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Local Art Students Create a Winter Wonderland at the Big Blue Bus Transit Store

Art Institute of California-Los Angeles students use recycled transit maps, shredded plastic bags and natural materials to create a spectacular, earth-friendly holiday display.

SANTA MONICA, Calif. – Who knew that a pile of recycled bus maps could be transformed into a wintry forest of elegant birch trees? Or that discarded plastic shopping bags could be shredded to look like freshly fallen snow? And who would think of taking eight tiny toy buses, outfitting them with reindeer horns and launching them into the air, connected to some kind of invisible sleigh?

These imaginative and eco-friendly holiday decorations are the brainchild of two talented interior design students from the Art Institute of California-Los Angeles, whose visions of a wintry wonderland are now on display at the Big Blue Bus transit store in downtown Santa Monica.

All of the individual displays contain either recycled or natural materials, including old Big Blue Bus maps and bus tokens, natural pine cones, water bottles, empty food boxes, recycled wood planks, paper towel rolls, discarded tree branches and old bicycle tires.

In addition to the birch forest in the window, some of the other decorations include colorful ornaments made from day passes, wreaths wrapped in recycled paper ribbons, baskets made from plastic bags, and bows and wrapped packages made from old Big Blue Bus maps.

"When you first look at the window display, it's so peaceful and picturesque," said Dan Dawson, customer relations manager for the Big Blue Bus. "I think it really captures the feeling and quiet of being in a forest."

"So many people do a double take when they walk by or come into the store," said Dawson. "When you tell them the display is made from paper maps, a little paint and some fish line, they just can't believe it!"

Interior design students Dimitra Dorbacopoulos and Margallet Yosef are completing their final year of a four-year Bachelor's program at The Art Institute, and were selected for the project because of their exemplary performance in their work, both inside and outside the classrooms. Both students will be graduating this month.

"We hoped that by doing this display, it would set an example to society that the beauty in art work lies not only in creativity, but in the process as well," said Dorbacopoulos.

She noted that they made it a point to use primarily recycled or natural materials to stay in line with the Big Blue Bus' message of the importance of using natural resources to help the environment.

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"We hope that everyone who sees this display will be inspired to be more resourceful and maybe even to utilize materials found all around us to improve the spaces where we live and work," she said.

Yosef recalled the numerous people who stopped by to watch the pair create the forest display, and how they were curious about how they did it.

"We could see a deeper appreciation for the whole process as we showed them the different materials we were using and how we were putting them together. As designers, this part was really inspiring," she said.

Yosef said that in addition to the environmental message, the students hoped to encourage people to make their own decorations for their home this holiday season.

"We think it can be fun and also inspiring for children to gather items they find around the house and turn them into something beautiful," she said. "A little creativity really can go a long way."

Dorbacopoulos and Yosef offered some of their favorite tips for making eco-friendly projects for the holidays, including using magazines or newspapers to make wreaths or garlands, cutting picture frames out of cardboard shoeboxes and painting them bright colors, and painting soda cans and sprinkling them with glitter to make ornaments.

Michelle Estrellado, director of public relations and marketing for the Art Institute of California-Los Angeles, said working with the Big Blue Bus always gives the school's students a truly unique experience.

"This project gave these two gifted and artistic students a real world opportunity to use recycled materials in their designs, which perfectly complements the Interior Design program curriculum," she said.

The winter wonderland display is expected to remain up throughout the holidays.

The Big Blue Bus transit store offers a variety of fares such as Day Passes, Little Blue Cards, EZ transit passes, Student Punch Cards and Metro EZ Passes. It also features a custom-designed line of earth-friendly products including organic clothing, beachwear, toys and local travel guides. In addition, the store carries a collection of limited edition vintage bus token jewelry made by local Westside artisans. The designs use actual Big Blue Bus tokens dating as far back as 1930, along with recycled glass beads, semi-precious stones and natural seashell.

The transit store is located at 223 Broadway near the Third Street Promenade in downtown Santa Monica. Store hours are 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, and from noon to 6 p.m. on Saturday. For more information about the Big Blue Bus or the transit store, visit www.bigbluebus.com or call 310-451-5444.

Photos of the exhibits can be obtained by contacting Francine Pares at fpares@intelibrand.com or 949-481-7559.

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