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Garbage Bag Skirts and Popsicle Stick Necklines

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"It's going to be kind of like Project Runway," said Cat Chow as she sifted through cupcake liners attached with staples, woven strips of magazine and daises wrapped in twine.

Household and miscellaneous items were the main focus of a workshop for the students in the Creative Design Foundations class of the Textiles and Apparel program Friday. Participants arrived to the workshop with four swatches of non fabric items connected without using tape or glue. Through what visiting artist Chow described as problem solving, the students were instructed to combine their swatches to make a garment. Chow is known for transforming non traditional materials such as metal rings, dollar bills and zippers into clothing and sculptural designs.



Photo courtesy of Mitchell D. Strauss

Visiting artist and designer Cat Chow teaches University of Northern Iowa students how to make designs out of household and miscellaneous items.

"I hope that they think about objects in different ways and the potentiality of how they can be used," Chow said as her goal for the workshop.

In groups of four, students showed off their original designs. Gumballs attached with fishing line, a mass of stapled feathers and interlaced balloons lined the tables as groups discussed how they crafted their samples.

"I walked around Wal-Mart and Blain's Farm and Fleet and thought, how can I convert this into something else?" explained Laura Fonkert, a sophomore textiles and apparel major.

Jesselyn Clapp a senior English education major and textiles and apparel minor placed her creation, colored Popsicle sticks attached with metal jump rings as the neckline of a garment.

"I lucked out, I already had a power drill," Clapp said as the group discussed various methods of connecting their materials.

Hannah Gammack, a senior history major with a textiles and apparel minor, took a different approach. When connecting plastic spoons with jump rings, she created holes by pounding barbecue skewers with a mallet.

As the groups created their garments they looked how different pieces would work best together. Group creations ranged from tuxedo inspired black and white garments accented with leftover wedding decorations to a nature themed dress covered with sparkling leaves.

"Energy is the word of the day!" said Allison Kuhle, a junior psychology major as she placed her own samples on the dress form.

Chow, who taught students to focus on the energy of their pieces has been an object of study of the textiles and apparel program for a few years.

"I've always loved Cat's work. She is so approachable; I was giddy when I first met her," said Bryante Fletcher, a fourth year textiles and apparel major.

Lauren Holsing, a senior textiles and apparel major, was lucky enough to sit down with Chow and discuss a design she is hoping to create. She plans to macramé leather strips into a corset which will cover a daisy infused dress made of plastic flowers and twine. Working together Chow and Holsing, she decided that vines full of daisies twisting up the legs of the model would add a more natural touch.

As the workshop came to a close students lugged their new creations to the display cases in Latham Hall. Proud of their accomplishments students thanked Chow as they left.

"I can see some of these people hanging out together, some of these people you've created," Chow said with a smile as the workshop closed.

Impressed with the students' determination and willingness to take on a challenge Chow explained her view behind the workshop.

"I wanted to challenge them to work collaboratively in a group in order to solve a problem, where they would have to take some risks which may seem uncomfortable at first," she said.