

# The art of spring cleaning

At UIC's Gallery 400,  
trash is in, objet d'art is out

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Lee Wells searches for treasure in someone else's idea of trash at Gallery 400, where the University of Illinois at Chicago's "In and Out" exhibition is running.

by Shannon Jones

The room is small, white and rectangular, furnished only with wooden chairs. People file in and out, carrying books, old records, furniture, candlesticks, clothes and even a machine.

This is the University of Illinois at Chicago's Gallery 400, where a five exhibition called "In and Out" is running. People who come to the exhibit put things they don't need in the crates and take things they do need, or want. The gallery will take anything—as long as it's not alive, toxic or flammable.

"We're trying to understand the direction art is going in the '90s, which is more toward art that the public can see and appreciate," said Karen Inbeck, director and curator of the gallery.

"More and more, art is coming off the

wall. We're trying to move art and sculpture into a public realm where people can really interact and understand the art."

The project is a collaborative effort between New York-based Robert Rauschenberg, an artist-in-residence at UIC, the Resource Center, a nonprofit environmental education organization, and the UIC School of Art and Design. Much of the Rauschenberg work is based on the kind of social interaction in one of Rauschenberg's pieces, he invites people to a gallery and looks on observers. That model he uses.

"I create situations that bring people together and make them interact, have conversations and do things together," he said.

"It's a different kind of relationship to making art. It's art through the act of people communicating values that

through objects. What I'm interested in are those exchanges. The objects [in this exhibition] are really just a means to provide a stage in which certain things can happen. Within that frame, there can be discussion."

Rauschenberg and UIC students worked together to come up with the idea and design of the exhibit, and the Resource Center provided the pallets that the students used to make the crates, which can also be turned over and used as tables.

Both Rauschenberg and Inbeck hope that the interest in this exhibit will spread to the larger Chicago community.

"We're hoping that this exhibit will bring people into a gallery situation who have been intimidated by art in the past," Inbeck said. "In this show, you're not just sitting an audience because you participate, so it's less intimidating."

Chris Hooper works at the Museum of Contemporary Art and came to the exhibit with a friend who is an art student at UIC. He said he was intrigued by the concept of the exhibit and agrees that the audience participation is what makes this exhibit unique.

"When you go to any art show, you take something away with you. In this show, you can literally take something away," he said.

People are not required to bring something to participate in the exhibit, but Rauschenberg and others at the exhibit said this was a valuable part of the project.

"We all have lots of things in our closets that we don't want to throw out but we don't really have a use for anymore," Rauschenberg said.

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"If you bring it here, someone else can find a use for it. These are objects here that can be repaired and actually be functional."

Some of the functional objects in the show include old televisions and telephones, clothes and small furniture. Taha Chalikhona, a third-year architecture student at UIC, found a lamp she liked in one of the crates and took it home with her. Although she hadn't brought anything in with her that day, she plans to return and bring some items in.

"I'm moving soon and I know I need to get rid of some things," she said.

"I don't want to have to throw them away, and this way I can feel good that I can bring it here and maybe someone can use it."

Hessan contributed an old black light. "When some friends of mine were moving, they were just going to put this out on the curb and throw it away," he said. "I thought there must be someone out there who can use this, so I held on to it. It could be worth \$75, I don't know. But I got it for free, and now I'm going to pass it along to someone else. Maybe they can use it, or maybe they'll pass it along again."

This idea of reuse is an important part of this exhibit, Indeck said.

"When someone brings in or takes something from the project, someone working in the gallery logs that item in or out on a computer. Indeck said she will periodically print out this record and put it in a book so that visitors can see where objects came from and where they've gone.

"We never know the history of where



things have been, and I think it makes an object more special if you know where it's coming from," she said.

Both Indeck and Torrey said they expect that some participants will see other people wearing the clothes they contributed to the project.

Julia Rooney, a second-year studio art student at UIC, said that in some ways this project is similar to groups like Catholic Charities that collect people's things and redistribute them to those who need them.

"This is really in the same vein, but it's

under the process of being in a gallery," she said. "We're just making that whole exchange art, but it goes on every day outside the gallery."

Rooney is a student in the beginning sculpture class that worked on designing and building the crates for the exhibit. She said everyone in the class drew potential designs for the crates and that they decided as a group which one to use as a prototype. The decision was based primarily on the ease of reproducing the design. The class then divided into small groups, and each group was responsible



**Above:** Traditional art on display at a nontraditional exhibit.  
**Left:** Karen Indeck, the gallery's director, logs items in and out of the computer.

for building a crate.

"When the exhibit is over, the gallery will give the crates back to the Resource Center where they will provide storage for the objects in the center's Creative Reuse Warehouse, which collects objects that cannot be recycled and uses them in artistic or community projects.

"In and Out" is running at Gallery 400, 400 S. Peoria St., through March 23. Gallery hours are 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday, there is no admission fee. For more information, call (312) 996-6714.

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