

Rags to riches

~ Haute Couture by Melissa Kolbusz ~

By Sanny Ensing

Did you ever imagine that Haute Couture could be fashioned out of trash? Think that materials that were discarded by society can be used again to become the “wannahaves” of rich and famous? Artist Melissa Kolbusz and friends make their living turning rags to riches with creative minds. This time they created Haute Couture dresses for the eco-fashion show that took place in Miami on April 16.

Only just recently, Kolbusz moved to St. Maarten. Locally, she is known for the gorgeous jewellery she fashions out of waste products, such as necklaces made out of rubber punch-outs and computer resistors, bracelets formed of stainless steel and magnet wire, small motor windings and recycled bike chain, rings of BMW parts and surplus upholstery trim, earrings cut out of surplus rubber and labels off vodka bottles.

The Chicago-native returned to the States a little over a month ago, to take part in this fashion project, scheduled to kick-off Earth Week. Together with close friend and inspired mind Likalee, she used



This stunning dress is made of recycled waste material by Melissa Kolbusz for the eco-fashion show at the Miami Art Museum.

structure – no need for the hoops of the 1800s. I did this one on the model about a half hour before we started shooting. I decided I should go about it in the way I come up with a lot of my collections – by doing a ‘body’ installation first.”

“I collaborate a lot with an artist and friend named Likalee. Together we do photo shoots for her digital/multimedia artwork and photography. Usually the photo shoot is the place where all the ideas develop. We try to get good models and makeup artists and we got very lucky this time with Bella, the model. I usually show up with a bunch of materials that interest me and Likalee often has a general theme or ethereal futuristic idea she is looking to develop and we just go from there.”

More art, less waste

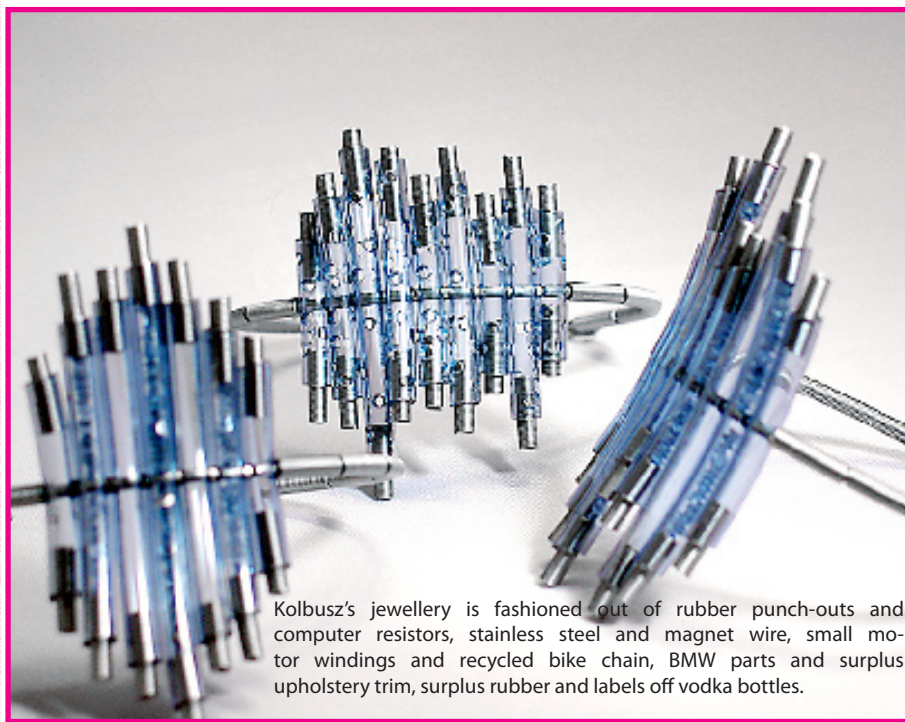
The Miami Eco Fashion Show is a brain child of Luis Valenzuela. Valenzuela has a green gallery in Miami and also puts on the Green Art Fair during the Art Basel Extravaganza in December. He works within the community, organizing green events, workshops and summer programs for kids and promoting other local creative minds who are developing electric cars and solar energy and much more. Melissa emphasises: “Valenzuela is also a fantastic artist himself!”

The fashion show will start

with a signature Green Carpet to welcome all Government representatives and celebrities supporting green initiatives. The idea is to conceive imaginative designs with a conceptual and very unique style, bringing a group of artists/designers together with the same vision of the Earth’s environmental problems today and the passion to re-use and recycle items into haute couture gowns.

The garments-art pieces are created from different re-used materials, saving the materials from going onto the landfill. The organisers describe it as an ethical fashion revolution, with the purpose of reducing the negative impacts in the environment that threaten the survival of humans and other living species. The multi-coloured pieces intentionally describe the differences in race, culture, religion, thoughts and natural elements. Lined up next to each other they become so-called Eco-municators, and deliver a positive message to the world through sustainable art and design.

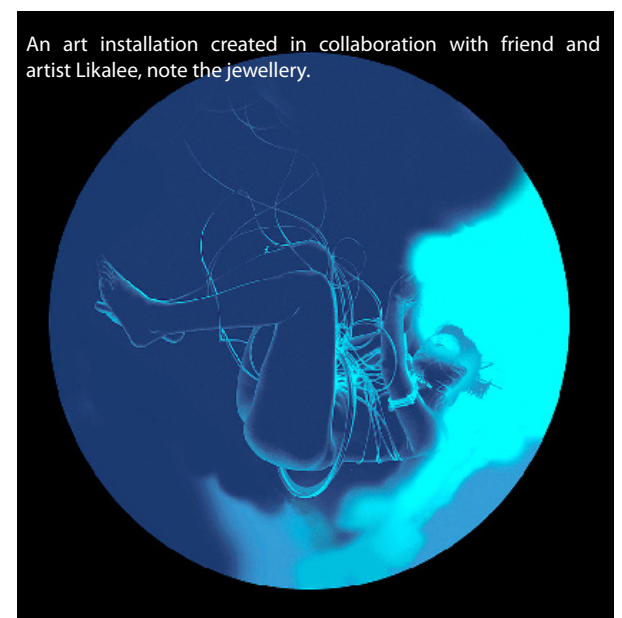
For more information on Melissa Kolbusz, her friend Likalee and the Miami eco-fashion show, check out websites: www.wiredresistance.com, www.likaleedesign.com, and www.greenartusa.org



Kolbusz’s jewellery is fashioned out of rubber punch-outs and computer resistors, stainless steel and magnet wire, small motor windings and recycled bike chain, BMW parts and surplus upholstery trim, surplus rubber and labels off vodka bottles.

waste material to create Haute Couture for the eco-fashion show at the Miami Art Museum. Melissa Kolbusz comments on the dress she created: “It’s my first. I am not sure how comfortable this one is for St. Maarten with all the rubber. I got the material from a place that buys and sells surplus. It is 1/8-inch thick black foam rubber on one side and that silver foil on the other.”

The fashion show guidelines demanded that designers create a dress inspired by the 1800s. Melissa: “Of course, I have to do my own futuristic version. Originally, I had another idea but when I saw this sheet of silver, it all changed. It has its own



An art installation created in collaboration with friend and artist Likalee, note the jewellery.