Make/Do puts reuse on view with 180 objects at the History Museum

Separated by 76 years, what do a 1935 crazy quilt made from Women’s Relief Corps ribbons and a 2011 dress crafted from yellow plastic “caution” tape have in common? Creative reuse of manufactured goods whose intended purposes have already been fulfilled. Make/Do: A History of Creative Reuse focuses on the constantly evolving, cyclical nature of our relationship with objects, and takes a look at historical transitions of reuse and single use. It reminds us that before upcycling was a thing, it was “the” thing.

Washington State History Museum visitors can explore 180 objects generated through upcycling, downcycling and recycling, and learn how the Northwest has responded to the cycle of use and reuse. Cultural, geographic and industrial influences, among others, have given regional makers and their objects a distinct character.

Make/Do opens July 14 and will be on view through December 6, 2018. Be among the first to tour the galleries, try the makerspace, and meet some of the makers at a Preview Party on Thursday, July 12, 6:30 PM. The Preview Party includes appetizers and a no-host bar; it is free for WSHS members or $15.00 for non-members; details at WashingtonHistory.org/events.

“Upcycling’s taken on new life in recent years with a renewed focus on reuse. However, there was once a time when upcycling wasn’t just a hobby, it was a way of life. The Historical Society’s collections are full of examples of creative ‘making do’—flour sack clothes, stacking toys made from tin cans, that sort of thing,” said Lead Curator Gwen Whiting. “We wanted to embrace the regional nature of this topic, so we connected with historical societies, museums, and organizations across the state in our search for the historic and the contemporary. Objects from all over Washington and parts of Oregon are represented in the show. It is our hope that people will be able to make connections between the exhibition, what’s happening today in their community, and memories from their own family history.”

In addition to delving into our relationship with objects over time, the exhibition explores the idea of how reuse can build community. In the past, women gathered for quilting circles or knit-ins. During hard times and war, Washingtonians united to remake old items into new, whether it be to support troops overseas or to use in everyday life. This community-building trend continues today in creative reuse centers, makerspaces and living rooms across the state.

Portland based eco-artist and educator Nancy Judd, whose work has been added to the Smithsonian’s collections, builds community through fashion. Judd looks at trash not as garbage but as raw materials. An active public speaker, Judd often provides her audiences with such materials on which to write a pledge, later sewing those messages into her fashions. In her TEDxABQ talk, she asked her audience to imagine standing among the waste they’ve generated during their lifetime: “If you’re an average American who lives an average lifespan, that’s 61 tons of trash. But it’s worse than that, because for every one bag
you put on the curb, 70 were created to mine, manufacture, transport, and sell you those goods. So really, you’re sitting in the middle of 4,270 tons of trash. Is that the legacy that you want to leave behind? I hope that you’ll look differently at garbage now, and that instead of seeing waste, you’ll see wasted resources.” Judd’s Caution Dress in featured in Make/Do.

An exhibition about reuse would not be complete without a makerspace, and Earthwise Architectural Salvage has partnered with the History Museum to provide a station for the run of the exhibition. Visitors will have a chance to make a project of their own.

On August 16, Third Thursday, the next generation of creative innovators are invited to practice entrepreneurial skills at the Kids’ Maker Market. Vendors ages 4-18 can rent tables for $10 to sell their handmade wares. Local maker Allison Stewart Bishins of Handmade PNW is organizing this event. Interested youth can apply through the History Museum’s event page or email Allison at handmadepnw@gmail.com. Visitors can shop and enjoy snacks at the Kids’ Maker Market, make crafts at the Tinkertopia booth, and tour the galleries. The museum offers free admission from 3:00-8:00 PM on August 16, generously supported by Columbia Bank.

Make/Do’s material and historical survey of second-life objects includes architectural reuse and salvage, cultural examples of creative reuse, and contemporary objects. Works from multiple artists, makers and institutions show that some trends are timeless.

For more information, see www.WashingtonHistory.org/makedo.

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Press Tour: Tuesday, July 10, 11:00 AM, Washington State History Museum, 1911 Pacific Avenue. Confirm attendance via email to Julianna.Verboort@wshs.wa.gov and request parking pass if needed.
Image credits, top to bottom, left to right:

Nancy Judd, Caution Tape Dress, 2011. Caution tape recovered from the side of the road and sewn onto a vintage sundress. Image courtesy of the artist.


Graham Schodda, Mac, circa 2014-2015. 1940s welding unit for ships and tanks, toasters, Volvo wiring harness, reclaimed wood, camera lenses, bike gloves, Sawzall box, various plumbing and electrical gizmos, 67×30×15 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.


Corncob pipe, circa 1900-1940. The bowl is made from a cob and the stem is turned wood painted in a cob pattern. The tip is bone, a metal ring joins the stem and tip. Collection of Washington State Historical Society, C2018.0.88.

Washington State University School of Design and Construction, construction block made from upcycled drywall waste, 3×6×12 inches. Photo and image courtesy David Drake.

About The Washington State Historical Society

Washington State Historical Society partners with our communities to explore how history connects us all. Founded in 1891, the Historical Society is now in its second century of service. The Historical Society serves Washington citizens through programs across the state including heritage outreach, workshops, the Heritage Capital Grants program, downloadable exhibitions and curriculum, COLUMBIA Magazine — a quarterly journal of Northwest history, and more. The Historical Society’s Research Center, located in Tacoma’s Stadium District and housing collections and archives, is open to the public by appointment. The Washington State History Museum (WSHM) located in Tacoma’s thriving downtown corridor presents ongoing and rotating exhibitions interpreting Washington’s past and present. WSHM is one of six museums in the Tacoma Museum District, and within blocks of the recently renovated Marriott Courtyard and boutique Hotel Murano.

Website: www.WashingtonHistory.org

Washington State History Museum address: 1911 Pacific Avenue, Tacoma, WA 98402
Hours: 10:00 AM–5:00 PM Tuesday-Sunday. 10:00 AM–8:00 PM on the Third Thursday of each month.
Admission: Free for members; $14 for adults, $11 for seniors, students, and active duty and retired military (with ID), $40 per family (up to 2 adults and up to 4 children under age 18), free for children under 5. Patrons with a Washington Quest card or with a Washington Foster Parent license (and ID), $1 per person or $2 per family. Admission is free for all from 3:00-8:00 PM on the Third Thursday of each month, generously sponsored by Columbia Bank.