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Art rises from the ashes

• After witnessing the devastation from a California forest fire, artist Amy Caterina was inspired to express her feelings through her work.

By Kelly Strodl

Eight years ago, artist Amy Caterina took a 27-day cross-country road trip to California, and she's been here ever since.

Along the way, in Montana, Caterina witnessed for the first time the aftermath of a massive forest fire, a sight that has been the inspiration behind a great deal of her work.

"I had never seen anything like that, black and knobby, everything charred," Caterina said. "That picture has stuck with me all these years."

Where do all the animals go after fire ravages the land? This question sparked Caterina's work now on display at the Huntington Beach Art Center's part of the exhibit MANufactured. The show features four artists who work with only man-made products — plastic twisty ties, fabric, beads, glitter and yarn — as their mediums of expression.



Amy Caterina (in foreground) leads the community in a group art project to cover her car with psuedo sod.

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Using varying natural shades of brown and green, grassy-looking yarn, Caterina creates inorganic topiaries with the knitting skills taught to her by her grandmother back in Niagara Falls. Called the Forest Fire Friends, these pseudo topiaries show varying shades of burns and drying.

"They're fake animals covered in fake grass representing something organic and transient," Caterina said.

The first Forest Fire Friend, a small rabbit created in partnership with her grandmother on one of Caterina's visits home, is on display at the art center, accompanied now by a moose and pieces of her newest project, a knitted car cover.

Intended for her green Toyota Echo and which to the Santa Ana resident and her friends resembles one giant topiary, the cover has become a hands-on exhibit within the show. All who visit the art center are welcome to pick up a needle and yarn and knit.

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Caterina's cover is only about 1/8th complete, and she's got a lot of plans for the car.

"When it's complete, I'm driving it out in the desert or places affected by fires," she said. "I'm going to go out in those places and take pictures."

"My goal for my work is to kind of get you into the piece, something beautiful and tactile, and then make your head kind of tilt," Caterina said.

A photograph by Robert Frank of a covered car in Long Beach often flashed though Caterina's mind as she planned the project.

"I don't just hang my stuff on the wall and say, 'Here you go,'" Caterina said.

"Exhibiting is great, but talking to the people about the work, it's about the ideas behind the project."

The artist has many plans for her project. Top on the list is how to get the word out. She has plans to create a website for people to check in on the progress of the project or to get involved and invites anyone interested to e-mail her at freerangeteeth@yahoo.com.

Visitors to the Art Center will get a chance to meet Caterina on Nov. 14.

The exhibit featuring Caterina's work and the art from Cathy Breslaw, Maureen Shields, and Tomoko Suzuki will be on display through Dec. 17. For more

information, visit the website at <http://hbarts.tripod.com>.

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