

VISUAL ARTS APRIL 21, 2016 5:30 PM

Art derived from salvaged materials on display through Friday in Miami

HIGHLIGHTS

Art of Found Objects encourages repurposing of materials to create artwork pieces

Materials are donated by businesses and housed at Ocean Bank's warehouse

Teachers from all over Miami-Dade can "shop" items for free



The Art of Found Objects Exhibition in the Ocean Bank lobby at 780 NW 42nd Ave., Miami. **JUAN CABRERA** - Photo provided to the Miami Herald



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People are always on the phone, according to art teacher Michael Flaum, who recently created a piece of work depicting a scene in which different types of figurine people are glued on top of an old rotary telephone.

The work is part of the [Art of Found Objects Exhibition](#), a showcase supported by [The Education Fund](#) that encourages students from all grades up to high school, and their teachers, to create art using repurposed materials.

The salvaged materials are housed in the 11,000-square-foot [Ocean Bank Center for Educational Materials](#) warehouse, where products range from bottle tops and Popsicle sticks to fabric trim, beads and other scraps donated by South Florida businesses. According to the center's log, more than 18,000 teachers have picked up supplies for free since 1993.



Teachers from all over Miami-Dade County are allowed two “shopping” visits per school year, with extra allowances for art teachers. A point system works as the currency, and on occasion, when educators need more materials, they may trade volunteer hours or, in Flaum’s case, submit artwork into the exhibit using materials from the warehouse.

The Education Fund, a nonprofit organization in its 30th year, created the show upon request from the Miami-Dade County School District after Hurricane Andrew in 1992. The district was looking for an innovative way to distribute materials donated by people across the United States in response to the hurricane, including whole containers with materials.

Linda Lecht, president of The Education Fund, likes to use the exhibit as an extended teaching tool to give students real life examples of how art can create a career. Xavier Cortada, a favorite local artist, hosted the awards ceremony on April 14.

“We want the students and parents to realize this is a potential career path. Working in the arts and developing observational skills is good training. Sometimes parents don’t tell their kids to be an artist, and we’re saying it’s OK to be one, no matter what facet of your life you choose to do it in,” Lecht said. “Being involved in the arts develops so many other skills that we don’t understand that we truly need to value.”

The exhibit encourages teachers and students to use their ingenuity to create masterpieces to later be auctioned. The students have the option to keep their project or submit it, and the proceeds of the sale are returned to the school and put back into the school’s art budget.

Flaum, who teaches at Jack David Gordon Elementary in Country Walk, credits the Education Fund and its partnership with Ocean Bank with creating a fun program that encourages real-life skills like peer collaboration, creativity, innovation, critical-thinking skills, recycling and even environmental conservation. This year, his fifth-grade class won first place in the group category, making it a double win after Flaum took first place for the teacher submission.

He says that without the help of The Education Fund, Ocean Bank and Stacey de la Grana, the center’s program director, it would be difficult to obtain the much-needed supplies that helped the student project come together.

“This was my best class this year, and I think it’s because of the piece they worked on,” Flaum said. “It brought them all together, and it’s going to be the event they’re never going to forget. They were so into it and then having them win, is the most exciting thing to happen to me this year.”

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