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step out

BY INA SALTZ

Remixing the Museum

THE BORN-AGAIN MUSEUM OF ARTS & DESIGN REINVENTS ITSELF BY BLURRING BOUNDARIES OF DESIGN & ART.

Ever wonder what to do with the stacks of vinyl stashed in the basement? How about those dated pointy-toe heels in your closet? Way too many plastic forks in your office desk drawer? And what to do about that jar where you dump your change every night? For some creative individuals, the answer to these questions is a simple one: Make art.



ECHOING EXHIBITION

Seven thousand welded nickels make a spectacularly sensual chaise; 9273 plastic spoons and 3091 red rubber bands make an impressive but fragile pyramid; oodles of hypodermic needles form elegant clusters hung from a chandelier. A "wedding gown" made of white latex gloves is simultaneously sculptural and sepulchral. **Records (45 rpm) form a mass of butterflies**, and mashed-together LPs rear up into a giant wave.

"Objects transformed" is the perfect theme for the third reincarnation of the yet-again-renamed Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) in New York City.

Second Lives: Remixing the Ordinary is the museum's first exhibition, shown in a newly transformed building on Columbus Circle,



PHOTO BY JEFF BAIRD

along with the museum's permanent collection. The building is as much an object of design as the collection it now houses.

PHOENIX (RE-)RISING

Formerly known as Huntington Hartford's Gallery of Modern Art, the structure stood virtually abandoned for 40 years, an object of architectural derision in a very public location. In 2002,

JEAN SHIN'S *Sound Wave* (left) repurposes dozens of records, which were melted over a wood armature to create the shape of a cascading ocean wave.

JOHNNY SWING'S *Nickel Couch* (right) is made of about 7000 nickels, 35,000 welds and a substructure of stainless truss works using 350 ft. of stiffening rods.

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PHOTO BY ANNA BEEKE

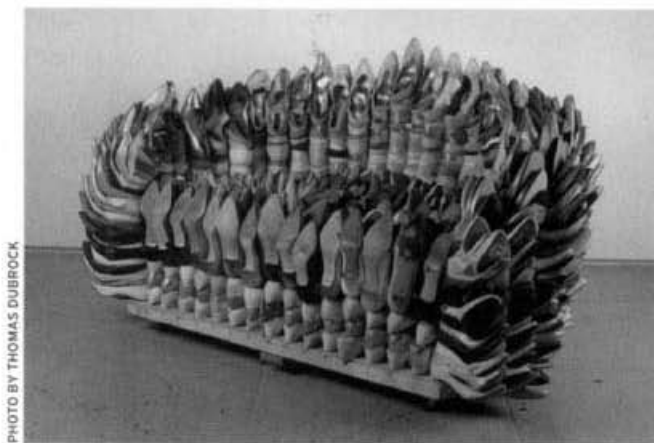


PHOTO BY THOMAS DUBROCK

PAUL VILLINSKI'S *My Back Pages* (top row) incorporates vinyl records, record covers, turntables and wire. Courtesy of Morgan Lehman Gallery, New York

WILLIE COLE'S *Loveseat* (below) is comprised of shoes, wood, PVC pipes, screws and staples.

after years of public battles about the building's future, The New York City Economic Development Corporation focused on redeveloping the site, an unusual island of land exposed on four sides.

Architect Brad Cloepfil of Allied Works Architecture was charged with preserving the building's shape, scale and color (its "memory"). He clad the building's facade in 22,000 ceramic tiles, each 30 x 60 in., finished in a light iridescent glaze. His biggest challenge was to bring light into the building—which previously had almost no windows—and open up sweeping views of the cityscape and Central Park.

MAD's architectural mission (preserving the past while reimagining the future) reflects yet another reinvention of the museum itself. Founded in 1956 as The Museum of Contemporary Crafts, it reopened in 1979 with the new name of the American Craft Museum. For its third incarnation the Museum dropped the C-word from its title entirely (perhaps because of the limited perception of "craft"). It also dramatically increased in space—now 54,000 sq. ft.—and added an auditorium, restaurant and event space, and educational facilities, with interactive artists' studios that are open to the public at all times.

TIMELY TRANSFORMATION

Director Holly Hotchner proclaims that MAD's "expanded mission reflects the ways in which the world of making has expanded."

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PHOTO BY HÉLÈNE BINET

THE MUSEUM OF ART & DESIGN'S CHAZEN BUILDING offers stunning views and plenty of natural light. It was designed by Allied Works Architecture.

There may never be a better time for the museum to redefine itself: As the boundaries between art, craft, pop culture and design have become blurred in today's mix-it-up world, the public is more accepting of "crossover" work, and the definition of art has become more broad-based and inclusive. This expanded vision plays directly to MAD's strengths as a public museum.

So it is fitting that *Second Lives: Remixing the Ordinary* is intended to make us rethink the potential inherent in ordinary, valueless and discarded objects. Fifty-four artists from 18 countries have given new life and meaning to combs with missing teeth, worn hair extensions and surplus stainless kitchenware (in addition to those worn shoes, old records and plastic utensils). The show also reflects the zeitgeist in its underlying "green" recycling theme, apropos of the repurposing that has become so mainstream.

While the museum is trying hard to create a bridge into fresh territories, its elegant and highly stylized new quarters make the effort seem like not so much of a stretch. MAD may finally blur its own boundaries enough to achieve its longstanding desire: to elevate its artists' works into the sphere of fine arts. ☺

www.madmuseum.org

[For the story on MAD's new logo, see page 39.]