

## Give them shelter: Design for a greater good Exhibition emphasizes art's humanitarian role



Global Village Shelters, similar to this one erected in 2005 in Grenada, will be on display at Tufts. (ARCHITECTURE FOR HUMANITY, NATHAN CRANE AND GR3)

By Lisa Panora, Globe Correspondent | August 23, 2007

**Global Village Shelters** *Tufts University Art Gallery Remis Sculpture Court  
and adjacent grounds 15 South Campus Road, Medford*

*Sept. 6 through Dec. 23 11 a.m.-5 p.m.*

*Tuesday through Sunday, Thursdays until 8 Free 617-627-3518, [ase.tufts.edu/gallery](http://ase.tufts.edu/gallery)*

In little more than a half-hour, Amy Ingrid Schlegel, director of the galleries and collections at Tufts University Art Gallery in Medford, and some colleagues erected a 67-square-foot disaster relief shelter from a few pieces of flat-packed corrugated cardboard.

This was only a test. They plan to construct two more for an installation opening next month in the Remis Sculpture Court. In the event of an actual emergency, they would be fortunate to have such a shelter, designed by Global Village Shelters, the exhibition's focus. Made with a weatherproof coating, the shelter is durable enough to house a family for at least 18 months, according to the company. Referred to as "transitional houses," they have been deployed to health clinics in Grenada, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the United States following natural disasters.

But why is one situated in an art gallery?

Co-owned by a father-daughter team, Daniel Ferrara and Mia Ferrara Pelosi, the Connecticut-based company has spent almost four years designing an inexpensive alternative to the standard tents and tarps relief groups usually distribute to refugees. The installation is intended to heighten awareness of refugee crises around the world and foster Tufts' mission of active citizenship through, in this case, design. "Certainly the Tufts community will make a connection between form and design and its larger applications. It's important to let people know that designers can play a role in humanitarian work," said Schlegel.

Schlegel believes this design deserves equal footing with other humanitarian aid efforts. The exhibit includes photographs and stories about some of the refugees who have used the shelter.

"We see first aid volunteers on the ground, but we rarely recognize the people behind the products they use. Designers are engaged in this problem solving, and this is one example of that," she said.

The goal of the design was to create a product that could cross cultures, said Ferrara Pelosi. The result is a strikingly simple house structure Schlegel compared to Monopoly game house-shaped pieces. The directions are written graphically rather than in words.

"We tried to make the look of it as simple as possible. The design needed to be culturally accepted throughout the world. We created a neutral, straightforward house that can be easily adapted to any culture. There are no bells and whistles; keep it clean."

Unfolding like origami, the house's simple biodegradable materials create an efficient system for builders and the manufacturing company, Weyerhaeuser, a paper company. The level of privacy the shelter provides can help create a feeling of home for someone who may have lost everything. "This is a viable solution to a problem," said Ferrara Pelosi.

The designers at Global Village Shelters aim high for humanitarian aid.

"There's a real movement for design to have more of a purpose, for design to have a greater good," said Ferrara Pelosi, who decided to team up with her father after feeling discouraged working in the fashion industry. Her father, who has more than 30 years of design experience and holds some 70 patents, was responsible for most of the design.

Ferrara Pelosi said the future of Global Village Shelters is in the 25-square-yard unit, which the company plans to deploy, with the help of other organizations, to Iraq and Lebanon for displaced people.

This installation is one of many about the shelters around the country, including those at the Aspen Ideas Festival, Washington, D.C.'s National Building Museum, and the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry. Global Village Shelters are also part of the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

"I hope visitors understand that people receive these houses and that's their home. That's where they house their families and their children for long periods of time. We are very fortunate in this country, and we use that fortune to help others," said Ferrara Pelosi.