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JUNE 13, 2007  
**Swap-o-Rama Rama and Trashion Show**  
Do it yourself: Recycling style

BY AMELIA V.B. SHULL

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I showed up at the Armory in downtown Durham on May 20 right at noon. I'd spent the night before sifting through my closet collecting a grocery bag full of clothing that I didn't want or didn't fit in anymore. Usually, the thrift store would take my clothes and resell them to benefit their cause, but this time, my clothes would be going on more of an adventure. At the third annual Swap-o-Rama Rama and Trashion Show, my clothes would be cut, sewn, embellished and reconstructed with the help of artists and designers from The Scrap Exchange and See Saw Studios. These two landmark Durham art spaces combined forces to bring New Mexico artist Wendy Tremayne's Swap to our area.



Mary Lew obeys the sign.  
Photo by Rex Miller

The concept is simple: This project brings together members of the community to explore creative reuse of clothing through Do-It-Yourself stations like screen printing and sewing. What's difficult is making something as exciting and liberating as this happen. Ann Woodward, the executive director of the 16-year-old Scrap Exchange, received a one-time grant of \$4,300 from the Durham Cultural Master Plan Advisory Board to make the event possible.

"Culture isn't free. I want the artists [that help with this project] to be paid. My biggest joy is writing artists checks!" Woodward explains. "The whole budget included advertising, paid staff and paid designers."

While the event didn't actually end up raising money, it did bring joy to about 150 people who attended that day. I was certainly one of the joyful. Once I handed over me \$10 admission fee and my bag of clothing, I entered my receipt in the raffle. About 10 items were being raffled, from a sequin-covered vintage top to beautiful shears to a homemade tote bag made from gorgeous fabrics. I went for the sewing scissors. Next, I began to peruse the variety of tables where all the clothing had been sorted by type of item: shirts, skirts, dresses, children's, shoes, etc.

Imagine a high-quality thrift store where you could take as much as you want for \$10. I was elated and began to refill the very temporarily empty grocery bag I had come with. Quickly, I found a beautiful piece of fabric, and when I picked it up I realized it had tragically been made into a giant, pleat-filled skirt. I also found a sweet, lightweight vintage white cotton christening gown. I slowed down the bag stuffing as I realized that I had work to do, and found a place at one of the numerous tables. Very unlike my house, here were giant tables with needles, thread, ribbon, glue guns, irons, sewing machines and screens for printing. If nothing else, I had space and enthusiastic artists all around me, so I stretched out, decadently, and enjoyed the freedom this kind of creative environment provides.

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*Moss Brennan accessorizes at the Swap-o-Rama Rama.*  
Photo by Rex Miller

I began with the gown, and had collected a number of ribbons, bows and tulle to add to create a funky dress for my baby daughter. With sewing machines donated (for the day) from Alexander's Sewing and Vacuum Center, those who came to create were able not only to sew something new onto their garments but receive hands-on assistance from the shop's owners. When it came time to turn the tulle into flowers, I was shown how to make yo-yos (round cloth flowers) and then was able to try the new felting machine to attach them to the dress. After I had finished with that transformation, I moved on to the giant skirt. After trying it on, I realized that it was enough fabric to make an entire dress and found a sewing form to pin it to. Quickly, Seth, one of the senior designers from See Saw Studios, came over and offered to help me. We cut, tucked and pinned the skirt until it started to re-emerge as a flirty, swingy dress with straps made of the excess material. I didn't hit the runway, but throughout the afternoon proud creators would jump up on stage and show off their creations—with wild applause from all of us.

I was almost finished with my second project when drums and horns burst out from the Armory's balcony. The Scene of the Crime Rovers, a local punk rock marching band and partner of the Scrap Exchange, erupted into an amazing rendition of a Stooges song.



*Saxophonist David Garfield of the Scene of the Crime Rovers entertains the crowd.*  
Photo by Rex Miller

Certainly this is what I was missing at home; this is why I never seem to get any projects finished. If only I had a live band, endless materials and generous helpers in my living room. While this event is only once a year, I was reminded that the Scrap Exchange in Durham always has thousands of unique recycled materials and lots of tables to work on as well as friendly, helpful people. The more we as a community can support these innovative creative establishments, the more often they can provide us with joyful events like the Swap-o-Rama Rama. I didn't win the raffle, but I won a bit more confidence in my abilities to create and wear unique clothes.

Want more info? Visit:

[www.scrapexchange.org](http://www.scrapexchange.org)

[www.seesawstudio.org](http://www.seesawstudio.org)

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