

ROBIN



ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE

2017-2018 ANDREW W. MELLON
FOUNDATION DISTIL FELLOW

FROHARDT

Robin Frohardt takes the mundane, everyday items and experiences, adds her creativity and unique sense of humor, and transforms them into thought-provoking art. An artist, puppet designer, and director, Frohardt's inventive work has received national recognition, most recently by Creative Capital, which awards funding to artists' projects that are "bold, innovative, and genre-stretching."

As part of her work at UNC as a Mellon DisTIL Fellow, Frohardt is creating a large-scale installation called *The Plastic Bag Store*. She hopes that her work will be a fun and engaging way for the audience to think more deeply about one of the most ubiquitous objects in our lives: the plastic bag. "I'm building a fake grocery store in a real storefront that seems like a regular grocery store except that everything inside this grocery store is actually just plastic bags—packaging inside of packaging inside of packaging," says Frohardt. She will explore UNC faculty research into the impact of plastic bags in our environment today, new ideas to lessen plastic's impact on our future, and how archaeologists study the containers and remnants from the past.

The grocery store will also be the setting for an interactive play. "Audience members will be able to travel down aisles that will twist and turn; scenes will be revealed; and trap doors will open," she says. "In this setting, the audience will be experiencing a play that is about the present day and the far-off future where people are excavating, analyzing, interpreting, and misinterpreting all of this plastic garbage that we have left behind."

Frohardt appreciates that the Mellon DisTIL Fellowship offers a longer period to explore the ideas involved in *The Plastic Bag Store* and gives her access to the different departments of the university. "I'm working with people in the archaeology department, as well as art history, to investigate further some of the ideas that the store addresses which is a rare opportunity," she says. "I'm hoping that it will add depth to the work, help with the educational component of the work, and add to the overall quality." Beyond the ideas that emerge from *The Plastic Bag Store*, she expects that her next project will be born from her experiences at UNC.

Frohardt says that the collaborative nature of a college campus enhances her creativity. "There's a tendency, if you were to sit



alone in your studio, to spin your gears mentally and just have the same ideas be churning and churning and churning,” says Frohardt. “But to have access to all the different minds that are here at UNC: there are other gears that are spinning that I can make contact with and they can send me off in a different direction. There’s time for things to ferment and bubble to the surface that otherwise would not have had an opportunity to do so.”

The collaboration also benefits the faculty. As Frohardt shares her approach to new ideas and how she uses art to draw her audience into rethinking their relationship with everyday items—such as plastic bags—she will help faculty spur new conversations about their own research and findings. “I also hope to engage students in a way that’s fun for them but that also makes them think about their own practices in their day-to-day routines,” she says.

Frohardt also plans to collaborate with BeAM (Be A Maker) spaces on campus to create new materials for her projects. “I have been talking with some people from the archaeology department about creating some fake archaeological digs on campus, with present day objects in them to re-contextualize them for people to encounter,” she says. “I really like the idea of placing things around campus and engaging people in a surprising way, much like Arts Everywhere did. Just having little moments that catch you off guard in your everyday that might make you stop and think.”

– MICHELE LYNN

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WHAT ROBIN IS WORKING ON

Mellon DisTIL Fellowship Workshop: a public gathering to explore the questions and connections at the heart of Robin’s Mellon DisTIL Fellowship work

Pop-Up Archeology Digs Across Campus

Town Hall Conversations on Art, Plastic, and the Environment