should have experience with large-scale work. As for environmentally-friendly works—well, that's something that we encouraged," said Lanzl. She also added that they consulted members from the HarborArts team and the shipyard to determine the feasibility of the artists' proposals and safety issues regarding climate changes on the waterfront.

Marisa DiPaola, *Twin Octopi*, knitted found nylon, braided found plastic bags and outdoor lights on reinforced chicken wire. 5 x 5 x 4'. Photo: Christina Lanzl.

Those who were selected chose their own sites for their pieces, and their works emerge from the most unexpected of corners in the vast shipyard. An oversized cleaver painted lime-green to subdue its menacing quality stands tall and playfully in front of a cabin decked with old buoys. Bright red-and-blue octopi made from woven pieces of scrap cloth and wire hover high above visitors' heads, swaying and turning with the wind.

The exhibits will continue on a semi-permanent, rotating basis, with another call to art after the summer. Through these successive shows, HarborArts hopes to garner even more attention and expose as many people to its mission. HarborArts demonstrates not only why art is important or useful to society, but also how art can promote a strong, pan-organizational effort to reach a unifying goal.

"With everything we hear, global warming and everything—certainly these are sensitive issues, but I think people need to get involved," said Israel. "Nowadays with all the technology, we're able to talk from different parts of the world. If we're that close, we can find a solution. I think art has a major role there."

Minji Kim *is a senior studying the history of art and architecture at Harvard University. An occasional painter, Minji also writes for* The Harvard Crimson *and* Harvard's Office for the Arts *blog, and has contributed to publications such as* ARTnews *and* Apollo *magazines.*