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## Haitian artists make creations from S.F.'s discards

Kurtis Alexander

Updated 11:04 pm, Sunday, September 22, 2013

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Pierre (center), with fellow Haitian artists Claudel Casseus (left) and Racine Polycarpe, learn about San Francisco from touring the city as well as making art from residents' discards. Photo: Leah Millis, The Chronicle



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Romel Jean Pierre, a resident of the impoverished city of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, enjoys an unusual pastime: making art from trash.

The 19-year-old has turned used auto parts into offbeat sculpture and fashioned discarded furniture into abstract design - in large part to call attention to the materialism of the

modern day.

When Pierre seized an opportunity this summer to leave the Haitian capital and pursue his

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artwork at the dump in San Francisco, he was not only surprised by what he found, he also saw greater urgency for his message.

"This isn't garbage," he said, pointing to scraps at the decidedly First World dump on Tunnel Avenue - toys, tables, telephones, even a T-shirt that Pierre now wears. "This is waste."

Pierre's fabrications of Bay Area trash have been on display as part of an artist-in-residence program run by San Francisco waste contractor Recology. He and two other artists from Haiti will wrap up their visit Tuesday with exhibitions and an evening panel discussion before they return to their homeland.

### Outside perspective

The art program's director, [Deborah Munk](#), figured that bringing an outside perspective to the 23-year-old enterprise would further its longtime goal of encouraging people to think differently about their consumption.

"Folks coming from a different country probably have the same reaction to how much we throw away, but it's more severe," Munk said. "We can tell people to reduce, reuse and recycle and have an ad campaign, but when we look at the world through an artist's eyes, it touches us in a different way."

Pierre, who has spent time in the slums of Port-au-Prince, has had limited contact with iPhones and other cutting-edge technology - until he started seeing their remnants at the dump.

"I wish I had a computer like that," he said.

Pierre is both appreciative of his experience in one of the nation's wealthiest and most indulgent cities and a bit dismayed.

"If you still can sleep on a bed, why do you have to change it just because you've seen some commercial?" he asked.

Mixed feelings about society are manifest in the works of the three Haitian artists.

Pierre described a piece called "Machinations of the World," comprising a folding table and a mannequin head, as a metaphor for technological obsession. A more festive piece called "Twoubadou/Troubadour," which revolves around a toy guitar, celebrates modern music.

### Recycled studio

Pierre and his colleagues, [Claudel Casseus](#) and [Racine Polycarpe](#), have been working out of a 40-foot shipping container at the dump, which normally houses Recology's student art program.

They've been there for about a month, shorter than Recology's typical residency but part of the terms arranged with Project Hope Art, the sponsoring group.

"We feel a little bit sad that we can't stay anymore," Pierre said, before offering parting thoughts for the Bay Area: "Before throwing away something, ask yourself if someone would want it. What's not good for you might be good for someone else."

### Recology art exhibition

The work of Haitian artists will be on display from 5 to 7 p.m. Tuesday at Recology's artist studio, 503 Tunnel Ave., San Francisco, and at the [Environmental Learning Center](#), 401 Tunnel Ave. An artists' panel discussion will be held 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Environmental Learning Center.

*Kurtis Alexander is a San Francisco Chronicle staff writer. E-mail:*

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