

# "INVASIVE SPECIES: THE ART OF UPCYCLING"

by Barbara Stodola

"Invasive Species," as the current exhibit is billed, can suggest any number of unwanted visitors to the Lubeznik Center for the Arts, 101 W. Second St.

Three life-sized militaristic mannequins face the entrance, poised for combat. One wears a gas mask and carries guns, grenades: traditional instruments of warfare. The sweetest of the trio, "The Pollinator," is a female, her body assembled from appropriately shaped auto parts.

Gradually, "the invaders" begin to acquire definition and we have to figure out who they are, and how they became "upcycled."

Overhead, a large and beautifully crafted chandelier titled "Ice" is whirling, slowly spinning. Its intricate formations betray their origin: white plastic clothes hangers — dozens of them, probably hundreds, more than anybody needs in a laundry room — put to a purpose previously unimagined.

We came to this exhibit forewarned, expecting unique assemblages of everyday objects, peculiar materials cleverly repurposed and the mockery of "fine art" introduced by Dada almost 100 years ago and still attracting new adherents.



Alan Emerson Hicks' "Ice."



Bryan Sperry's "Lil Bastard."

But what comes across most strikingly is the beauty of these unusual constructions: the artists' concerns with beauty, an almost forgotten concept, and the successful attainment of their goals.

Bryan Sperry's imposing warrior-mannequins are splendid. Alan Emerson Hicks' plastic fixation extends to "Earth Angel," a remarkable figure, and then to unexpectedly appealing wall-mounted pieces: "Red Planet" and "Twilight" (mostly blue). Their glistening surfaces are found, upon close examination, to consist of ordinary bottle caps encased in lustrous plastic wrapping, achieving a mosaic-like brilliance.

The "upcycled" materials used by these artists were evidently selected for their decorative and sensual qualities, not because environmentalists plucked them from a garbage heap. Close attention to their details pays rich dividends.

In no case are the details more delightful than in Valerie Mann's recreation of little birds, precisely mounted just inches apart and casting their shadows: 140 miniature birds crafted of wire, glass, fibers and trinkets, each different, thus paying tribute to the infinite variety of the bird kingdom.

Chris Silva and Lauren Feece draw upon what has now become a modern tradition: graffiti and street art. Their materials were found on the beaches of Puerto Rico and the streets of Chicago, and are ennobled with playful, tongue-in-cheek titles: "The Boat Won't Stop Rocking Until We Reach Another Level."

Victoria Fuller, the most reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp, has made a piece of "Bad Plumbing" from shower faucets, a horn, a gourd, a convoluted piping



La Porte: 219-326-5263

Michigan City: 1-855-349-8551  
(Toll Free)

[www.landheatingandair.com](http://www.landheatingandair.com)



*It's Hard To Stop A Trane.*

**DON'T PANIC!**

**"WE'LL HAVE YOUR SYSTEM UP AND RUNNING  
TODAY! — NOT TOMORROW!"**





Victoria Fuller's "Bad Plumbing."

system leading to a stack of books and a mid-century valise. A long-haired mop-head stands ready to bathe.

Historical references are adeptly incorporated by Michael Dinges, using a style that calls to mind sailors' scrimshaw and soldiers' trench art. In his search for "cultural markers" in our increasingly digitized society, Dinges has created a series of repurposed laptops, their screens engraved with arcane and occult imagery. His "Cabinet of Curiosities" refers to the 19th-century practice of collecting and mounting insects and shells, but notice his up-to-date labels (the starfish is "Ego").



Michael Dinges' "Cabinet of Curiosities."



Chris Silva and Lauren Feece's "The Boat Won't Stop Rocking Until We Reach Another Level."

On another wall, Dinges' "Domino Theory" is mounted: a line of iPods engraved with messages you must strain to read. "We Are The Desperate/ Led By The Ruthless/Doing The Unnecessary/For The Ungrateful" – that is the first. There are seven more.

A perusal of artists' bios shows the three-state area, intersecting at Michigan City, that curator Carol Ann Brown has staked out as Lubeznik Center territory. Hicks, Sperry and Silva are well-known in the Chicago art scene. Mann grew up on a working farm in Indiana and now co-owns a gallery in Ann Arbor, Mich. Dinges holds a master of fine arts from the University of Chicago and Fuller from The School of the Art Institute; both of their works are loaned by Packer Schopf Gallery.

Michigan Citian Mike Bailey is showing his acclaimed series of mushroom photographs in the NIPSCO studio, and another small space features the work of Rich Manalis, Beverly Shores artist and biologist, who photographed seaweed and rocks on the beaches of La Jolla and Santa Barbara, Calif.

The upstairs galleries have solo shows by two more artists with Michigan connections: Renee Robbins, a Chicagoan by way of Michigan State University, and Jan Dean, a South Bend native who graduated from Cranbrook Academy and has exhibited widely, including the National Museum for Women in Washington, D.C.

Continued on Page 12

**Ted Perzanowski, M.Div., B.A.**

**talk to ted inc**

An effective alternative to counseling and psychotherapy for individuals, couples, and families

219.879.9155 Michigan City  
312.938.9155 Chicago

[www.talktotedinc.com](http://www.talktotedinc.com)  
[ted@talktotedinc.com](mailto:ted@talktotedinc.com)

Construction | Purchase | Refinance | FHA | VA

**Mike Nagy**  
NMLS #129104  
C: 219.712.5067

**The La Porte SAVINGS BANK**  
Michigan City  
[laportesavingsbank.com](http://laportesavingsbank.com)



**INVASIVE SPECIES** Continued from Page 11



Jan Dean's "Transformation."

Robbins' colorful acrylic paintings are drawn from natural phenomena, micro to macro relationships and new discoveries in science. Her exhibit is titled "Aquatic Kaleidoscope" and, nicely complementing the other artists, reveals "the complex systems that reach through tiny cells, flowering botanicals, deep oceans and distant galaxies."



Renee Robbins' "Under Moon."

Dean, by contrast, brings us a three-walled room constructed of styrofoam. If you think you would never climb to the second floor to see sculpture made out of styrofoam, it is time to think again. This artist has created a truly magical space and, besides all the witticisms and insights we have already been treated to, Dean produces a one-liner that would have you focus not on the materials, but on the composition. "Each piece fits where it's at," she explains.

**If You Go**

The Lubeznik Center for the Arts, 101 W. Second St., Michigan City, is open to the public 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily except Thursdays (2 to 7 p.m.) and Sundays (11 a.m. to 4 p.m.). "Invasive Species," "Aquatic Kaleidoscope" and Jan Dean's "Transformation" run through Oct. 18, Mike Bailey's "Mycological Magic" through Sept. 14 and Rich Manalis' "Minimalism: Images of California Shorelines" through Aug. 31. Visit [www.lubeznikcenter.org](http://www.lubeznikcenter.org) or call (219) 874-4900 for more information. All photos used in this article are courtesy of the Lubeznik Center for the Arts

## BETTER FLOORING BY DESIGN

*Custom Overlay*

**Decorative Concrete**

- One of the most popular options for transforming concrete
- Low maintenance and extremely durable
- A fraction of the cost of real stone
- Many designs & colors to choose from

*Stained Concrete*

\$200 OFF

400 Sq. Ft Or More

On Decorative Concrete Only  
Offer Expires 8/26/14  
Mention code TTV

*Garage Epoxy*

Garage Epoxy • Custom Overlays (Existing Concrete)  
Acid Staining/Concrete Staining • Stamped Concrete  
Patios & Pool Decks • Driveways & Basements

ALL AMERICAN  
 **DECORATIVE CONCRETE**

Call for your estimate today!  
**219-921-0861**

Visit our website for pictures & information [www.aadecorativeconcrete.com](http://www.aadecorativeconcrete.com)