



SAVING GRACE

WHAT'S OLD IS NEW AGAIN FOR AN ARTIST NEAR DALLAS
WHO BRINGS NEW LIFE TO UNCONVENTIONAL MATERIALS.

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FINE ARTS

The phrase “waste not, want not” takes on a whole new meaning for artist Josephine Durkin, whose studio outside Dallas brims with a curated collection of debris—think paper shards, pink silicone scraps and leftover painter’s tape—used in her art production. Other artists might dispose of such remains, but these odds and ends find new energy in Durkin’s collages, sculptures and kinetic installations. “If a fragment doesn’t function for one piece,” she says, “I can scale and shift it to add color, texture and shape to a new, future work.” From paintings to mechanical apparatuses, each of her series naturally evolves from experimenting with these remnants as well. “The scariest thing for me as an artist is a blank canvas,” she admits. “I work more intuitively with a physical object.”

Though often suggesting organic forms, Durkin’s art doesn’t disguise its origins. The artist calls attention to the materials’ texture with her *Highlighter* series, for instance, by binding together leftovers like fabric swatches, corrugated cardboard and wood, and then making molds of these bundled compositions to create hollow cast-plastic wall sculptures. She photographs similar materials for her *Flora* collages, consisting of sewn photographs, Color-aid paper, painted paper, colored pencil, watercolor crayon and pastel. And she goes a step further to explore the potential movement of these remnants with her kinetic *There Within Reach* installation, featuring printed images of her *Flora* collages ripped into elongated wings and engineered with wires and motors to gently flutter. “I try to celebrate these ordinary materials,” explains Durkin, “and how they can be assembled to create something that’s emotive.”

This constant recycling enables the evolution of her older works as well. The soft, gestural lines of her *Bouquet* sculptures, for instance, originate from a previous wall painting of hers. “I wanted to retain the same gestural line quality of that painting,” she explains, “but have flexibility to create different shapes.” For this series, Durkin printed, cut and transferred photos of her painting onto vinyl, which she then cast in plastic to create sculptures that have the same lines as the original painting. This type of creative experimentation is natural for someone who has been enamored with art since childhood, long before committing to it as a career while attending Virginia Commonwealth University. “I was always excited about materials and technical problem-solving,” recalls Durkin. “As a sculptor, I realized I didn’t have to give up my love for materials and learning how they function.”

This exploration continued during her master’s program at Yale University, where Durkin collaborated with the engineering department



and artist-engineer Natalie Jeremijenko. Today, Durkin is an associate professor of art at Texas A&M University-Commerce.

The artist’s yearning to reinvent found objects in imaginative ways and create meaningful connections among seemingly disparate, insignificant items continues to inspire her unique creativity. “I never know how things are going to contribute to the final piece,” says Durkin, who recently completed shows for Dallas Contemporary, Erin Cluley Gallery, Carthage College and The Box Company. “It may not end up in a future work until years later, but I always know there’s never a shortage of ideas.” ■



Near Dallas, the whimsical studio of artist Josephine Durkin (this page) is a creative laboratory of sorts, filled with everything from colored pastels (opposite, bottom left) to a drill press (opposite, bottom right) used for drilling holes in wood and plastic. Her cat, Dante, (opposite, top) brings his own color to the space.