

MEMBER SUBMISSION: TRASH TO TREASURE: COOP WASTE INSPIRES ARCHITECTURAL STUDENTS' CREATIONS

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*By Tim Shields*

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In November 2024, the bustling basement of the Park Slope Food Coop became an unlikely muse for creativity. Twelve first-year architecture students from Pratt Institute descended on the Coop, but not for groceries—they were there to collect stacks of discarded cardboard and onion bags for an ambitious final project.

Under the guidance of PSFC member and sustainability architect and educator, In Cho, the students were tasked with transforming recyclable materials into prosthetic devices capable of supporting the human body in motion. The project wasn't just about sustainability; it was a challenge to reimagine the potential of humble packaging waste as structural, weight-bearing objects.

Joseph Gordon, a receiving coordinator, played a key role by carefully stockpiling materials for the students. The Pratt group marveled at the Coop's behind-the-scenes operations, particularly the sheer volume of packaging involved in food distribution.

The students' designs culminated in innovative prosthetic devices that supported

two-person interdependent movements, blending engineering, architecture, and sustainability. The result? An experiment that turned waste into art, function and inspiration.

“It’s amazing how these everyday materials challenged us,” said one student. “We learned to see them not as trash but as opportunities for design.”



Students showcase one of their creations. Photos by In Cho.

This collaboration showcased the creativity of Pratt’s budding architects while highlighting the importance of sustainable practices and rethinking waste as a resource. Big thanks to PSFC Receiving Coordinators Joseph Gordon, Marvin Pique and Dominique Esser, and fellow guests, who attended the final presentation, inspiring the next generation of architects.

*Tim is a longtime Coop member who enjoys his 5:30 a.m. lifting shift at the top of the belt.*