

# The art of trash

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Watercolor collage from Sonya Sagan-Dworsky's "Discarded: Daily Views of Trash."  
Courtesy Studio Place Arts

An empty can of cranberry-raspberry Spindrift sparkling water casts a pinkish shadow echoing the color of its packaging. A white plastic tub that held cashew milk yogurt stands drained of its contents. A silver Philadelphia Cream Cheese box is slightly crushed. The subjects of Sonya Sagan-Dworsky's watercolors are very familiar — the boxes, cans, wrappers, bags that remain after we have consumed their contents. They are the familiar waste we generate every day.

In Sagan-Dworsky's exhibition "Discarded: Daily Views of Trash" at Studio Place Arts' Quick Change Gallery, the Montpelier High School senior brings together her art and climate activism. This compact show fills the converted telephone booth gallery with 60 watercolors, and powerfully brings attention to the physical disposable waste of daily life.

Sagan-Dworsky began the project early in 2021 as a personal month-long challenge to create a painting every day as a form of personal climate activism. Drawing on Japanese artist Hokusai's approach in "One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji," she set out to consider similar subject matter in many different views as a creative process.

For Sagan-Dworsky, a meticulous painter who paints from observation rather than from photographs, painting trash was an artistic challenge. Discarded wrappers and containers are part of daily life. Their packing is intentional, designed by and for their industries.

"Focusing on trash we throw away can be like a diary of choices we make," Sagan-Dworsky said, noting that it was an opportunity, "to focus on something that is at the same time meaningful in some contexts, but worthless in others."

After the initial month, Sagan-Dworsky continued the project. Her 60 watercolors paint a vivid picture of household trash generation. Seeing the volume and diversity inspires reflection on the extent of waste in daily life and also consideration of options including reduction and recycling to take action and reduce this flow.

Sagan-Dworsky also developed and taught an art class that highlights her project's motivations: connecting climate action and art, daily practice and insights that arise from observing the same subject. She taught the class over Zoom to students at Union Elementary School this fall.

For information about Sagan-Dworsky's project and class, go to: [www.dailyviewsofttrash.com](http://www.dailyviewsofttrash.com) online.