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Reshaping Raw Materials:

A Night with Helena Garzotto



Photography Courtesy of Nicholas Lea Bruno

By Isaiah Diaz-Mays

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Helena Garzotto's experimental work puts on display the ways in which raw materials can be used for communal purposes. A senior in the BFA Furniture program, Garzotto was the recipient of the 2025 Ronald & Anita Wornick Award, which recognizes talented students in the wood arts at California College of the Arts. As a part of her award, over a dozen furniture pieces that Garzotto created during her tenure at CCA were exhibited at the CCA Campus Gallery in November. These pieces exuded luminosity while maintaining a presence of tangible innovation. Her aptitude for reshaping and repurposing woods, metals, and fabrics was transparent within seconds of entering her exhibition, just hours before its opening reception.

The central work that drew me in was an industrial-like bench molded in the shape of a trapezoid and constructed from a mixture of stern metals and sagacious woods—a piece which Garzotto referred to as “a reflection of process.” Utilizing a hydraulic press, she bent the large slice of metal that bridged the piece together to its trapezoid frame before employing aluminum to mold the stacked veneer. Her inclusion of functional rustic clamps was brilliant. These clamps, reminiscent of those commonly seen at a naval shipyard or early 20th-century silk factory, pinched white-oak blocks at each end of the bench, adding a historical feel to the piece that also implied contradictory elements of ease and tension.



Photography Courtesy of Nicholas Bruno

This stark contrast successfully formulated a complex take on creatively assembled materials while simultaneously conveying a chronicle of needed rest. The manufactured bench provoked reflection on divergent ways to repurpose woods and metals for communal usage. And in communal fashion, as I circled the bench for a few minutes to study it further shortly after walking in, Garzotto, alongside a few friends, was finishing the attachment of the clamps onto the wooden blocks. Witnessing the artist complete her work in real time amplified my elation for the opening reception.

While traversing the exhibition, I noted Garzotto's organic flair for exploring distinct manipulations of unassociated materials. In the opposite direction of the bench, about 20 yards away, hung what looked like a towel frozen in time. The assumed piece of laundry was held up by clothespins attached to a single string of yarn which hovered about 15 feet high. The authenticity of the striped towel was enhanced by the effect of flowing wind getting captured in the moment.



Photography Courtesy of Nicholas Bruno

The towel had waves trickling down its being, like when rain greets a bigger body of water. During my brief discussion with Garzotto after she completed the finishing touches on her bench piece, she explained that she took a weaving class during the previous semester in lieu of an upholstery course, a Furniture program requirement. She detailed her personal interest in cloth and her curiosity toward adding structure to woven material without depending on armature. Within this realm of material studies, she ended up weaving the cloth with steel wire in the weft, which allowed her to sculpt the fabric in various ways, such as wind blowing through her laundry.

Garzotto's show featured more dynamic works made from other distinct materials, such as a small lamp made from fabric coated in a beige hue that could softly illuminate any working or resting space it'd be used in. She constructed an additional floor lamp, manipulating its shape to form a staircase. The glow of the staircase felt symbolic in a transformative sense. When asked if this was the intention for the piece, Garzotto confirmed, adding a bit of context on why the process of transformation was important for the show. She chose the furniture program after conducting digital work for years and feeling unfulfilled. She's worked with her hands for most of her life, and naturally felt a connection to furniture-making, particularly after taking a gap year in Denmark and learning from the local community there, where a portion of her family hails from.

As the night progressed, the element of community continued to circulate the room. Garzotto's friends, professors, classmates, colleagues, and kin shifted through the gallery as they enjoyed light refreshments, sharing smiles and taking in the imaginative work on display. Katherine Lam, the beloved Chair of the Furniture program, delivered closing remarks, reiterating the honor of earning the Ronald and Anita Wornick Award. Lam echoed adoration for Garzotto's diligent work over the years, sharing pride in witnessing the young artist grow as a creator and student during her time at CCA. Shortly after Lam's remarks, the crowd took their time exiting the gallery and showered Garzotto with flower bouquets on their way out, provoking smiles from ear to ear. The reward in being introduced to creative wood works for the first time was priceless.



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