

Waste to Wonders Art Contest: Art for Awareness

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Motivations

Did you know that...

- We are currently producing 360 million metric tons of plastic each year, according to the United Nations (UN) Environment Program
- The UN predicts that the number will increase to 1 billion metric tons by 2050

"Only when the last tree has been cut down, the last fish has been caught, and the last stream poisoned, will we realize we cannot eat money" - Alanis Obomsawin



Project Journey

Preparation and Planning

- Worked with Kat Owens to discuss the continuities of organizing an art contest that utilizes trash materials, while also discussing exhibition spaces
 - Following the recommendations from Dr. Owens and other members of the community, I explored various exhibition spaces such as the Five Points Art Gallery and the Mansfield Community Center
- Concluded the competition details:
 - Deadline to enter: April 1st
 - Rules: one art piece/person, max. size 20x20 inches, hangable or sculpture
 - Prize: \$50 for category winner, additional \$100 for overall winner

Website Creation

- Created and published competition website: wastetowonders.odoo.com
- Included on website: rules, judging criteria, submission directions, art examples (by community partner, Dr. Kat Owens), and exhibition information

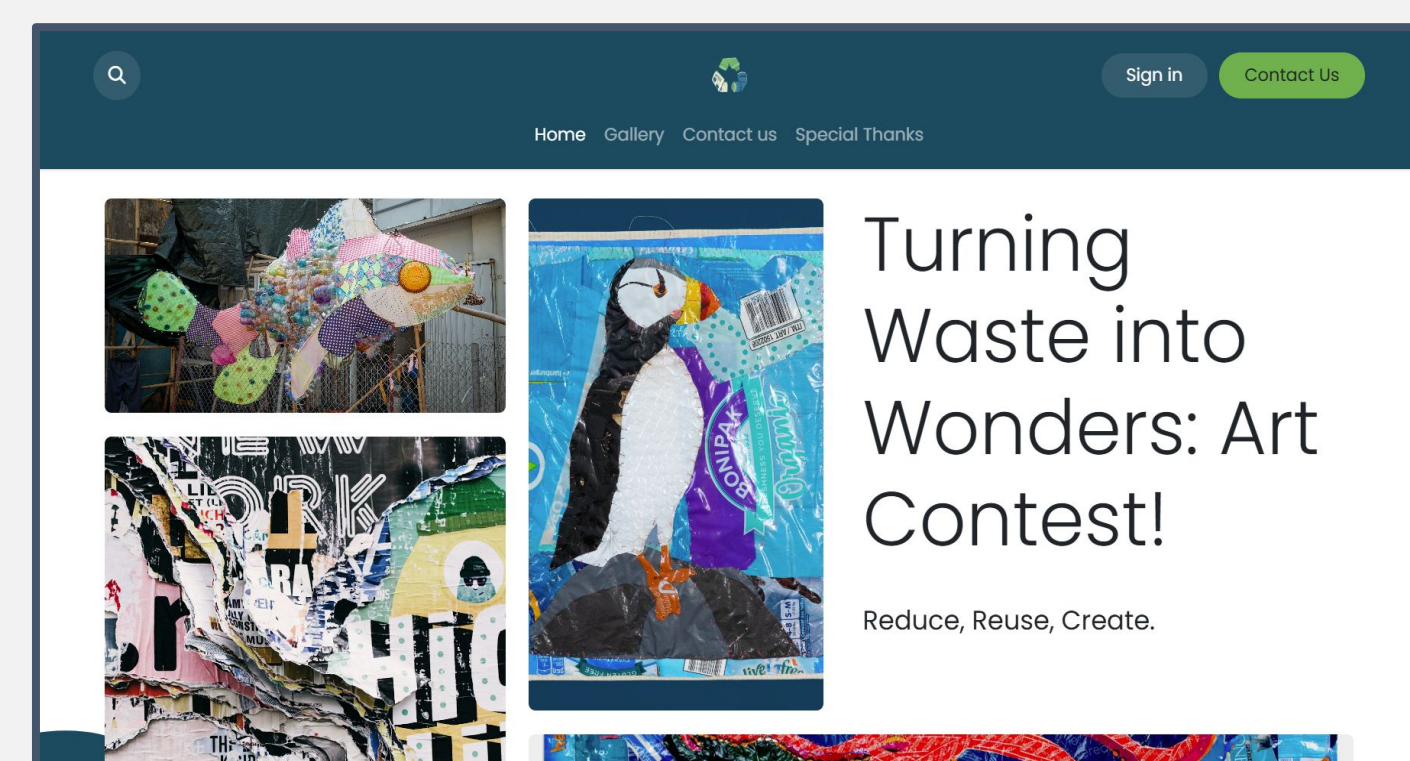


Figure 1. Screenshot of Art Competition website

Finalizing Exhibition

- Reserved an exhibition space in the Student Gallery at Eastern Connecticut State University's (ESCU) Fine Arts Instructional Center
- Finalized exhibition details with Julia Wintner from the Arts Center
 - She was the spokesperson for my exhibition, and helped me tremendously with planning and finalizing, ensuring that the gallery would work
- Exhibition Details:**
 - Drop off: April 7th 8:30 am - 4:30 pm
 - Award Announcement & Celebration: April 14th 4:00 - 5:30 pm
 - Pick up: April 17th 8:30 am - 4:30 pm

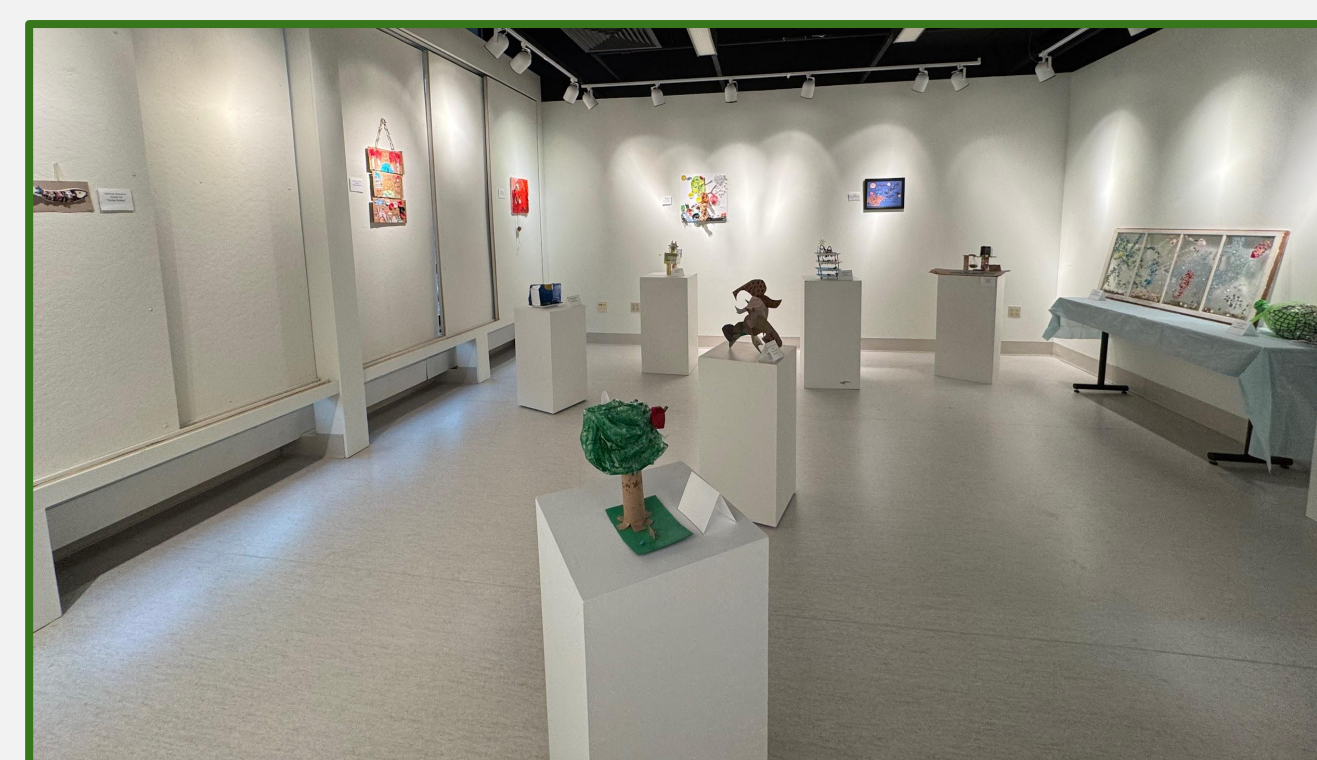


Figure 2. Visiting the Five Points Art Gallery in Torrington (left), exhibition set up (right)

Outreach

Advertisement

- Created flyers to promote art contest
- Distributed flyers at E.O. Smith High School, Mansfield Elementary School, and Mansfield Middle School
 - Sent out to families
 - Given to students/parents at crafting events

Crafting Events

- Elementary School Craft Club**
 - Attendees: 3-4th grade, 20-30 students**
 - I reached out to Grisela Luna-Juarez at the Mansfield Elementary School, and brought my competition to the elementary school Craft Club.
 - Ms. Luna and other members of the club were extremely friendly and helpful, and through the club I was able to get many kids excited about and active in the competition
 - I went to the Monday and Tuesday sessions, and as requested many times by the students, repeated the same thing the following week!
- Mansfield Public Library Wonder Workshop**
 - Attendees: pre-K to elementary, around 20 students**
 - I worked with Emily Webson from the Mansfield Library to bring the Waste to Wonders crafting activity to the Wonder Workshop already active there. I recruited Wonder Workshop regulars to enter the art competition, and also provided a fun crafting activity. Emily provided many materials and helped tremendously with organizing the collaboration.



Figure 3. Art contest advertisement flier



Figure 4. First week at the Crafts Club (above) Week two and everyone is still hard at work on their projects (left)



Figure 5. Waste to Wonders crafting at the Mansfield Library Wonder Workshop (right)



Celebration Event, Award Ceremony, and Impact

Exhibition Celebration Ceremony

- Organized a final celebration attended by the participants and their friends and family
- Provided refreshments, created educational activities, and offered small prizes
- The event began with open gallery time for folks to view the art pieces
- I prepared a speech for the closing awards ceremony, clearly stating the goals and implications of this project, the urgency of the climate crisis, and what I hope the students take away from this experience



Figure 6. Delivering speech at the awards ceremony (above), Presenting awards to award winners (left)

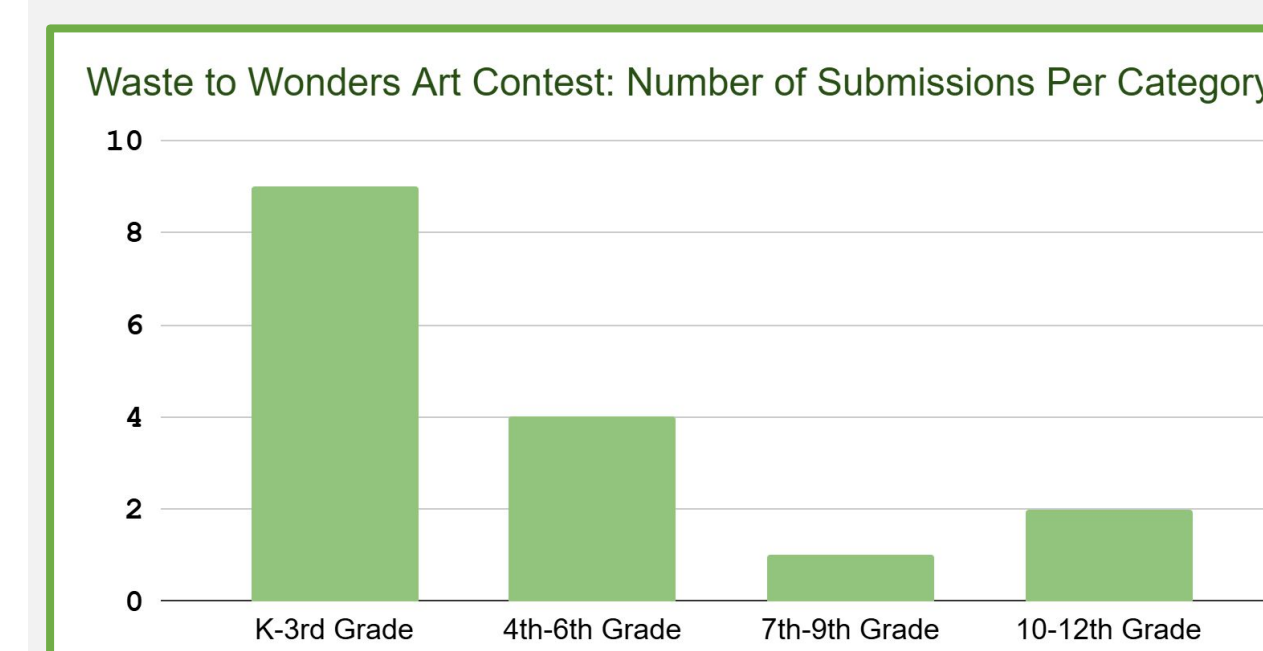


Figure 7. Submission data showing the number of submissions per category



Figure 8. Posing in front of poster wall in exhibition space (left), Two submitted artwork pieces (above)

Project Impact and Future Opportunity

- The exhibition featured a wall of posters conveying the detrimental effects of waste pollution, including statistics, images, and quotes, and also including a call to action
- An interactive worksheet exploration activity guided kids to learn important key facts
- I was invited to bring my project to the Mansfield Community Center Earth Day celebration event by Margaret Jordan Chatey, Mansfield Communication Specialist, whom I invited to document this event

Community Partnerships

This project could not have been possible without the endless support from my community partners.

- Dr. Kat Owens** for mentoring me throughout this project. Her fantastic work inspired me and folks who participated in my competition.
- Julia Wintner** for making the Waste to Wonders exhibit possible. This project brings more attention to and community connection with the ESCU Student Art Gallery.
- Ms. Luna** and members of the Crafts Club, and **Emily Webson** from the Wonder Workshop for allowing me to bring my activity to their facilities. I intend to continue helping there in the future!
- Bibhuti Marasini** and **Sonya Harvel** for volunteering at the events.
- Laura Cisneros, Molly Daigle, and the UConn NRCA** for giving me such an amazing opportunity, and providing me with the proper mentorship, support, and materials to carry out this project, including a NRCA stipend (from Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut).

References

- 'We Are Choking on Plastic', Secretary-General Tells Intergovernmental Committee, Calling for Ambitious Agreement to End Plastic Pollution | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases. Un.org, 30 Oct. 2024. press.un.org/en/2024/sgsm22433.doc.htm.
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