



Bay Weekly Classifieds

1982 Catalina 25 pop-top, fin keel. Well-kept. Upgrades, sails, furler, tiller pilot, Tohatsu 9hp outboard, \$3,999 obo. Located in Edgewater. 201-939-7055.

- see all classifieds -



Home

Tools of the Trade

A look at ReTooled: The Hechinger Collection at the Mitchell Gallery

By Bob Melamud

The names Hechinger and Mitchell Gallery are not two entities you would normally expect in the same headline. Those of us who have lived on or around the East Coast for enough years will recognize the name Hechinger. Until the late 1990s, if you needed home supplies, you went to Hechinger's. Then the larger home improvement chains moved in and Hechinger's became just a memory.

The Mitchell Gallery at St. John's College in Annapolis is one of the premier art galleries in our region. Known for showing both local and nationally known artwork and artists, Mitchell Gallery brings six or seven high quality exhibits and shows to town annually, as well as lectures, workshops and guided tours.

"I'm going down to the Mitchell Gallery to look at tools" is a phrase I never thought I would utter. I was on my way to see their latest exhibit: **ReTooled: Highlights from the Hechinger Collection**. It is art, and it is tools—art made from tools, art with tools as the principal subjects. Things like a hammer made from glass and a bird made from old farm tools are on display.

My personal favorite is a 1988 painting by Arman called *Blue, Red, Brown*. This abstract artwork features paint brushes still attached—the kind of big brushes you would buy at Hechinger's to paint your house, not the little ones artists typically use. My description does not do it justice – it needs to be seen in person to be truly appreciated.



Arman, "Blue, Red, Brown," mixed media. Photo courtesy of Joel Breger. © 2020 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Hechinger's Vision

The story begins in the 1980s when John Hechinger was the CEO of a booming chain of hardware stores. His new corporate headquarters was functional, but sterile. Hechinger decided that artwork would liven it up and he had the means to acquire it.

Sarah Tanguy was one of the curators of the original collection, working closely with Hechinger. "John's vision was to inspire the people who worked at the company headquarters to appreciate the inherent beauty of tools and to see how in the hands of artists, everyday objects that might have been bought at a Hechinger's store were transformed into unique works of art as well as to share this experience with the public at large."



At its peak, the collection contained over 300 pieces. When the company dissolved, the collection temporarily moved to the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C., but it needed a permanent home.

“John’s strong desire was for the collection to stay intact in order to give a sense of the broad creative potential that actual tools or images of tools afforded,” says Tanguy. “This dream was realized when International Arts & Artists, a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit, took stewardship of the collection.”

Coming to Annapolis

International Arts & Artists maintains a number of collections that it lends to museums around the world. The Mitchell Gallery has obtained collections from them several times over its 30-year history.

The gallery plans its shows years in advance. Lucinda Edinberg, art educator at Mitchell Gallery, played a personal role in bringing the Hechinger Collection to the school. “I was a longtime patron of the Hechinger’s stores, and when we received the announcement from International Arts & Artists that another part of the Hechinger Collection was going to be touring, I asked Mitchell Gallery director Hydee Schaller if we could present the exhibition to the Faculty Committee for consideration.”

Although this exhibition is quite different from the Old Masters, there are many well-known artists included in the collection, Edinberg says.

“It’s whimsical and it makes wide use of repurposed materials. The Hechinger Collection represents a wide scope of artists, styles, and techniques. I was surprised by the range of media, and the juxtaposition or irony of some of the materials and subjects, like Frabel’s Hammer and Nails made out of glass.”

The old cliché, a picture is worth a thousand words, has never been truer than in an attempt to describe this collection. Even the photographs with this article don’t do it justice. It is an exhibit that demands a trip to the gallery.

Artist Talk

Mark Blumenstein, the artist that created the Saw Bird sculpture, gives a lecture at the Mitchell Gallery on Sunday January 26 at 3pm. Blumenstein will talk about his career making art from materials never intended to be used for art. His Saw Bird uses a gas pump nozzle for a head and beak, saw blades for wings, and scythes for a tail. The lecture is free, but registration is required.

To register for the lecture, or get more information on the gallery and this exhibit, visit: sjc.edu/annapolis/mitchell-gallery/exhibits-and-programs. Admission is free. But hurry, the exhibit only runs until February 23.

▼ Publication Information

Date Published:

1/23/20

Volume Number:

28

Issue Number:

4

Add new comment Share this!