



Upcycled: Your Castoffs Become Art At The Atwater Village Goodwill

By Sharon McNary
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A detail from artist Spencer Lewis' painting of a pair of jeans on burlap (Sharon McNary / LAist)

Textile artists who work with fabric often turn to thrift stores to find affordable raw materials. Goodwill Southern California has taken it a step further, inviting a pair of artists to create an installation, using unsold clothing as inspiration and material – and saving it from the landfill.

Opening Thursday, the exhibit at the Atwater Village store has several giant art panels that dominate the lobby, along with canvases and a collection of wearables.

The canvases and sculptures were painted and

built by contemporary artist Spencer Lewis, while curator Darren “DRx” Romanelli worked with the American Sewing Guild Los Angeles Chapter to also create a collection of wearables for the exhibit.

Some depict donated clothing, while others are made from the garments themselves, such as a giant banner made of souvenir t-shirts.

Sewing Guild chapter president Nicole Brown and another member stitched most of the pieces together to carry out the artists' visions.

SPENCER LEWIS

"Darren would literally bring me over a pile of stuff, and he would say, 'Here, make this into something,' and I was like ... okay," she said.

At first she was hesitant to impose her own artistic vision on the materials the artists gave her. But eventually, she gained confidence in her creations.

Brown used dozens of pairs of tattered jeans to create denim floor mats and rugs. She combined other materials to make large blankets. One is made up of Rams football jerseys, jackets and t-shirts.



Visitors take photos of some of the large art panels at the Goodwill Atwater Village store gallery (Sharon McNary / LAist)

Inside the store, an art installation in the form of a shelter or hang-out space is draped with some of the creations.

Bobby May works as a liaison for Goodwill, urging unhoused people to accept services. The cloth art-draped shelter, he said, reminded him of the time he spent living on Skid Row and of the encampments of unhoused people he visits there.

"It does look like Skid Row with the tent and everything," May said. "My job is going out, bringing people to work and giving them jobs out of Skid Row."

"And now we got people working in all the stores everywhere."

The large art panels will be sold through a broker with a percentage going to Goodwill Southern California. The smaller items such as the blankets and rugs and a curated collection of vintage shoes and clothing are for sale at prices starting at \$30 for smaller items, also benefiting Goodwill's training programs.

The art show runs through Sunday.



A piece of art inspired by a donated pair of jeans (Sharon McNary / LAist)