

Korean art student finds inspiration in fireplugs

There are fire hydrants bedecked with roses. There are fire hydrants having sex. There's a tower of seven red fire hydrants, more than three meters (11 feet) high.

It looks like a city dog's fantasy, but there are no pooches permitted. This is art.

Ran Young Kim, who grew up in South Korea and spent five years in a Pennsylvania convent, has put together a free exhibit called "Fire Hydrant" as part of her thesis for a master's degree in fine arts at Purchase College. The work is on view at the Visual Arts Building on campus through Friday.

Kim, 39, says her goal was to take an everyday object and transform it in her studio.

"People associate the hydrant with fighting fires, or maybe with parking spaces — you can't park there," she said in an interview at the gallery.

"But when it's nonfunctional, people can interpret its meaning for themselves. To me, a fire hydrant is humorous."

Several of the pieces in the exhibit — which are untitled — show various forms of male-female interplay. One piece, she said, was inspired by the Ross and Rachel characters on the television sitcom *Friends*.

Artist Murray Zimiles, Kim's professor, says her work invokes Constantin Brancusi's *Endless Tower* in Romania and the fanciful creations of Claes Oldenburg, who makes giant sculptures of such commonplace items as baseball mitts and sandwiches.

When something like that works on so many levels, it becomes a very novel, amusing experience, which is what art is supposed to do.

"I know I'll never look at a fire hydrant the same way again."

Kim said she was inspired last winter by a fireplug near the New York flower shop where she was working. It had apparently been damaged

when the water inside froze and it was marked with a yellow ring so firefighters would know it wasn't working.

The only real fire hydrants in the show are in photographs she took on campus, near her home and near the flower shop in Manhattan,

Jim Fitzgerald

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and a pair she calls her "Country Couple" that she spotted among flowers and weeds in upstate Swan Lake.

The bulk of the gallery is taken up with the fireplugs Kim has constructed of a stiff,

plastered paper and various adornments including the roses, noodles, chains, tubing, an extension cord and a clear gooey substance that looks wet but isn't.

Kim came to the United States at age 20 and spent five years with the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary before she realized that it was not her calling and began working 70 hours a week at a garment factory in New York City. She worked her way through Purchase, which is part of the State University of New York, and decided to make art her career.

"I'm not expecting a lot of money," she said. "I'd love to find some free studio space somewhere so I can keep working."



AP/Karen Vibert-Kennedy

Artist Ran Young Kim stands next to part of her master's degree thesis exhibition on fire hydrant in The Richard Dolly Maass Gallery at the State University of New York at Purchase, New York.