

# Upcycled

Artwork created out of plastic post-consumer waste

**Olivia Kaufman-Rovira • Bernard Klevickas • Barbara Lubliner,  
Shari Mendelson • Janet Nolan • Ilene Sunshine • Tyrome Tripoli**



December 8, 2010 to January 20, 2011  
Opening reception: Wednesday, December 8, 2010: 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm



**ERNEST RUBENSTEIN GALLERY  
197 East Broadway, NY, NY 10002**

The impetus to curate **Upcycled** was to put together the work of artists who, like myself, harvest plastic detritus for their art practice. This choice of art-making material speaks to the abundant availability of plastic post-consumer waste. **Upcycled** brings awareness to the plastic byproducts of consumerism.

**Upcycled** puts together accomplished artists whose work first engages aesthetic appreciation before the viewer recognizes that the work is formed of trash. The artists in **Upcycled** have a strong connection to notions of beauty and art-making traditions. One can imagine the artists gathering, sorting, and processing their untraditional medium and exploring the characteristics of their various plastic finds, just as an oil painter gets to know the qualities of different paint colors or a sculptor gets to know the qualities of different clay bodies.

Ilene Sunshine "draws" with cut-up plastic bags. Her lyrical, fluid strokes belie the fact that they are carefully pieced together from plastic-bag remnants. In her large hybrid drawing/sculpture installation, Sunshine skillfully and slyly reconfigures the designs of commercial artists on customized plastic bags that are used to advertise and promote an assortment of businesses.

Tyrome Tripoli "paints" with found objects culled from the trash. While he is not a plastic purist, Tripoli is a purist when it comes to using his detritus unaltered. Whole objects are "brushstrokes" exuberantly worked into a coherent composition that delights the eye with abstract relationships of form and color. In addition, the incongruous objects he juxtaposes resonate with one other, calling forth interesting associations.

Janet Nolan transforms castoffs into a rhythmic dance of color and line in her Cancan installation. It is made primarily of plastic bottle caps and lids she has accumulated over the years. With these materials, Nolan invents an amusing vocabulary of nodes and segments that she integrates into a quirky network. The installation gives the viewer an experience of playful movement. Cancan is an apt name, as the installation brings to mind a whirl of high-kicking dancers.

Shari Mendelson crafts vessel sculptures out of cut-up plastic bottles. Her sculptures appear to be traditional historical vessels. Within this limited subject, she explores subtle shifts in tone and form that reveal a world of careful observation. Her pieces have an illusionistic magic that plays against their recognizable plastic-bottle components.

Bernard Klevickas also cuts up plastic vessels to make his sculptures. The former life of his plastic containers is integrated into his pieces. Snippets of labels, handles, spouts, and other recognizable container parts are readily seen. Klevickas gives them a double life and challenges the viewer to see the play of forms and color. As in other materials he works with, Klevickas explores undulating curves and how they define interior and exterior surfaces.

Olivia Kaufman-Rovira redefines the gallery entrance with a site-specific installation. Kaufman-Rovira constructed the portal of plastic water bottles she collected from co-workers. The transparent plastic is configured into an architectural-scale work that evokes nature's angles and curves. Her structure adds an imposing fanciful window to the gallery environment that literally has the viewer seeing through pervasive plastic.

In my work for the exhibit, I join whole plastic bottles to form the sides of wire-frame platonic solids. The sculptures are inspired by sacred geometry and Sol LeWitt's open, modular cube structures. The notion of their pure abstract form contrasts with their funky, articulated bottle construction.

Each artist in **Upcycled** has a unique creative response to the plastic discards with which we are all surrounded. Their work inspires viewers to reflect upon our consumer culture and the plastic pollution it creates. The power and beauty of the artist's "hand" is seamlessly rendered in plastic. The plastic is upcycled, converted from refuse into something of much greater value.

~Barbara Lubliner, Curator

**Ilene Sunshine**

<http://www.ilenesunshine.com/>



*East Otisserie*, plastic bags, 5' x 20'

### **Ilene Sunshine: Artist's Statement**

I re-use cast-off materials gleaned from the urban landscape — plastic bags, fallen leaves, or dead Christmas trees — in staged acts of transformation. A hybrid of drawing and sculpture, my work is an inquiry into the mutability of matter.



### **Ilene Sunshine: Bio**

Ilene Sunshine was born and raised in Atlanta, Ga. She attended Boston University's School of Fine Arts, earning her BFA (Sculpture) with honors. She has lived in New York City since 1990.

In the mid-90's, Sunshine began to salvage discarded Christmas trees from the city's sidewalks, cutting them into pieces to make wall-mounted constructions. In 2002, her commitment to scavenged materials deepened during a four-month stay in Kolkata, India, where reusing and repairing things was a matter of course.

With a developing interest in negative space and site, Sunshine realized her first large-scale installation in 2003 as part of a biennial exhibition held in SW France. She has continued to generate new projects using an array of materials— from plastic bags to bedsprings— at various public venues, such as: The New York Public Library, The Kentler International Drawing Space, Wave Hill, and The Islip Art Museum.

Sunshine has been awarded residencies at the Ucross Foundation, Soaring Gardens, the MacDowell Colony, and Dieu Donn  Papermill. She is currently a 2010-11 LABA Fellow.

**Tyrome Tripoli**

<http://www.tyrometripoli.com/>



*Garden*, found plastic, metal, wood, 5' x 5' x 10"

### **Tyrome Tripoli: Artist's Statement**

This series is comprised of disparate elements that are assembled into unexpected juxtapositions. The objects are connected with the utmost precision, fastened together with threaded rod, washers, and bolts. While the objects are seemingly incongruous, they are integrated by color and form. I think of this work as abstract painting. The objects I collect are my brushstrokes, each with pre-existing color and shape.



### **Tyrome Tripoli: Bio**

Tyrome Salvatore Tripoli was born in Los Angeles, California, in 1967. Growing up in a beach town outside of LA, he developed an early love for the power and movement of the ocean, a driving force that fuels his art today. In 1990, Tripoli graduated from the University of California at San Diego with a Bachelor Degree in Biochemistry and Visual Arts. In 1992, he found himself unfulfilled with a career in science, so he moved to San Francisco to start a business making sculptural metalwork.

Over the next ten years, Tripoli worked full-time designing and building unique furniture and architectural metalwork. In 1995, he co-founded Melting Point Art Studios and Gallery, a 7,000-square-foot art studio and exhibition space located in downtown San Francisco. In 1999, he began to experiment with blowing glass into steel armatures, a series called Pods. In 2000, Tripoli was commissioned by Yerba Buena Center for the Arts to create a blown glass and steel installation emerging from a pond. In 2001, Tripoli was selected to participate in the San Francisco Refuse and Recycle Artist-in-Residency program. During this time, he discovered the potential of working with mixed media and creating conceptual sculpture. Focusing on assemblage sculpture and installation, Tripoli took his work on a world tour, participating in an international art exhibition project called VERN.

Tripoli moved to Brooklyn, New York, in 2004. At present he is working on public and private commissions. Tripoli works and resides with his wife and daughter in Bushwick. He works as a full-time artist, making mixed-media sculpture and installations as well as executing architectural metalwork commissions.

**Janet Nolan**

<http://www.janetnolanart.com>



*Cancan #20*, plastic bottle caps, lids, and straws, detail from 12' x 32' installation

### **Janet Nolan: Artist's Statement**

My sculptures are made from accumulated post-consumer objects such as hundreds of discarded umbrellas, wire coat hangers, and lost gloves to thousands of plastic six-pack holders and colorful plastic bottle caps. Meaning lies in transformation of the objects into something beyond themselves, something surprising and often amusing.

I have no preconceived sculpture in mind when I gather these objects; rather, the nature of the object itself suggests to me the content and form. Through my experimenting with their physical properties, structures and patterns often emerge which are similar to those basic growth systems found in nature.



### **Janet Nolan: Bio**

A native of Alabama, Janet Nolan began making art as a child and continued her formal training at Auburn University (BVA). After graduation, she worked as a graphic designer and illustrator and continued to develop her skills and interest in fine art, taking classes in painting and drawing. While living in Atlanta, GA, she earned a graduate degree in painting and drawing at Georgia State University (MFA).

After moving to New York in 1976, Nolan observed hundreds of umbrellas broken and discarded during rainstorms. Soon she became inspired to gather them for possible use as art material. On her first windy, rainy day out, she picked up fifty-seven and took them back to the studio. Harvesting became an obsession, and the collection multiplied. After a few months, she began deconstructing the umbrellas and experimenting with their unique physical properties to recycle them into sculpture. This marked the turning point from a two-dimensional to a three-dimensional approach to Nolan's art-making process.

Over the years, her use of recycled objects has expanded to include, for example, large quantities of lost gloves, wire clothes hangers, plastic six-pack holders, and colorful plastic bottle caps. Through experimenting with the physical properties of these mass-produced manufactured objects, surprisingly, structures and patterns often emerge which are similar to those basic growth systems found in nature.

Janet Nolan's work with post-consumer objects has attracted interest from "green" architectural and corporate projects. She has received commissions for two permanent installations at Harvard University and has exhibited work in "green"-sensitive corporate spaces throughout the United States.

**Shari Mendelson**

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



5 Vessels, plastic from discarded bottles

Photo: Robert Wright

### **Shari Mendelson: Artist's Statement**

In recent years, I have been working on a series of sculptures inspired by the painting of Giorgio Morandi; historical ceramic, glass and metal vessels; and the shapes and textures of found plastic bottles. I collect discarded juice, soda, and water bottles, cut them into pieces, and use the parts to create new vessels. In some cases, the forms are coated with glaze-like layers of acrylic medium and paint. Some of the pieces are closely related to specific Greek and Roman vessels while others are built from my imagination and informed by the shapes of the found bottles themselves. The original material is transformed from plastic trash into unique pieces that address issues of mass production, waste, the environment, the value of objects, history, and culture.



### **Shari Mendelson: Bio**

Shari Mendelson is a sculptor who lives and works in Brooklyn and upstate New York. She holds a BFA from Arizona State University and an MFA from SUNY New Paltz. She was trained as a jeweler and metalsmith. Currently, she is working on a series of vessels that are created from found plastic bottles.

After graduate school in 1986, Mendelson moved to New York City to be close to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. At the time, she was working on a series of copper vessels inspired by ancient art. Over the years, she has worked with a variety of materials, including silver wire, scotch tape, shadows, and plastic. In 2008, while spending time at the Giorgio Morandi exhibition and the Greek and Roman Galleries at the Metropolitan, she decided to revisit her earlier interest in vessels. Previously, she had made a number of large, fluorescent plastic pieces and was questioning the environmental ethics and health risks of using new plastics and toxic solvents. Mendelson, a garden, compost, and recycling enthusiast, was searching for a way to integrate her environmental concerns and her art practice. This led to her current body of work.

Mendelson's work has been exhibited at Pierogi, Black and Herron Space, Cheryl Pelavin Fine Art, Sideshow, McKenzie Fine Art, and many other venues.

Her work has been reviewed in numerous publications, including *The New York Times*, *Glass Quarterly*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The Forward*.

Mendelson has received a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant, two New York Foundation for the Arts Grants, and a Guild American Crafts Award and is currently a LABA fellow.

**Bernard Klevickas**

<http://www.bernardklevickas.com/>



*untitled (centered), plastic rivets, 14 x 11 x 8"*

### **Bernard Klevickas: Artist's Statement**

My work in plastic, made from used detergent, motor oil, and food containers, uses repetition and curvature to corral, shape, and redefine interior and exterior spaces. I cut up and rearrange these discarded vessels, then reconstruct them with pop rivets, exploring the opened forms, the push/pull and curvature of the surfaces, and the newly juxtaposed colors and shapes. By reworking commercially produced items redolent of cleansing, lubrication, refreshment, and, above all, containment, I circumvent [or subvert] their original purpose and remake the familiar into the sublime.



photo: Caroline J. Nye

### **Bernard Klevickas: Bio**

Bernard grew up in Northwestern Indiana near the Lake Michigan shoreline and among multiple steel mills. With the tools of his father, a machinist, he learned to craft and design objects. After earning a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1998, he relocated to New York's Hudson River Valley to work as an art fabricator at Polich Art Works (now Polich-Tallix), where he honed his construction expertise by fabricating large-scale sculpture for Jeff Koons, Frank Stella, Louise Bourgeois, and other artists.

Bernard Klevickas has won several grants and awards, including a merit scholarship at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and in 2004 he was granted a Manufacturing Certificate from the New York State Board of Cooperative Education. He has exhibited his work throughout the Northeast and Midwest in the U. S. and internationally in Istanbul and Bermuda. He lives in Long Island City, New York.

**Olivia Kaufman-Rovira**

<http://www.oliviakaufman.com/>



*Flotsam Reef Spiral*, plastic bottles, staples, 10' x 3.5' x 3.5'

### **Olivia Kaufman-Rovira: Artist's Statement**

I transform the ordinary into the extraordinary. This piece alters the entrance of the gallery, warping perspectives and also innovating the understanding of an everyday object normally regarded as refuse. By juxtaposing the inorganic material, in this case plastic bottles, with an organic form, I question the boundaries between natural and unnatural and our cultural dependence on man-made materials.

### **Olivia Kaufman-Rovira: Bio**

Olivia Kaufman-Rovira is a Jersey City based artist. She grew up in the suburbs of New Jersey surrounded by her father's sculpture. She was inspired at a young age by his innovative use of objects and materials in sculptural forms.

Kaufman has a permanent outdoor sculpture at her high school Alma Matter – her design was chosen through a juried process when she was a senior there and was fabricated on a large scale. She received her BFA with honors, in 2006, from Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University attending on a full scholarship. There she experimented in a variety of materials and created bodies of work in wheat grass, clay, paper and more exploring ideas of ephemeral nature and constructed environments.

After her formal studies she traveled to Barcelona, Spain where she began collecting plastic bottles from the street and making work with the detritus. She has shown work in New Jersey and New York and abroad while she lived in Barcelona. Her work is process oriented and she enjoys transforming perceptions of everyday materials by creating large-scale works where the original object is unrecognizable at first sight.



**Barbara Lubliner**

<http://www.barbaralubliner.com>



*Icosahedron*, plastic bottles, 36 x 36 x 36"

### **Barbara Lubliner: Artist's Statement**

Currently I am using plastic bottles to make building-toy-like sculptures of wire frame platonic solids. Re-purposing plastic bottles into playful art shifts the focus from environmental blight to creative production.

The use of found objects has been a continuous aspect of my art practice for the last 10 years. I am attracted to how a found object can keep its original identity yet assume another role and have an abstract formal logic in combination with other forms. The use of recognizable found objects stimulates associative connections, adding resonance to the works.



### **Barbara Lubliner: Bio**

New York artist Barbara Lubliner moves fluidly from performance art to works on paper to sculpture both large and small. Additionally, Lubliner has organized and moderated panels, curated shows, and started a feminist newspaper.

Lubliner grew up in Port Washington, a suburb of New York City on Long Island. Her first toys were the treasured paper samples that her father, a paper salesman, brought home. As a youngster, she spent hours with them: cutting, pasting, drawing, and painting. Her first "studio" was the basement, where her experiments included dripping melted crayons a la Jackson Pollack. After graduating from Boston University School of Fine Arts, Barbara designed interiors for architectural firms.

In the late 1980s, Lubliner started her ongoing series of work called "Aspects of the Female Experience." This series grew out of her experiences of giving birth and mothering. Examples can be seen in the Brooklyn Museum's online feminist art base.

In 2000, Lubliner took up welding and began creating playful, toy-like sculptures with found metal. *File Cycle*, Lubliner's sculpture in Stamford, Connecticut's 2007 Art in Public Places Exhibit, was featured in *The New York Times* article about the show.

Lubliner's interest in using found plastic was spurred in 2009 when she was the "bottle" artist for *Tree Gems*, an environmental installation in collaboration with Thea Lanzisero. The First Presbyterian Church on Fifth Avenue and 12th Street commissioned the project, and the community participated in collecting plastic bottles and constructing it.

## Upcycled Checklist:

Sculpture from entryway counterclockwise

### Olivia Kaufman-Rovira

Flotsam Reef Spiral plastic bottles, staples 10' x 3.5' x 3.5'

### Barbara Lubliner

Icosahedron plastic bottles 36 x 36 x 36"

Octahedron plastic bottles 24 x 34 x 24"

Cube plastic bottles 26 x 26 x 26"

### Shari Mendelson

Iridescent Bubble Vase plastic, acrylic, polymer, hot glue 10.5 x 4.5 x 4.5"

Light Green Urn plastic, acrylic, polymer, hot glue 8.5 x 3 x 3"

Round Vessel plastic, monofilament hot glue 11 x 7 x 7"

Pom Vessel plastic, hot glue 11 x 3 x 3"

Clear Vessel plastic, hot glue 11 x 7 x 7"

Cupcake Vessel plastic, hot glue 11 x 8 x 8"

Vessel with Pink Foot plastic, hot glue, "magic sculpt" 13 x 15 x 14"

Round Silver Vessel plastic, hot glue, aluminum foil 17 x 15 x 15"

Blue Bubble Vessel plastic, hot glue 10 x 13 x 14"

Small Green Bottle with White Neck plastic, hot glue 9 x 4 x 4"

Iridescent Vase plastic, acrylic polymer 11 x 3 x 3"

Blue Pyramid Vessel plastic, hot glue 14 x 18 x 18"

Tall White Vessel plastic, hot glue, acrylic polymer 14 x 5 x 5"

Green Urn plastic, hot glue, acrylic polymer 12 x 6 x 6"

V8 plastic, hot glue, acrylic 8 x 5 x 5"

Wall works from entryway clockwise

### Bernard Klevickas

untitled (centered) plastic, rivets 14 x 11 x 8"

untitled (hangy) plastic, rivets 16 x 6 x 5"

untitled (doubletake) plastic, rivets 12 x 16 x 10"

untitled (Xtra) plastic, rivets 33 x 14 x 5"

untitled (emergence) plastic, rivets 19 x 15 x 3"

untitled (starwave) plastic, rivets 17 x 18 x 5"

### Tyrome Tripoli

Wood Grain Green Circle found plastic 22 x 14 x 3"

Refrigerator-Blue found plastic and metal 28 x 13 x 2"

Brown Ring Pink and White found plastic and wood 21 x 19 x 4"

### Ilene Sunshine

East Otisserie plastic bags 5' x 20'

### Janet Nolan

Cancan plastic bottle caps, lids, and straws 12' x 32'

### Tyrome Tripoli

Garden found plastic, metal, and wood 5' x 5' x 10"

Sculpture in front window

### Shari Mendelson

Blue Bubble Vessel plastic, hot glue 10 x 7 x 7"

Blue Bottoms bowl plastic, monofilament 6 x 11 x 11"

**The Educational Alliance** was set up in the 1890's as a settlement house to help East Europeans settle in New York. Today the Alliance is a network of vibrant centers at over 26 locations, extending social support and opportunities for cultural interaction to residents of downtown Manhattan.

**The Educational Alliance Art School** was started in 1895 to provide arts enrichment to young immigrants and neighborhood adolescents and adults. It soon became known for its quality programs, attracting people from all over the city. Among the artists who studied or taught here are Louise Nevelson, Adolph Gottlieb, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Jules Olitski, Leonard Baskin, Peter Blume, Chaim Gross, Philip Evergood, Ben Shahn and Moses Soyer.

The Art School and Gallery provide instruction and cultural enrichment to people of all ages. The art school offers courses for children, teenagers, and adults in ceramics, drawing, painting, photography, and sculpture.

**The Ernest Rubenstein Gallery** is a distinct public space located at the core of our building that permits hundreds of members, clients, and visitors easy access to view monthly exhibits of contemporary art, as well as artwork by students, faculty and alumni. Many prominent and upcoming artists have generously lent work for exhibition at the gallery. These include Polly Appelbaum, Lynda Benglis, Yvonne Jacquette, Peter Halley, Robert Kushner, Carrie Moyer, Alison Saar, Mira Schor, Sheila Pepe, Kiki Smith, Judy Pfaff, Tom Otterness, and many others.

Walter O'Neill, Director  
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