

One man's trash may just be another man's come-up

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GUEST WRITER

The pop charts finally reflect some thrift-store love. Macklemore's hit "Thrift Shop" passes on Gucci in favor of your Grandpa's button-up and is as much at home digging for his "come-up" in a pile of musty clothes as he is rocking a zebra onesie in the club. Macklemore merges the thrift shop with the party.

Guilford College is also awash with thrift-store swag, recasting second-hand clothes into first-hand style. At a school threaded in thrift-shop garb, who is our Macklemore? Who merges seemingly disparate elements of style into something cohesive?

Visiting Instructor of Art Mark Dixon, of course. Recasting the old and obsolete, Dixon's performance art project, "Invisible," explores new ways of making music. Along with primary collaborator Bart Trotman, Dixon digs deep into thrift-shop oddities, transforming outcasts of consumerism into instruments.

"There's no way you can't be fascinated by his work," said Assistant Professor of Art Kathryn Shields.

So what exactly is "Invisible?" Physically, "Invisible" is an hour-long musical performance using artist-created instruments, including the Selectric Keyboard, a typewriter turned piano.

Utilizing the engineering expertise of collaborator Fred Snider, the group created Rhythm 1001, a mechanical rendering of modern-day beat-making technology. A bass drum, a cymbal and even a plastic cup are fair game. As a peg passes a switch on Rhythm 1001's wheel, it triggers the instrument's sound.

According to the "Invisible" website, "Trotman has visited nearly every second-hand store in the Southeast and has taken from most of them a story."

Pulling together "samples taken from self-help tapes, answering machine messages, acting instructions and vocabulary lessons," Trotman stuffs the sensory overload of modern-day living into tracks that are simultaneously overwhelming and absurdly funny.

"You have a — BEEP — I was rudely cut off," sounds out "End-User Archive," Trotman's creation reminiscent of "Revolution #9." "I was trying to tell you to have a very safe, merry Christmas ... and try not to eat too much. We

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got enough fat folks in the world. Love you. Bye."

How do they integrate all of these different elements? The story began when Dixon was a student here at Guilford, studying the art of sculpture.

"As much as I could scrape off other responsibilities, I was in the art studio," said Dixon.

At the same time, he played in a popular rock band, performing at least once a week. When Dixon left college, he directed most of his attention to sculpture, but also began creating his own instruments as a "sidelined thing."

It was then that Dixon faced a stark new reality. Without

the captive audience of college students, Dixon realized the extent of the competition for attention. How could he compete?

"This was the site of the crossroads," said Dixon.

In 2006, Dixon started "Invisible," uniting the rigor that shaped his sculpting career with the immediate spark of his music. The tinkering with musical instruments, previously thought to be a secondary focus, emerged instrumental in Dixon's work with "Invisible."

"That's what I try to tell my students," said Dixon, as he twisted a paper clip into a mini-lightning rod and twirled the new shape absentmindedly in his fingers. "You're not sculpting because you're taking long walks or playing video games or obsessively making lists. What you're already doing can be brought into the fold."

Admittedly, "Invisible" is messy.

"From loading dock to loading dock, it's 12 hours," said Dixon. "We perform maybe 40 minutes."

Invisible is measured better by the experience than a neatly packaged mp3 and is difficult to translate into commoditized form. Yet, that very mess is what draws Dixon onward.

"If I didn't love the mess, then I'd have to think about what I'm doing."

While Macklemore says, "They had a broken keyboard. I bought a broken keyboard," Dixon takes an old keyboard and makes a Selectric Piano.

You have a mess. What will you make?

"Invisible" exhibits on display from Feb. 6 – May 17 in the Hege Library Atrium.

DEGREE

How to afford a crazy art degree

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in the business world. Others, such as first-year Conor Sastre, work towards double majors in order to make their preferred field relevant.

"History majors alone don't have that many (job) options," said Sastre.

Sastre currently pursues a double major in history and education, hoping to one day teach his passion to other eager students. However, a microeconomics course and the promise of more financially stable employment have led Sastre to consider changing his education major to economics.

"Except for the best of the best ... most history majors are limited to either delivering pizzas or teaching," Sastre explained.

Similar fears surround theatre majors, English majors and women's, sexuality and gender studies majors, to name a few. But, these degree paths provide a great deal of abilities and understandings that will assist in finding employment.

"One of the things I value about the English major is that it makes you incredibly nimble as a writer, as a thinker and as a dealer of ideas," said Visiting Assistant Professor of English Mylène Dressler. "(An English major) is valuable for anyone who wants to be involved in social activism and needs to wield language to transmit

their passions to an audience."

This is merely one option among many in the list of potential opportunities Dressler suggests. Other options include entrepreneurship, advertising, marketing and any sort of content creation.

A list for history, art or theatre majors would look similar, as these degree paths cultivate a student's ability to recognize trends and effectively communicate with a client or employer. All three may find employment in marketing, consulting, public relations or even writing.

Joshua Friedman, a recent UNC Asheville graduate, recounted the usefulness of his art education in his job search.

"I have found that the most important things I learned studying art were flexibility and creativity," Friedman explained. "Since I've been in the working world, I've had to be quick on my feet and look in places I might not have thought about before, but there are certainly jobs out there for us."

The same could be said about any "dead-end" degree path. The world is a scary place, regardless of what you studied in school. However, despite the fears of Gov. McCrory, a degree in something that is not obviously practical is not a sentence to perpetual unemployment.

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