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Your trash is their art

By Richard Cole, Staff Writer

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If you call their work trash, you'll get no argument from artist Kim Weller and Noah Wilson, who are featured in an unusual show starting today.

Their art is made almost exclusively from objects found at the San Francisco dump – everything from old photos to rescued plants to recycled wood and even paint recovered from the hazardous materials facility.

“People throw out perfectly good objects all the time, and artists would love to have access to them,” said Paul Fresina, director of the art program for SF Recycling & Disposal Inc.

The company operates the landfill and pays for the program though city garbage bills, Fresina said.

A show by Weller and Wilson – the latest artist in residence under the program – begins today at 5 p.m. in the art facility at 503 Tunnel Ave. on the San Francisco-Brisbane city line.

The program began 1990 at the urging of the city's arts council. Artists must formally apply, and the company now picks six artists a year out of as many 60 applicants.

Weller has spent the last four months in the program, and her work will be on display behind the facility – in part because of its size. She said she was always fascinated by Archie comics, and her art is inspired by artwork from the comic books.

She has created a larger-than-life campfire scene, complete with Archie characters out of scavenged wood and paint.

“I chose wood because I thought it was appropriate for the comic book industry, because paper is made out of wood,” Weller said.

She painted her fire partly in Day-Glo orange, inspired by the orange vests she saw workers wear around the facility.

Wilson has several exhibits – one is a series of old photos found in the dump interspersed with his own photos of discarded objects. Wilson said he had gone to the dump with his father since he was a child

“My father would say, “I can’t believe the perfectly good stuff people throw out. I can do something with this... I can fix this,” Wilson said.

He also rescued plants from the waste facility, reported them – and used soil made from the green waste San Franciscans put out with their recycling. And Wilson created a book collage from discarded volumes.

Artists in the program currently have four-month residencies, and are paid \$900 a month for part-time and \$1,800 for full-time attendance.

But the biggest advantages of the program, Weller said, is the large facility to work in – rather than a small apartment – and, of course, access to the dump itself.

The show, which also will be held tomorrow from 1 p.m. to 5 p. m., is the climax of her residency. New artists will move in Oct. 1 she said.

“It’s been a very, very exciting program. Weller said.