

# Going Green

## In the home and at work

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THE SUN, LOWELL, MASSACHUSETTS

## Bamboo is a fabric with few hassles



**HIROKO SATO**

You might think earth-conscious vegans would encourage people to dress in natural silk rather than in polyester.

But it's just the opposite. That's because, in order to harvest filament silk — extremely fine and long, contiguous threads — silkworms are boiled alive. If you waited until the worms ate their way out of the cocoons, the fiber gets torn and would only be good for spun silk — still beautiful, yet lower-quality than filament — said Cynthia Hughes.

The fabric artist from Chelmsford, who runs her studio at the Brush Art Gallery & Studios in downtown Lowell, admitted that filament silk is too gorgeous for her to avoid using it. But that's a guilty pleasure, to say the least.

Then, several months ago, Hughes decided to check out a material she said is growing "hot" in the apparel industry — bamboo. It's an alternative to silk that her ecologically-minded 19-year-old daughter had been nagging her to use because bamboo is known to grow back fast without use of pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers. The fibers from rigid grass stalks turned out softer and smoother than most of fabrics Hughes has ever woven with and give off an elegant glow that matches that of silk.

Besides, Hughes said, bamboo fabric beats silk in that it's wrinkle-free. It's also naturally resistant to perspiration and stains as well as bacteria.

And, most important, bamboo requires no diesel-guzzling tractors to plant seeds year after year because the plant easily establishes a web of roots from which new shoots come out. The extensive root system helps prevent soil erosion, too, while the plants absorb about five times the amount of carbon dioxide and produce about 35 percent more oxygen than an equivalent stand of trees, Hughes said.

Bamboo fabrics are 100 percent biodegradable. To top that, Hughes said, they release no methane gas while being decomposed.

Hughes was hooked. She quickly hoarded up bamboo yarns in favorite blue and purple and other breezy colors like green and started weaving away. Her mobius wraps — 70-inch-long, over-the-shoulder shawls sewn together in the front — gently drape down from hangers in her studio to await buyers.

But like anything else, you have to know what you're getting when buying bamboo clothing or yarns, Hughes warns. That's because, there are two ways to make bamboo fibers — turning the plants into chemicals and spinning them like most synthetic fibers, or mechanically breaking them down with the help of natural enzymes.

The former method is extremely toxic, according to Jim Coleman, president and CEO of the American Textile History Museum in Lowell. Any leakage of the chemicals would affect the environment — so much so that factories in the U.S. and Europe no longer use the method, Coleman says.

All yarns that Hughes use come with Oeko-Tex certification — international standard for skin-safe fabrics — and she suggests shoppers look for such assurance that the products were made in environmentally sound ways.

Bamboos are less expensive than silk, too. Hughes' mobius wraps are sold for \$165 apiece. She will also be making scarves and other items with bamboo yarns, which would be available at much lower prices.

For more information about Hughes' and her work, visit <http://www.thebrush.org/CindyWebOut/index.htm> or e-mail at [cindy-hughes@verizon.net](mailto:cindy-hughes@verizon.net).

Have green story ideas? Hiroko Sato can be reached at [hsato@lowellsun.com](mailto:hsato@lowellsun.com).



Local artists at the Brush Art Gallery & Studios are incorporating "green" ideas into their work. From left are Will Winslow, Chrissy Theo Hungate, Penny Cox, Deirdre Grunwald, Eileen Byrne and Vassilios Bill Giavias.

SUN / TORY GERMAN

## 'Green: More Than a Color'

### Downtown Lowell art gallery to unveil works using recycled products

By Hiroko Sato  
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LOWELL — A skeleton lies on the ground with the feet buried under a heap of wind-swept rubbish.

Lottery tickets, broken Styrofoam coffee cups, plastic silverware — the pile is an assortment of what you'd see on city streets. And, it's no wonder; illustrator Will Winslow, who painted the dead man, picked up the trash himself as he does every morning on his way from his downtown Lowell home to the Brush Art Gallery & Studios on Market Street and glued it onto the canvas. His two other paintings show how the corpse returns to earth over time. But the trash is still there, covering the feet that have disappeared.

While Winslow tries to communicate the ugly side of modern convenience through his art, a fellow artist at the gallery, Penny Cox, keeps busy turning waste into beauty. Broken hinges and other used metal hardware hung from her necklace chains, reflecting light in nostalgic amber. And pottery artist Lolita Demers has flattened empty beer bottles in a kiln to make cheese boards out of them. Logos of ales still clearly show on some boards with their round bottoms folded horizontally.

Using recyclables isn't just an expression of her creativity; it's about handing down precious nature for generations to come.

"Everyone can help in small ways," Demers said.

These and nearly 30 other earth-conscious local artists will come together from noon to 4 p.m. Saturday in "Green: More Than a Color," an ecological art fest to take place at the Market Mills Courtyard at

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256 Market St.

In addition to The Brush Art Gallery, which is organizing the event, three other galleries as well as 11 eco-friendly organizations, including the Merrimack River Watershed Council and UMass Lowell Fair Trade Initiative, will join the fair for art and educational exhibits and demonstrations.

The festival will kick off the Brush's 17th Annual Exhibition with a "green" theme. As more people grow conscious of human's footprints on earth, Executive Director Eileen Byrne felt the gallery ought to do its part, she said.

"It's important to use art to focus the public's attention to important issues," Byrne said.

Byrne's idea fired up both artists who've already been using recyclables to make art — like sculptor Jay Hungate, who displayed a 40-foot water dragon he made with 1,000 used DC-ROMs in downtown Lowell two years ago — and those who haven't, including fabric artist Cynthia Hughes, who's knitted silky mobius wraps with bamboo yarns for the show.

For sculptor and painter Chrissy Theo Hungate, the show provided a chance to

create fish-motif art in honor of her father, who died in April. Come to think of it, Hungate said, people now have to use caution to eat most of the seafood she and her late father used to fish together in the Atlantic Ocean because of mercury and other toxins in them. For the show, Hungate prepared handouts to go with the art, which contain environmental impacts of over-fishing, tips on how to shop fish and other useful information.

Painter Vassilios Giavias will exhibit his colorful depiction of many turn-of-the-century buildings in Lowell to help inspire historic preservation while painters like Deirdre Grunwald and Pamela Wamala will show off their landscapes-motif artwork. In the meantime, painter Gay Tracy will be displaying her funky dancing-dog and other animal paintings in vivid colors. The series is called "Green emotions," she said.

So, what does it feel like to be green? "I see pure energy," Tracy said. "It means being clean and pure."

Participating in the event are: Brush Art Gallery & Studios; All arts Gallery; X/O Studio; Studio II; The Lowell Farmers' Market; Lowell Canal Waters Cleaners; Friends of Rogers Fort Hill Park; Howland Greene Consultants LLC; The New Entry Sustainable Farming Project; The City of Lowell Green Building Commission; Merrimack River Watershed Council; UML Toxics Use Reduction Institute; Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust; UML Fair Trade Initiative; World PEAS CSA.

For more information about the event, visit <http://www.thebrush.org/Green-MoreThanAColor.htm>.

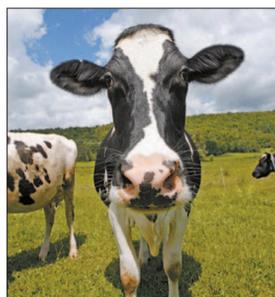
## Greener diet reduces dairy cows' methane burps

By Lisa Rathke  
Associated Press Writer

COVENTRY, Vt. — Vermont dairy farmers Tim Maikshilo and Kristen Dellert, mindful of shrinking their carbon footprint, have changed their cows' diet to reduce the amount of gas the animals burp — dairy cows' contribution to global warming.

Coventry Valley Farm is one of 15 Vermont farms working with Stonyfield Farm Inc., whose yogurt is made with their organic milk, to reduce the cows' intestinal methane by feeding them flaxseed, alfalfa, and grasses high in Omega 3 fatty acids. The gas cows belch is the dairy industry's biggest greenhouse gas contributor, research shows, most of it emitted from the front and not the back end of the cow.

"I just figured a cow was a cow and they were going to do



Yogurt maker Stonyfield Farm wants its cows to burp less. It's for a noble cause: cutting down on the gases that contribute to global warming.

AP PHOTO

whatever they were going to do in terms of cow things for gas," said Dellert. "It was pretty shocking to me that just being organic wasn't enough, actually. I really thought that here we're

organic, we're doing what we need to do for the planet, we're doing the stuff for the soil and I really thought that was enough."

She learned it wasn't. The dairy industry contributes about 2 percent to the country's total greenhouse gas production, said Rick Naczi, a vice president at Dairy Management Inc., which funds research and promotes dairy products. Most of it comes from the cow, the rest from growing feed crops for the cattle to processing and transporting the milk.

To satisfy consumers' demands for sustainable production, the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy in Rosemont, Ill., is looking at everything from growing feed crops to trucking milk to reduce the industry's greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent by 2020. That would be the equivalent of removing about 1.25 million cars from U.S. roads every year, said

Naczi, who manages the program.

One way is by feeding cows alfalfa, flax and grasses, all high in Omega 3s, instead of corn or soy, said Nancy Hirschberg, head of Stonyfield's Greener Cow Project. The feed rebalances the cows' rumen, the first stomach of ruminants, and cuts down on gas, she said. Another way is to change the bacteria in a cow's rumen, Naczi said.

When Stonyfield first analyzed its contribution to global warming in the late 1990s, the company thought its factory in Londonderry, N.H., produced the most greenhouse gases.

But a study showed that the single biggest source was the cow's enteric emissions: gas.

Since January, Coventry Valley Farm has reduced its cows' belches by 13 percent. At another farm, they've gone down 18 percent.