

Fusing Fashion art & revenue

Amanda Mohan of Gloucester wears a dress made by her mother, Felicia Ciaramitaro Mohan, from 10 pounds of gold-painted ziti and other pasta to promote her cookbook, "Gifts of Gold: In a Sicilian Kitchen with Sista Felicia."



Clark Linehan

seARTS show celebrates, builds cultural economy

By GAIL McCARTHY

CAPE ANN
North of Boston Life

Christine Gauthier-Kelley of Manchester incorporates her interpretations of photographs taken by the Hubble Space Telescope in her designs. Her silk capes may depict the Orion and Bubble nebulas and other cosmic bodies.

Printermaker Camilla MacFadyen of Gloucester uses seaweed and other fruits of nature to create prints on silk organza, which may become a scarf or dress.

Hannah Thorne, a Manchester Essex Regional High School student, glued pencil shavings in layers upon a paper bodice for her party dress, a design that went on to win three awards.

Theirs were just a few of the pieces paraded on the runway last fall when the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts (seARTS) Cape Ann hosted its second biennial Celebrate Wearable Arts fashion show. The event was a showcase for dozens of Cape Ann artists who experiment with haute couture as they push the boundaries of their imaginations.

Outfits in the show ran the gamut, from hand-painted textiles to a cocktail dress made of 700 Band-aids, to clothing made from newspapers, VCR tape and pasta, as well as cotton, alpaca felt, hemp, muslin and more.

Models donned dresses, jackets, capes, ties, wedding dresses, gowns, beach wraps and even bikinis made from the ubiquitous plastic grocery bags.

Art vs. fashion

While "wearable art" may not be a new concept, it is a concept distinct from what is in vogue.

"There is art that is wearable and there is fashion. I see two clear distinctions," said artist Marion Powers. "While fashion can be strong aesthetically, its purpose is to clothe a human body. It can also be created by designers who are artists and it can look artful. But I think wearable art is a different form. It is art off the wall and worn on the body. Movement of the body adds to the experience of the art for the viewer."

Powers said the process begins with the discovery of materials and mediums of choice.

"It often, then, evolves into an artwork. Many times the end product is very different from the original idea," she said.



Colleen Apostolos models the Zoe dress in silvery silk organza with a full-length blue Penny shell in silk crepe underneath, which is hand-printed with seaweed and wheat. The "Black Flames" necklace is handmade by Beth Williams. The clothing line Suzoe is created by Camilla MacFadyen and her sister-in-law Suzanne MacFadyen.

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Rebecca Dowd of Gloucester models a Mimi top and Harper pants made of silvery-gray silk organza with a seaweed print, created by Camilla and Suzanne MacFadyen.



Manchester Essex Regional High School student Hannah Thorne models a dress she designed and made. Thorne created the texture by sharpening countless pencils and layering the shavings upon the bodice and folding the paper in different ways for the skirt until she achieved a harmony between the two.

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“WEARABLE ART’ IS A FOREIGN AFFAIR USING A LANGUAGE ALL ITS OWN WITH DIALECTS OF FABRIC, FLOWERS, AND EVERYDAY ITEMS THAT TRANSLATES INTO AN EXPERIENCE WHICH SPEAKS TO OUR ESTHETIC AND, HOPEFULLY, PUTS A SMILE ON OUR FACE.”

DEBORAH COULL,
SALON OWNER

In recent decades, there seems to be a renewed focus on wearable arts. Wearable art often involves fibers and jewelry, one-of-a-kind pieces that make a statement.

Wearable arts and revenue

Wearable arts fashion extravaganzas are under way around the globe. New Zealand’s World of WearableArt (WOW) show just celebrated its 25th year, attracting an international audience of more than 50,000. Other shows take place in British Columbia, Australia, and even Juneau, Alaska, which held its 14th annual Wearable Arts show to benefit the local arts council.

In historic Gloucester, Celebrate Wearable Arts II was a benefit for seARTS Cape Ann, an arts consortium founded in 2000 to celebrate and develop the cultural economy on Cape Ann through initiatives and partnerships. Among the goals of seARTS is to help transform artwork into dollars for artists and spark the local economy.

“People are enamored of New England,” said Rita Fucillo, associate publisher of Art New England magazine. “They have a romantic notion of the area, and Cape Ann is representative of that romance and people want to know more, and that’s why it’s growing. Arts can generate a stronger revenue stream.”

Gloucester’s fall fashion show translated into nearly \$19,000 worth of sales for exhibiting artists, of which a portion went to seARTS.

Jacqueline Ganim-DeFalco, chairwoman of the Wearable Arts II committee, also noted the region’s long history of visual arts in its many elements.

“Creativity in all its forms is part of the DNA of Cape Ann,” she said. “The idea behind the show, in part, is about demonstrating how the arts impact so many

aspects of the community.”

The work of seARTS is putting Cape Ann on a greater creative radar. Art New England, a 35-year-old publication, sponsored the second wearable arts show and devotes a section to Cape Ann in each July/August issue.

“The area craved and deserved more attention,” said Fucillo. “The art is strong and vibrant – it’s a real gem. There is a consistent influx of artists, and new galleries opening up on a regular basis, and Art New England became a vehicle to educate people.”

Judith Tolnick Champa, one of the Wearable Arts II judges and editor of Art New England, said the seARTS event was well done.

“There is a great deal of talent there,” she said. “The creative community on Cape Ann is alive and well. That talent is a tremendous asset on the North Shore. We are flagging its formidable presence in our next issue of Art New England (March/April).”

Odd materials

A highlight of the show held at Cruiseport Gloucester was a piece specially made for the event by artist Lorene Ireland, who has a shop on Nantucket. Ireland won an award at the 2011 WOW show in New Zealand when she entered a garment on a whim. Local hairdresser Lucy Glatfelter modeled Ireland’s sculptured plaster corset, which was encrusted with layers of seashells, fine china, and freshwater pearls.

Ireland is an artist and designer first and foremost.

“I have always done decorative sculptures with mosaic art for decades and I found people asking if they can wear my artwork – literally,” she said. “I started making these bustiers and bikinis that were just freehand sculptures made of shells. Then a man asked if I could make one wearable for the New York Couture Fashion Week.”

She obliged. Not long after, she sent a piece to New Zealand. To her surprise, the dress, the skirt of which was a trio of drawers decorated with Ireland’s signature inlay of seashells and pearls, was selected for the show.

“But I didn’t know about the show performances and I hadn’t designed it to be worn 14 times, but it lasted. And then when it won an award, the dress went into the (Canterbury Museum in Christchurch’s) permanent collection,” said Ireland.

By happenstance, Kristine Fisher, a



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Gloucester’s Lucy Glatfelter, a hairdresser at Salon 127, models a piece from Barbara Poole of Lowell’s B_Felt collection. Dedicated to Stevie Nicks, this wool jacket and dress employ hand-dyed printed discharge silks, re-purposed silk organza, vintage wedding silk, a beaded wedding dress, leather and mulberry silk.

seARTS board member, met Ireland at her Nantucket gallery and asked if she would submit a piece for the Gloucester show. Ireland said she would be happy to do so.

Ireland sees a lot of fashion designers who are going beyond just fabric, tulle and beading.

“I see a big transition in the use of odd materials and I see a lot more wearable art shows popping up,” Ireland said. “They are doing more unusual things, and some with big headdresses.”

Powers, who also teaches at Manchester Essex Regional High School, agrees with Ireland.

“As an artist, I work with a lot of non-traditional objects – bathmats, spatter protectors for frying pans, etc. – and I encourage my students to produce art that is inventive and conceptual, as well as aesthetically pleasing,” she said.

Powers urges them to be aware of their surroundings for inspiration and materials for their art.

“A simple everyday task becomes part of their art. In the case of Hannah Thorne, as she sharpened a pencil, she saw possibilities of creations from the

shavings. Julia Paccone walked out of her house and passed by dried grasses and thought to bring them to school to create her dress. I tell my students to see the extraordinary in the ordinary,” she said.

She challenged students in her mixed media art class to create clothing from nontraditional materials. The guests at the seARTS show were charmed by their work, of which Thorne’s pencil shaving dress won a juror’s choice award.

Paccone created an award-winning fashion statement with her dress made from woven, braided, and frayed hemp rope and sea grass. Emily Arnsten made a mermaid dress, with aluminum foil-covered flip tops from soda cans sewn together with dental floss for the bodice and a Mylar skirt. A former student of Powers, Julia Whitten, also entered the show. A graphic novelist, she created a whimsical dress that wove together the tools of her trade – words, illustrations, and a story.

The creative expression goes beyond the wearable art itself.

Deborah Coull and her team from Gloucester’s Deborah Coull Salon volunteered to do the hair and make-up, using the models as their artistic palettes. John Sheehan, an independent stylist, provided the theatrical looks.

“There is no doubt that the ‘Wearable Arts Show’ is an exciting event in which to participate. For stylists and those in makeup artistry, we have witnessed in history a succession of ‘wearable art’ through centuries of hair and makeup,” said Coull. “Experiencing the creativity and expression of these modern artists through textile, floral design and reclaimed materials is exciting. Our place in history is woven into this rich and storytelling legacy.”

“‘Wearable Art’ is a foreign affair using a language all its own with dialects of fabric, flowers, and everyday items that translates into an experience which speaks to our esthetic and, hopefully, puts a smile on our face,” said Coull.

The artists

The imaginative clothing featured in Wearable Art II came from professional fashion designers and fine artists as well as newcomers.

Gloucester’s Daphne Papp, co-chairwoman of the show, recast a fisherman’s net as a beach cover-up, adorning it with sea glass found on local beaches.

Frieda Grotjahn, a German native who makes her home in Gloucester, made a bridal gown from recycled spinnaker sailcloth, adorned with sequins, and trimmed with sailcloth lace.

Gina Russo and Beth Genovese, of Gloucester’s Sage Floral Studio, took the stage by storm with two outfits created completely of flowers and foliage. One design used more than 20 types of flowers; dozens of orange and yellow roses became the bodice, and layers of woodlands became the skirt. The second design – a short and sassy skirt made of birch bark, and a wide tie made of moss – was inspired by New York business-attire style. Other local artists showcasing their apparel were Jen Greeke, with her Harpy Fashions; Janet Souza, whose collages become wearable art; Diane Giardi, whose collection was inspired by the nautical nature of Cape Ann; Gail Roy, a felt artist from Rockport; Frances Osten of Goose Cove Looms, whose shawls are inspired by the changing colors of the New England and the cove outside her studio; Stephen Bates of Ten Pound Studios and Sarah Adams.

A local cook and author, Felicia Ciaramitaro Mohan, jumped into the show, creating a dress using 10 pounds of gilded ziti, in celebration of the release of her cookbook “Gifts of Gold.”

Jane Wilson-Marquis, a New York City designer, showcased two of her lines, and Selina Narovlansky of the Boston area

SAVE THE DATE

Celebrate Wearable Art III is scheduled for Sept. 27, 2015. For more information, visit searts.org.

won the judges award for best wearable art.

Annisquam’s Donna Caselden created a mermaid dress along with an award-winning vertical fishtank table centerpiece.

Gloucester’s Sarah Adams, who recently graduated from Framingham State’s fashion program, exhibited her

recent designs.

Cape Ann jewelers also delve into the world of wearable art. Mahri Bode of Manchester displayed her ornamental metalworking talents with a repousse of sterling silver leaves with natural quartz balls and citrine beads. Beth Williams and Lee Cunningham contributed hand-made necklaces to the event. There was jewelry made by Marcia Settapani, and sea-glass hair accessories and jewelry by Ganim-DeFalco.

The next chapter takes place with Celebrate Wearable Art III, scheduled for Sept. 27, 2015. For more information and more runway looks, visit searts.org. 



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