

## ISTHMUS | The Daily Page

### Victor Castro raids recycling bins to create 'social sculpture' in Madison

Tetra Pak Man

by Laura Jones

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Victor Castro is proud to create art with "leftovers."

Castro, who is known for his public art projects in Mexico and Peru, received a \$10,000 grant from the Madison Arts Commission last year to create a site-specific mural at the new Meadowridge Library. The low-relief sculpture will be composed of Tetra Paks, containers made of paperboard, plastic and aluminum that are used to hold things like soy milk and soup. They are great for food preservation but not so good for the environment.

Castro started making work with discarded materials before recycling was a widespread activity. His interest was piqued by his empty tuna cans, which were beautifully tinged with gold. He began to play around with them.

"I don't believe in inspiration. I believe in moving hands," Castro says. "If you are moving, it's really easy to develop aesthetic ideas."

His sculptural work with everyday materials was born. Now he wants to get hands moving throughout Madison. Community involvement is a key part of the Meadowridge mural, which is an example of what Castro calls "social sculpture."

"I'm not just building a piece for them, but with them," Castro says. "Members of the community will collect material, design the piece, and then develop it together. I'm just the director of the orchestra. I need musicians."

Castro has found his "musicians" through his residency at the Central Library's Bubbler Room, where visitors wander in to donate bottles, plastic spoons and Tetra Paks. All nine Madison Public Library branches accept Tetra Pak donations. They transport the materials to the Meadowridge Library through the same system they use to move books.

But Castro's project isn't limited to libraries. He recently reached out to Toki Middle School, also located in the Meadowood neighborhood. Students participate in the project through art classes.

"Schools are important because as adults... we don't have time to remember washing leftovers and putting them in a different box for making art," Castro notes. "But if you tell kids to do that, they're never going to forget. They are going to commit to find as many materials as they can... and feel proud of that."

The community involvement doesn't end with Tetra Pak donations. Castro asks participants to design the mural, which is part of the USgathering project. One wall of the Bubbler Room is lined with abstract, rectangular collages that have been created by collaborators as young as 14 months old. Castro points out the beauty of the toddler's piece, and how it's indistinguishable from those done by older artists.

Elements of some of these designs will end up in the final work at the Meadowridge Library, which Castro plans to complete this summer. More than 2,000 clean, dry Tetra Paks are needed for the mural, but only about 500 have been collected. Luckily, it's still soup season, and the libraries will accept donations all winter long.